OECD/CERI FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROJECT

BACKGROUND REPORT: NEW ZEALAND

John Benseman

Alison Sutton[1]

Introduction

In New Zealand, adult basic skills are defined for the purposes of government funding as the literacy, numeracy and language competencies that are essential for effective participation in work and life. These are usually termed either "foundation skills" or "foundation learning". Foundation skills training takes place across the tertiary education sector, but has only received substantial government investment in the last five years. The government is currently working to build an infrastructure that can support the increased levels of provision necessary to address the literacy, numeracy and language needs of the adult population. As well as increasing funding in this previously under-resourced area, there has been a drive to professionalise foundation skills tutors and to build a teaching culture which is centred on learners' needs. A programme of research, development and evaluation is in progress to ensure that teaching, the organisation of provision and policy-making in foundation learning are informed by the evidence of what works. At the same time, although formative assessment is not always the term that is used, a nationwide professional development project for tutors is underway that includes a focus on embedding assessment processes into teaching and learning.

Background

While there has been some community-based adult literacy provision and an active advocacy movement in New Zealand since the late 1970s (Hill, 1990), prior to 2001 the provision and political presence of adult literacy was marginal at best. Advocates struggled to establish a secure funding source without a research base, within an educational system that had long prided itself on its child literacy achievements and was therefore sceptical about the existence of adult literacy issues. The government's primary focus was on the unemployed, with additional programmes for migrants and refugees and prison populations, all of whom had recognised literacy, numeracy and language needs.

The 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) provided the first substantial evidence of the levels of New Zealand adults' basic skills. As in Canada, the US and Australia, the New Zealand IALS results (OECD, 1997) showed that approximately one fifth of the adult population was operating at Level 1 and around one third at Level 2 (the lowest levels). While all groups were represented to some degree in the lower skill categories, there were disproportionately higher numbers of Pacific Islanders,[2] Māori[3], those who have a first language other than English, those with minimal secondary education, older people and those not in employment. Further analyses (Ministry of Education, 2004; Workbase, 1998) showed concentrations of low literacy skills levels in some rural areas (especially the Far North and the eastern North Island), the Auckland metropolitan area and in blue-collar occupations, the manufacturing, agricultural, hunting and fishing industries.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) is being conducted during 2006 and will provide updated data on New Zealanders' literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. The ALL results will also provide new information on the relationships between skill levels and the labour market, economic growth, and education systems and services. The ALL results may throw new light on the role of skills in creating social equity and

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[2] The largest Pacific Island groups in New Zealand are Samoan, Cook Island Maori and Tongans.

[3] The *tangata whenua* or indigenous population of New Zealand

inequity in economic outcomes, particularly for groups functioning on average at foundation level.

Foundation learning in the tertiary education sector

Policy context

IALS has been the catalyst for the New Zealand government to determine and define the adult literacy strategy; to coordinate the work of the education, social and labour agencies on literacy, numeracy and language; and to commission research into this previously under-researched area. The major task of the last five years has been to construct the infrastructure necessary to support tutor training, develop teaching resources and offer a flexible range of professional development opportunities in foundation learning. The government has also embarked on a programme of research and evaluation which will provide an evidence base to inform teaching and learning and policy decisions for literacy specialists, vocational tutors and for the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. The interest in foundation learning is in keeping with an increasing emphasis over the New Zealand education system generally, and on improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning for students at all levels.

The tertiary system as a whole is currently undergoing a series of reforms which will ultimately create a sector that is more responsive to national and regional priorities. In response to the government's three-yearly Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities, institutions will commit to plans of provision, performance and outcomes, supported by appropriate capacity development. Funding will shift from annual to 3-year cycles, which will create a climate of greater funding certainty. This will place institutions in a better position to employ foundation learning tutors on a permanent basis and invest in boosting quality. The funding system will consider the capability needs associated with a portfolio of provision, rather than simply funding for provision. Foundation learning is emphasised in the reforms as a key focus for the tertiary education sector. One of the three distinctive roles of Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, for instance, will be foundation education, which will ensure an institutional focus on foundation skills and the needs of underrepresented groups.

