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**Teaching, Learning and Assessment
for Adults
Improving Foundation Skills**

Case Study: Norway

**Janet Looney, Anne Husby and
Tove-Dina Røynestad**

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

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TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT FOR ADULTS IMPROVING FOUNDATION SKILLS

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Janet Looney, Anne Husby and Tove-Dina Røynestad

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As in other countries participating in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL), Norway has identified a significant portion of its population as having foundation skill needs. Norway's immigrant population is particularly at risk (with 69% of immigrant respondents performing at the lowest levels). Twelve per cent of the total adult population is considered to be at risk.

This case study explores three exemplary programmes developed to meet adults' foundation skills needs in Norway. The first is a community-based programme, the Reading and Writing Circle, in Verdal. The programme targets adults with learning disabilities or difficulties. It features a unique peer mentoring programme which was developed by local organizers in partnership with the National Dyslexia Association and Norway's umbrella organisation for the associations serving individuals with disabilities.

Two of the programmes featured in this study, the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, and the Arendal Adult Learning Centre in Arendal offer "Introduction programmes" for immigrant and refugee learners. 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. Both of the Introduction programmes featured use portfolios to track learner progress – although they have taken very different approaches.

All three programmes have a strong focus on building learners' skills for "learning to learn", and have developed innovative approaches to teaching, learning and formative assessment. These sites provide important lessons for policy on the challenges of deepening and broadening effective practice.

Highlights

According to the 2003 Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) survey, one third of the Norwegian adult population's literacy skills do not meet the needs of the labour market (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005).¹ Individuals at the lowest skill levels also have difficulties in gaining necessary information for daily tasks, such as reading letters, understanding the local newspaper, reading subtitles on television, and so on. Sixty nine

¹ ALL defines five levels of difficulty in prose, document and numeracy domains. Those performing at levels 1 and 2 are considered to be below the critical level for success on the labour market, although it must be noted that many individuals at this level have jobs and are satisfied with their literacy skills.

per cent of the immigrant population is at the highest level of risk, based on the results of at least one literacy test. Twelve per cent of the total adult population is considered to be at risk by the same measure. They are often unemployed and/or have less than a secondary level of education.

Many Norwegian adults – 53% – do participate in some kind of continuing education. However, those who need it most are least likely to participate. Only one in three adults at the lowest level of functioning participate in some type of learning programme. At the same time, it must be noted that many Norwegian survey participants who were classified as functioning below the “critical” level (level 3) are employed and are able to easily handle the functions of daily life.

The “Soria Moria statement”, developed by the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party coalition which came into power 12 September 2005, presents the government’s strategy for addressing these challenges. The government wants to:

- Develop structures for leaves of absence and improve the opportunities for learning and education on the workplace.
- Work for the financing of continuing and further education, by both employers, employees and the government.
- Work for the fulfilment of adults’ rights to primary and secondary education.
- Strengthen public information of adult education.
- Strengthen the right to validation of non-formal competence.
- Promote public support of adult education.

The Norwegian government takes a multi-pronged approach to these goals.

- Through legislation:
 - The Act on Adult Education (Voksenopplaeringsloven) (1976).
 - The Competence Reform, part of the Education Act, granting all adults the right to primary education (2002) and upper secondary education (2000).
 - The Introduction Act (2003) offering a 2-year introductory programme in Norwegian language and social studies to refugees and persons granted residence on political and humanitarian grounds, and to those who immigrate in order to be reunited with family members in these groups.

- Amendments to the Introduction Act (2004), establishing participation in 300 hours of Norwegian language training and social studies as “a right and an obligation” for all non-EU immigrants receiving their residence permits on or after 1 September 2005. Participation in these 300 hours is a condition for permanent residence, as well as application for citizenship.
- Through attention to prior learning and the development of competencies:
 - New approaches to validation of prior learning and tailoring of individual learning.
 - Definition of competencies at compulsory level (The Knowledge Promotion) and adult levels (National Framework for Basic Skills in Adults).
 - Development of new assessment tools (e.g., the “I Can” portfolio).
 - The 2001 establishment of the National Institute for Adult Learning, also known as Vox, to provide support for competence building.
- Through evaluation of existing programmes to learn more about effective approaches:
 - Support for the research and development of effective pedagogies (through Vox).
 - Intensive efforts to learn more about what works in community-based programmes.
- Through participation in international surveys and studies, including:
 - The International Adult Literacy Survey (1998).
 - The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (2005).
 - Related work in the European Union.
 - Related work at the OECD, including the recently released thematic review on equity and quality in education, *No More Failures* (OECD, 2007).

- Through new incentives for basic skills education for adults:
 - In 2007, and within the national programme for Basic Skills in Working Life, Vox will give grants to private and public enterprises. The grants, which in some cases also finance courses for unemployed adults, are meant to encourage development of courses that adapt teaching and learning to meet local and individual needs, and to encourage grassroots innovation. Vox will also evaluate the impact of different teaching approaches, and based on findings suggest policy approaches to strengthen adult basic skills education.