Funding of provision

Foundation skills provision in New Zealand occurs in a wide range of contexts ranging from informal, non-credentialed community settings and individual workplace settings through to formal tertiary institutions. This spread of provision throughout the tertiary education sector is a challenge for both researchers and policy makers. A mapping study was undertaken in 2003, but it proved difficult to identify clearly all provision which provided focused foundation skills training.[4] Various streams of mainstream and specialist funding support adult literacy, numeracy and language provision, amplifying the heterogeneity in types of provision, intensity of learning, learning outcomes and learner destinations. The picture is further complicated where foundation learning is embedded into other courses.
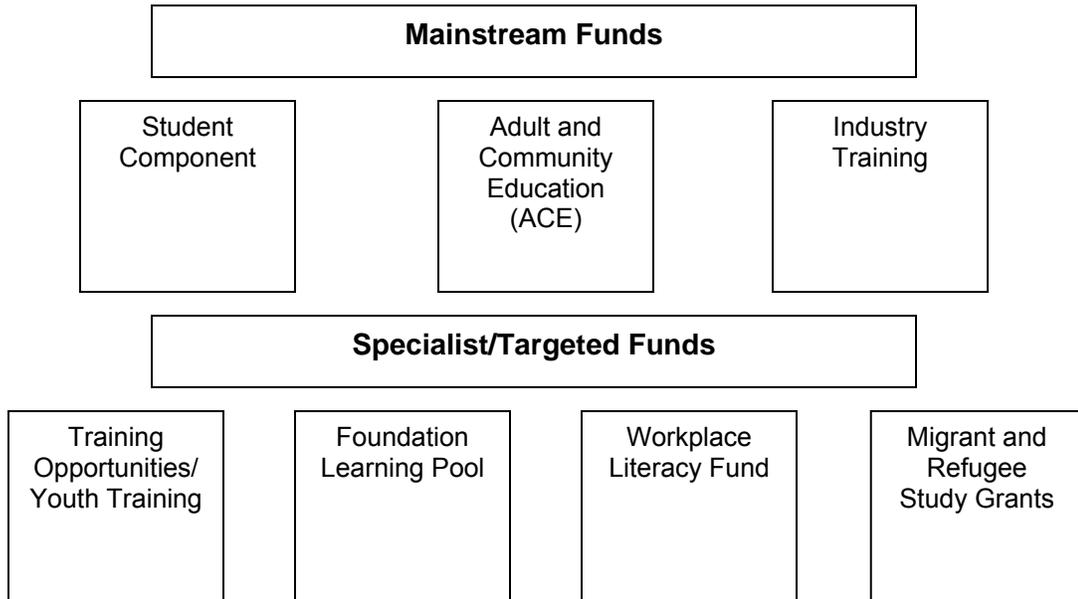
Three national providers with an explicit focus on foundation skills education warrant special mention: Literacy Aotearoa[5] which works predominantly in community settings, the ESOL Home Tutor Service (both organisations are predominantly staffed by volunteers) and Workbase, the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development, which provides programmes in the workplace. The government has also funded Workbase to conduct research and development in industry-based literacy, numeracy and language, and to provide some sector-wide training and resource development. There has been considerable growth, predominantly in group literacy, numeracy and language tuition in Private Training Establishments and Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, funded through the various funding streams outlined below:

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[4] Sutton, A., Lander, J., & Benseman, J. (2005).

[5] The Maori name for New Zealand

Funding streams that support foundation learning

Mainstream Funds		
Student Component	Adult and Community Education (ACE)	Industry Training

Specialist/Targeted Funds			
Training Opportunities/ Youth Training	Foundation Learning Pool	Workplace Literacy Fund	Migrant and Refugee Study Grants

Student Component:

- subsidises the majority of formal learning in tertiary education
- covers all levels, from second-chance education to doctoral study
- students contribute some of the cost of learning through tuition fees
- approximately 6% of this funding currently supports literacy, numeracy, life skills and employment skills
- the government aims to integrate literacy, numeracy and language in low level qualifications (levels one and two on the National Qualifications Framework)[6]

Adult and Community Education (ACE):

- subsidises the majority of non-formal learning in the community, in schools and in Tertiary Education Institutions
- generally provides low intensity learning of a short duration
- foundation learning is one of the five national priorities for ACE

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[6] The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a framework for registering national qualifications and competency standards. Unit standards define learning outcomes, focusing on skills as well as knowledge. They allow for flexible learning, and are able to recognise competency already achieved. There are 10 levels. Levels 1-3 are approximately the same standard as senior secondary education and basic trade training. Certificates are awarded at Levels 2,3 and 4, Level 7 is equivalent to a first degree and post-graduate qualifications at Level 8 and above. Foundation learning is primarily situated at Level 3 and below.

- also supports the national agencies ESOL Home Tutors and Literacy Aotearoa

Industry Training

- standards-based assessment of skills obtained through work experience and training
- takes place primarily at NQF Level 4 and below, so has the potential to incorporate foundation skills into training
- led by Industry Training Organisations, which purchase appropriate off-site training in Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics or Private Training Establishments and assess trainees in the workplace
- employers contribute 25% of the cost of training
- initiatives are currently in place with five Industry Training Organisations to integrate literacy, numeracy and language in training, with the view to extending it across industry training

Training Opportunities/Youth Training:

- Youth Training programmes are targeted at youth up to the age of 18 who have left school with no or very low qualifications
- Training Opportunities programmes are for those over the age of 18 who are unemployed and have had low educational achievement
- they provide foundation and vocational skills training at levels 1 to 3 of the qualifications register
- programmes are for a minimum of 30 hours per week
- programmes are free to the learner, with transport cost covered and continued eligibility for unemployment benefits
- the literacy focus in the purchase strategy is being strengthened

Foundation Learning Pool

- funds innovative projects providing high quality intensive learning that builds learners' foundation skills in literacy, numeracy and language
- supports projects that are free to the learner
- also provides funding to embed literacy in existing programmes
- supports family literacy programmes

Workplace Literacy Fund
- funding is available for literacy, numeracy and language training integrated with vocational/ workplace training
- employers contribute part of costs
- learning is free to the learner

Refugee/Migrant Study Grants
- provides for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to study ESOL at universities or Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics
- learning is free to the learner

Learners

While the IALS provided a reasonably detailed overview of where the greatest areas of need are in foundation skills, it is not easy to compare these needs against current patterns of participation, or to clearly identify which programmes and courses provide foundation skill teaching. Most learners in foundation skills programmes participate in short courses and receive less than 100 hours teaching per year, although funding guidelines for specialist funds now favour programmes of sufficient intensity to ensure learner gain.

Participation patterns vary from context to context and by location. Workplace learners are predominantly male and community-based learners tend to be female. Pacific Island learners are significantly under-represented in current provision, although they are proportionally overrepresented in workplace programmes. Some small towns and rural areas have low participation, even though they have the highest incidence of need according to IALS (Ministry of Education, 2004). There is often a lack of skilled practitioners available to teach literacy, numeracy and language in rural areas (Benseman, 2006).

However, evidence shows that in the past five years there has been a significant jump in participation in tertiary education, particularly at the lower qualification levels (certificate level), where many of the learners will have foundation needs. In 2004, over 14% of the population aged 15 years and over were enrolled in government-funded tertiary

education organisations, the highest participation rate in New Zealand's history (Ministry of Education, 2005b). As the New Zealand tertiary education system is open access, in that adults over 20 years of age do not require a school leaving certificate to participate, learners come to tertiary education with widely varying skill levels. The growth in enrolments has particularly favoured those who left school without any qualifications, especially older Māori women and those in small towns and rural areas.

Tutors

Tutors work in diverse contexts but very little is known about their characteristics, backgrounds or teaching practices.[7] In 2003 it was estimated that there were approximately 1 700 (primarily voluntary) tutors working in adult community education (often only teaching a few hours per week). Another 3 500 volunteers worked with learners of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), offering primarily social English support. Based on enrolment figures, the number of tutors in pre-vocational programmes or tertiary institutions working in foundation skills-related areas may be in the vicinity of 2 000.

Overall, the tutor workforce has been relatively homogenous. As with general adult and community education, the majority of foundation skills tutors are women (ranging from 60 – 85% in different contexts) and a similar proportion are Pakeha (of European ancestry). It is noteworthy that there are far fewer Maori and Pacific Island tutors than the proportion of learners from those ethnic groups. As a group, foundation skills tutors tend to be older, with the majority aged over 40 years. A third of foundation skills tutors have worked in the field for two years or more and another third have been working in the field for more than 10 years.

Most tutors have an eclectic mix of qualifications, on-the-job experience and ad hoc continuing professional development. In one survey, approximately half of the respondents had university degrees; nearly half had primary or secondary teacher

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[7] The data on tutors is taken from the mapping report mentioned above (Sutton et al., 2005). The report's data is indicative only because it was drawn from three previous surveys of various sub-groups of tutors in this sector and therefore probably under-represents foundation skills tutors working in formal tertiary institutions.

training and a third had a qualification in teaching adults.[8] Individuals also held a range of other non education-related qualifications. A very small number have gained specific adult literacy-related qualifications from overseas. A significant proportion has tertiary qualifications, albeit in disciplines not directly related to literacy, numeracy or language.

There is considerable variation in the working conditions of tutors, which is reflective of a sector that is still marginal relative to other parts of the education sector. Tutors in polytechnics and private training establishments are more likely to be full-time than those in community programmes. Full-time tutors tend to have formalised work contracts (albeit usually short term); part-timers may have sessional contracts or work voluntarily.

The three national agencies with a specific literacy focus (ESOL Home Tutors, Literacy Aotearoa and Workbase) have played an important role in training and supporting tutors and acted as 'nurseries' for the national pool of tutors in foundation skills. Until this year, the only systematic national training programme has been initial training provided by Literacy Aotearoa for its predominantly voluntary staff.

To enhance the professionalization of the educator workforce a competency standards-based national Adult Literacy Educator Qualification was introduced earlier this year at a level equivalent to the first year of a degree course.   This qualification is aimed at those who will tutor in national adult literacy and numeracy qualifications at certificate and diploma level. The government has funded study grants to allow tutors to study toward the new adult literacy educator qualifications at no cost. Other study grants support those who are bilingual and from migrant or refugee communities to study at no cost to become adult ESOL tutors. An additional unit standard has also been introduced to better qualify tutors who are not specialists in literacy, numeracy and language to help learners with foundation skills needs, for example welding tutors teaching pre-trades courses.[9]   The first postgraduate programme – a Masters in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Education – will be offered in 2007.

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[8] Percentages exceed 100% because respondents could enter multiple qualifications.

[9] Unit standard 21204, 'Develop adult learners' literacy and numeracy skills within a training or education programme'.

With few formally qualified foundation skills tutors at present, professional development is essential to develop the capacity of the sector. It is difficult to quantify how much professional development is provided or patterns of participation in it, but an estimate for 2003 recorded over 100 nationally-funded professional development events involving over 2 500 tutors, including over 800 from workplace contexts. A case study (Benseman, Lander, & Sutton, 2005) involving a cross-section of 15 foundation skills tutors found that professional development varied from 70+ hours per year for tutors working in a large workplace education provider to none for those working in small private training establishments. The amount of professional development among the tutors varies greatly by employer: staff in Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, for instance, have professional development built into their contracts, while professional development support for staff in private training establishments will vary according to the size of the employer and the opportunities available. The government has recognised the need in this area, and in 2004 allocated funding to professional development initiatives for foundation skills tutors.

Building capability

Learning for Living is a cross-agency project involving the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the Ministry of Social Development, as well as the Department of Labour and Career Services. Under each of three broad strands of focus – engaged learners, effective teaching and quality providers – a number of initiatives have been developed which together are intended to provide a solid and sustainable infrastructure for future growth in adult literacy provision:

The *Learning for Living* project

Engaged Learners	Effective Teaching	Quality Providers
❖ **Facilitate access** ❖ **Expand provision**	❖ **Raise quality** ❖ **Engage a broader range of tertiary educators**	❖ **Build a sustainable infrastructure**
▪ Pilots to embed LNL into industry training ▪ Advisors in migrant centres to direct adult ESOL learners to appropriate provision ▪ Screening tool for LNL ▪ Greater foundation learning focus in mainstream courses	▪ Research into effective adult teaching methods ▪ Professional development exploratory projects ▪ Communications workshops to disseminate research and best practice findings to tutors ▪ Study grants for adult literacy educators to attain qualifications ▪ Descriptive standards ▪ Learning progressions ▪ Assessment tools	▪ Foundation Learning Quality Assurance arrangements ▪ Adult Literacy Educator qualification
Raise foundation skills so that all can participate in NZ's knowledge society and contribute further to family and community		

Since 2005 the Ministry of Education has commissioned two rounds of *Learning for Living* research and development projects. The first round was intended to provide information on effective teaching and learning practices that led to learner gain. The second round has been structured around a cluster group approach to develop a 'community of practice' for two strands of professional development, one on strategies for teaching reading and the other on numeracy. This approach moves away from short training courses or one-off workshops to a model of sustained staff development. This consists of clusters of small peer groups from participating institutions which undertake professional development involving reflection, exposure to appropriate models and peer mentoring.

The exploratory phase of the project is fully funded by government and includes a national research team evaluating how change in tutor practice affects learner progress. Assessment tools and practices are being developed through the work and the

evaluation of the round as a whole will provide additional information about assessment practices. For example, a number framework for adult learners is currently under development based on one successfully used in schools. This framework is being trialled in the *Learning for Living* project and includes individual learner diagnostic, formative and summative assessment in numeracy. It will be published in 2007 as a national adult teaching resource.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education released the discussion documents *Key Competencies in Tertiary Education: Developing a New Zealand Framework* and *Draft Descriptive Standards: Describing the literacy, language and numeracy competencies that adults need to meet the demands of their everyday lives*. The Key Competencies aim to create a shared understanding among government, providers, learners and employers of the essential knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for adults to participate fully in society. The Draft Descriptive Standards elaborate on the foundation learning competencies, providing outcome descriptions of adult competency in reading, writing, listening, speaking and mathematics.

Building on the Draft Descriptive Standards, the Tertiary Education Commission has developed draft Learning Progressions in reading, writing, listening, speaking and numeracy which seek to identify the common progression of knowledge and skills that adults follow to reach foundation level competence. The Learning Progressions will:
  ▪ help establish a common understanding among tutors and learners about skills and knowledge
  ▪ be useful in building teaching capacity in the sector
  ▪ develop and change over time as understanding is refined through practice
  ▪ include the skills and knowledge required by adults who have English as a second language
  ▪ begin at entry level and build to 'foundation level' competence.

The draft Progressions will be accompanied by supporting handbooks for tutors. These will describe the components of the progressions and the theory behind them. The handbook will also provide examples of teaching strategies and how adults might use the skills and knowledge described in the progressions.

The primary purpose of the Progressions is to facilitate effective teaching and learner achievement, and to help tutors and learners identify areas for skill development and discuss progress. Tutors will be able to refer to the Progressions to plan and evaluate their teaching programmes. The Learning Progressions will directly inform the development of:

- foundation learning course content and course descriptions
- diagnostic assessment tools to identify the skills and knowledge a learner already has, and therefore help tutors focus teaching efforts
- formative and summative assessment tools linked to the patterns of progress described in the progressions
- new qualifications and enhanced unit standards for learners more closely tied to the components of foundation level competencies, which will provide employers and learners with better information about what learners have achieved
- new teaching and learning resources based on a common language
- professional development for educators.

The government's work in foundation learning is focusing increasingly on the workplace. *Upskilling the Workforce* takes an integrated cross-agency approach to:

- shifting workplace practices in key New Zealand industries, sectors and enterprises to help employers improve the literacy, numeracy and language skills of their employees and make better use of skills to lift productivity, profitability and pay;
- developing ways of motivating and assisting individuals to take up and continue literacy, numeracy and language training; and
- developing the capability and quality of tutors and training providers and increasing the supply of effective and focused literacy, numeracy and language provision that meets the needs of the employer and the workforce.

On the provision side, an initial focus is on supporting tutors and practitioners to develop their teaching skills in workplace contexts. Professional development clusters focused on the workplace will be added to the *Learning for Living* professional development clusters. The existing pilot project to integrate literacy, numeracy and language into industry training will also be expanded. A major focus of the upskilling project is to build knowledge about the link between literacy, numeracy and language training for low-

skilled adults and increased productivity, and the most effective ways to design, implement and fund work-based adult literacy programmes.

Foundation Learning Assessment

Directions and initiatives

A growing body of evidence (Black & Wiliam, 2003; Clarke, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003; NZCER, 2005a, 2005b) now points to good assessment processes (amongst other factors) as being important for effective teaching and learner achievement. There are currently national assessment mechanisms in place to assist initial, formative and summative assessment in schools (such as the asTTLE Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning), but none have been implemented as yet in literacy, numeracy and language learning for adults.

A number of steps have been taken toward determining learner gain and the best mechanisms to record progress in literacy, numeracy and language. In 2003 a draft Adult Literacy Achievement Framework (ALAF) was developed to identify learner goals and report progress, as a first step to developing a national reporting process (Sutton, 2004). Emphasis has since shifted to the development of draft Key Competencies, Descriptive Standards, Learning Progressions and the development of nationally consistent assessment tools.

The Ministry of Social Development has been reviewing foundation skills screening mechanisms for beneficiary applicants (Sutton & Benseman, 2005). The Ministry of Education is scoping the development of a computer-based interactive assessment tool that will provide rich data for initial/diagnostic, formative and summative assessment for its future work programme and is developing a generic screening tool during 2006, capable of being used in a variety of contexts.

Foundation skills programmes result in a range of possible outcomes for learners, including: improvements in literacy, numeracy and oral language skills (both tested and self-reported); achieving credits on the standards-based National Qualifications

Framework (NQF); employment-related outcomes and changes in confidence and self esteem. In the absence of national standardised testing or widely-used literacy assessment instruments for foundation skills in New Zealand, foundation learning providers use a range of proxy measures such as summative assessment against unit standards that have an explicit literacy focus, e.g. Unit Standard 2976 'Read independently texts for practical purposes';[10] or unit standards that have reading and writing requirements embedded in them (e.g. 'reading a manual').[11] Foundation learning providers may also design summative assessment processes specific to a programme, for example the completion of institution-specific qualifications, the completion of a worksite-specific assessment or using an Individual Learning Plan to record learners' personal goals and achievements.

While current discussions stress the need for good assessment practice in all its forms, formative assessment is emerging as an area for further study and development. Recent research discussed in this report has identified the importance of formative assessment in effective teaching and learner achievement. At the same time, a national literacy strategy in schools has led to a much greater emphasis on developing the ability of school teachers to use formative assessment related to developing literacy skills with children.

A range of government initiatives encourage providers to use formative assessment. Specialised funds for foundation learning support high quality, intensive learning that makes use of effective diagnostic and formative assessment. For projects to receive funding through the Foundation Learning Pool, for instance, applicants must demonstrate that formal diagnostic assessment is followed by the development of an individual learning plan.

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[10] Unit standards are categorized by field of study, which is further broken down into sub-fields and domains.

[11] Other examples include: 1273 – Express own ideas in writing; 1291 Participate in conversations with known people; 2970 Read independently texts about life experience; 2976 Read independently texts for practical purposes; 2987 Read independently texts to gain knowledge; 3485 Write presenting information.

Foundation Learning Quality Assurance Requirements have been consulted on and trialled. Aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of provision, the draft FLQA includes the following elements under its delivery requirements:

> 5.4 A range of formative learning assessment tools and processes are used that are suitable for, and integrated with, the adult learners' experiences, culture and learning contexts

> 5.5 Formative assessment of the learners' progress is reported to the learner, and other relevant parties, and leads to revisions of the learning plan as appropriate.

The requirements also make learner plans an essential element in adult literacy, numeracy and language teaching. In general, they shift the focus from programme management to the needs of the learner. A self-review guide is also being prepared, which will help the shift away from a compliance culture to one of reflective teaching and constant self-improvement.

As specific foundation learning qualifications for tutors will be a requirement of future quality assurance, these standards will help shape a common understanding of formative assessment among tutors. Formative assessment is defined in the standards as "describ[ing] a learner-centred approach that uses assessment and learner self-assessment to shape the progress of the course". For standard 21195 (design literacy skills development for a group of adult learners), the tutor's plan is required to "include […] ongoing formative assessment which allows the learner to be collaboratively involved". Although they do not refer specifically to formative assessment, other standards which make up the Adult Literacy Educator qualification outline a formative approach. For instance, standard 21198 (deliver literacy skills development for a group of adult learners) requires that students show that purpose and learning outcomes are clearly stated to the group of learners, learning activities are modified in response to the changing needs of learners and changes made during the programme are identified as potential improvements for future programmes.

Research

Foundation learning research has been limited in both quantity and quality, as dedicated funding has only recently become available. A review of all previous New Zealand research (Benseman, 2003) located only 54 studies. Most of these were programme evaluations, involved very small sample sizes, and had limited research methodologies. Few were of a scale or quality to usefully inform policy decisions.

A large-scale review of the international literature on effective foundation skills teaching (Benseman, Sutton, & Lander, 2005)[12] was undertaken to identify strategies to inform professional development programmes and the development of sector infrastructure. The review identifies assessment as an important component of effective teaching, including diagnostic assessment to guide teaching activities, formative and summative assessment. In its findings, the report listed formative assessment among the factors that appear likely to enhance learner gain (p.99):

> *On-going assessment that takes into account the variation in learners' skills across the dimensions of reading and writing.* Assessment processes need to incorporate measurement of all four components of reading: alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The assessment of reading needs to use more than silent reading and oral comprehension questions as assessment tools. […] Assessment also needs to include self-assessment by learners, and constructive, verbal feedback from the tutor.

Parallel with this literature review, a study of 15 foundation skills tutors mentioned earlier was undertaken to observe how they actually teach (Benseman et al., 2005).[13] During these observations, very few of the tutors used activities or strategies normally associated with quality formative assessment. For example, questions tended to be closed rather than open, involved lower level thinking (such as simple recall rather than analytical or evaluative tasks) and were seldom initiated by the learners or between learners. Feedback from foundation skills tutors at recent seminars where this research

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[12] Also available at
http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=10603&indexid=1028&indexparentid=1000

[13] Also available at
http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=10929&indexid=1028&indexparentid=1000

was presented indicates that the findings from this study have proved provocative for many practitioners as a prompt for reflection on their own teaching behaviours.

While formative assessment was not used as a lens for analysis during this study, the findings are very much in keeping with the definition of formative assessment being promoted in New Zealand schools (Clarke, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003), where it is considered to include:

- clarifying learning intentions while planning teaching sessions
- sharing those intentions with learners
- involving learners in self-evaluation against those intentions
- focusing oral and written feedback about the learning intentions of particular tasks
- appropriate questioning
- raising self-esteem through the language used in class.

Assessment Practice

A third research study involved a survey of how foundation skills tutors use assessment in their teaching (NZCER, 2005a). Prior to this study, little was known about the specific forms of assessment foundation skills practitioners were using or how they were being applied in teaching. The study report has therefore been a useful step in understanding 'the state of the play' in current practice, although its small sample size precludes confident extrapolation to all practice. The study was intended "to contribute to an understanding of what is required to enhance the assessment capability of tertiary education providers of learning in literacy, numeracy, and language " (p. xi). Data for the study was gathered from 12 foundation learning providers by way of tutor interviews and document analysis, with a very small amount of opportunistic observation.

The study showed the lack of a common understanding of assessment and the functions and interrelationships of the different forms of assessment (screening, initial, diagnostic, formative and summative). There was a focus on initial assessment and giving summative assessment, although at times summative assessment had a double duty, acting as formative for learning (looking at the learner's overall progress) and summative evidence for certification. A duplication of resource use by providers in developing initial/diagnostic assessments was noted.

The researchers developed six broad assessment principles based on research literature and consultation with key informants that were then used as a framework for examining the current practice of initial/diagnostic, formative and summative assessments in 12 different programmes (including one distance education provider). The six principles were:

1. there are transparent assessment goals and clarity of purpose
2. assessment aims to improve learning and pays attention to the needs and interests of the learner and to the process of learning
3. assessment is valid, reliable, ethical, fair and manageable
4. assessment is authentic
5. the assessment is credible to all relevant stakeholders
6. assessment is undertaken by tutors with experience and assessment practice is supported by ongoing professional development.

The researchers defined formative assessment as feedback both on progress and on the next learning steps. It may include all or some of these elements (NZCER, 2005b, p. 2):

- learning intentions clarified during planning and shared with students
- students self-evaluating against these learning intentions
- receiving specific feedback from the tutor about their progress in meeting those planned outcomes
- being supported to set one's own learning goals.

Table 1 below summarises the tools and approaches the 12 education providers reported using, the factors that influenced when and how the approaches were used, and the typical uses to which the formative assessment data were put.

Formative assessment – findings from a New Zealand study

Assessment tools and approaches	Factors that guide use of assessment	Use made of assessment information
Tutor observation and feedback ***	Learning to learn – drawing learners deeper into learning decisions***	
Use of meaningful contexts ***		Adapting tasks/next learning steps ***
Monitoring in relation to learning plan **	Tutor's personal professional knowledge ***	Tracking progress ***
Self- and peer-assessment **	Emotional wellbeing of learners **	Accountability *
Group assessment *		To get ready for formal summative assessments *
Individual meeting with tutor *	Sharing ownership of assessment with learner *	
Staff discussion of individual students *	Between tutor moderation of assessment judgements *	
	Peer support in another language*	

****=often used, ** = sometimes used,*=occasionally used

A common theme among the education providers was for assessment to be ongoing through continual observations that tutors made and recorded against the initial learning plan. Learning logs sometimes formed the basis of a kind of 'running record', with an emphasis on its use for 'learning to learn'. In some workplace settings some monitoring occurred as learners used their new skills while carrying out their routine work.

However, despite there being assessment related activity, some tutors were not able to articulate how they identified and shaped *evolving* learning goals as their programmes unfolded, or how they used these new insights to shape *next learning steps*, which are essential components of formative assessment. There appeared to be a lack of transparent assessment criteria. Without these criteria, it is not as easy to give feed-forward, or to share ownership of formative assessment decisions with learners. The

report suggested that the determining factor as to whether tutors could effectively set up the next learning steps was the individual tutor's own professional knowledge.

There were instances of formative assessments as practice for a future summative assessment task. This has the potential to restrict the next learning steps into only preparing for the 'test'. The education providers did not often talk about the use of moderation by groups of practitioners as a way of developing assessment expertise.

The study included a number of recommendations relevant to formative assessment:

- There is an opportunity to build further assessment expertise by supporting professional conversations between tutors who have been involved in designing and using purpose-developed assessment tools. This would enable the sharing and critique of current practice and possibly the dissemination of models of good practice/exemplars.

- It would be helpful to develop a bank of assessment tools, and possibly exemplars and stories of good practice, provided that the introduction of such a resource is supported by professional development. Training would need to cover both use of the tools and their appropriate modification to new settings.

- There is an opportunity to use the data collected in the initial/diagnostic assessments more systematically for formative assessment purposes. Overall, there is a need to develop a greater understanding of the role of formative assessment in supporting learning.

- There is a need to explore how learning outcomes such as motivation and confidence building are valued and assessed alongside the traditional assessment focus on cognitive learning gains. This may require new types of assessment tools, probably self-assessment tools.

- There is a need to develop a greater shared understanding in the sector of the purposes of assessment—for systems accountability, to support teaching and learning, and to support lifelong learning. From such a shared understanding could come new possibilities for designing assessment tools and processes to meet all three purposes, in a way that places the priority upon assessment that supports the learner and their learning.

While the assessment study and the observation study did not refer to the same education providers, the findings about the lack of clear and explicit formative assessment processes are very similar, which suggests that there may be similar issues within other provider contexts.

Challenges and Opportunities

The development of foundation learning in New Zealand has been hindered by a lack of data and rigorous research on which to base funding decisions. The government's recent investment has therefore focused on building an evidence base to inform future policy development and constructing the infrastructure needed to support high quality provision.

With the recent completion of several research studies about effective teaching and actual classroom teaching behaviours, there is now a clearer focus on improving the skills and strategies of foundation skills tutors. Formative assessment has not been prominent in these discussions to date, but has now been identified as a fruitful element for future work in the sector. As with other research on foundation learning commissioned by the Ministry of Education over recent years, the assessment study discussed above has been summarised in accessible language and distributed to government agencies and providers of literacy, numeracy and language teaching around the country. Sharing the results of research into effective teaching and learner achievement is designed to build a culture of evaluation in both policy and provision. The current government projects *Learning for Living* and *Upskilling the Workforce* projects are designed to build our knowledge about foundation skills, at the same time as supporting providers to make real changes in how and what they teach and creating new opportunities for learners in a range of contexts.

Despite the growth in participation in tertiary education, there is also evidence that many learners do not progress from foundation level to higher levels of study. The investment and progress that have been made in foundation learning provision in recent years will be augmented by wider reforms in the tertiary education sector to improve education outcomes for the most vulnerable learners. However, the level of investment may not

have been adequate to meet expectations of significant improvements and outcomes for learners. It is possible, as was found in Canada, that this year's Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) will show little overall improvement on the IALS results, as the country's demographic make-up has been affected by increased migration since 1996 (especially from non-English speaking countries).

On the other hand, the wide-ranging background information ALL collects will provide more comprehensive evidence on which to base policy decisions. The survey has been designed to oversample for Maori and Pasifika populations, to ensure that the sample sizes are large enough to provide valid data. Research on Maori learners in literacy, numeracy and language is currently being contracted, with results available in mid-2007. There is also a need for a greater understanding of how to attract and retain Pasifika learners to foundation learning provision.

Although the Tertiary Education Commission now manages the various tertiary education funds that support foundation learning, there is still a need to further coordinate the funding and develop a clear purchase strategy across government agencies, particularly between the Tertiary Education Commission, the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Corrections. Workplace literacy, numeracy and language provision presents a particular challenge: in order to achieve the skill gains required to make a significant and yet affordable difference, it will be necessary to build the supply of cost-effective workplace literacy provision. There will need to be firmer evidence of the connection between improved literacy, numeracy and language levels and productivity to attract greater investment from government and employers.

A task for the next few years is to ensure that the Foundation Learning Quality Assurance arrangements, the tertiary education reforms, the uptake of national qualifications, professional development initiatives, and the development of resources and assessment tools work together to build a sector that is more learner-focused, more professional and therefore in a position to use formative assessment effectively. The professional development and qualification of the tutor workforce, assisted by more reliable and longer-term funding, is expected to strengthen the infrastructure. Investment in this area can play a wider role in improving education outcomes for New Zealand adults: by improving teaching and learning for the most vulnerable learners,

learning outcomes throughout the tertiary education system will be significantly enhanced.

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