Thus, there is a strong emphasis on building a solid information base on the potential demand for adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) education, the learning needs of the target population, and the quality of educational provision currently available in Norway. This information will help to shape future policy reforms.

In Norway, adult language, literacy and numeracy training takes place in a range of settings, including secondary school programmes developed specifically for adults (in some areas, adults may participate in mainstream secondary schooling), work-based programmes, folk high schools and study organizations, correctional services, distance learning, and Norwegian language and social studies for recent immigrants and refugees.

Overview of the case studies

Three exemplary programmes for adult foundation skills learners are presented in the following pages. They include a programme for adults with dyslexia or reading and writing difficulties, and two programmes for adult immigrant learners. All adult immigrant learners receiving their residence permits after 1 September 2005 have both “a right and an obligation” to participate in courses in Norwegian language and social studies.

The first case is on the Reading and Writing Circle at Verdal’s Upper Secondary School in the county of Nord-Trøndelag. The programme, which was founded in 2003, targets adults with learning disabilities or difficulties. The second and third cases, at the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger and the Adult Learning Centre in Arendal, focus on programmes for adult immigrant learners who are working toward language and other competences considered necessary to participate in Norwegian primary or upper secondary school or at work. Both programmes use portfolio methods as a way to focus learners on their learning progression – what they have learnt, and where they need to work harder – and for building their skills for

“learning-to-learn”. However, the programmes take very different approaches to using the portfolio as a tool for teaching, learning and assessment.

Case study 1: The Equal Man Project of the Reading and Writing Circle, Verdal

The Reading and Writing Circle was founded in September 2003 as a programme of Verdal Upper Secondary School, the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association, and the National Dyslexia Association. The programme, which targets adults with learning disabilities or difficulties, offers a foundation and a comprehensive course in reading and writing. The programme serves approximately 20 adults each year. It is a small programme in a small town (the population of Verdal is approximately 13 800).

In the health care sector, an Equal Man is an individual with an illness or a disability who provides support to an individual diagnosed with a similar condition. The Equal Man, of course, also benefits from the support of his or her peers. 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.

The Equal Man project at the Verdal Reading and Writing Circle is the brainchild of the president of the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association. He and the director of the adult learning programme at Verdal Upper Secondary School initiated the programme. The president of the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association has personally recruited several of the learners in the programme. He notes that he has met 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, the president of the local Dyslexia Association 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.

There are two instructors currently working in the programme. This is a second job for both of them. One of these instructors teaches in primary school, the other in upper secondary school. One of the instructors has a background in the field of special needs education for younger learners. They have received training to work with adults with learning disabilities

and difficulties from the National Dyslexia Association and the Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon (FFO) for teaching reading and writing, and for working with adults in this population. (The FFO is the umbrella organisation for the associations serving, among others, the blind, deaf or other physical or learning disabilities, in Norway.) Beyond this, the instructors do not have special training for adult literacy education. They do, however, bring important personal qualities to their work in the Reading and Writing Circle, including empathy – which we see here as not only about understanding the learners’ feelings, but also what individuals may need for their learning.

Learners in the Reading and Writing Circle participate in a three-hour evening course once or twice a week, either at the basic or the comprehensive level. Most learners choose to come once a week, and complete a 100 hour course over the academic year. In each course, there are approximately ten learners, two instructors and two to three Equal Men. There is rolling admission. In other words, new learners can join the course at any point in the year. However, there are few drop-outs, and therefore few openings during the year.

The Reading and Writing Circle has a dedicated space within Verdal Upper Secondary School. It has a separate entrance, and participants have a code to enter the building. There is an area where learners may work on computers, an area for socialising and two separate rooms for smaller meetings or private conversations.

Learners receive a certificate upon course completion, although there is no requirement to “pass” the course in order to participate in further learning opportunities (nor are there any tests or marks). Most learners have goals for further education upon completion of the course – for primary, upper secondary school completion, and sometimes higher education.

Addressing the needs of adults with learning disabilities or difficulties

The goal of the Reading and Writing Circle is to give people with reading and writing difficulties a better quality of life by helping them to master daily challenges. Learners are encouraged to take steps toward a good or better job, to prepare for further education, and to build stronger social networks.

When learners first come in contact with the Reading and Writing Circle at the Verdal Upper Secondary School they take a computer-based screening test called “Radgiveren” to identify what they can do, and where they have specific weaknesses. This is not a diagnostic test for dyslexia, but helps to

identify those areas where learners have difficulty and may need further formal diagnostic testing and remediation. They then have an interview with an instructor, during which they discuss goals, set targets for learning and develop a plan. The plan serves as a sort of a contract between the instructor and learner. Learners take a second test at the end of the 100-hour course. They are able to track what they have learnt and where they still have gaps. With the instructor, they then develop a plan for next steps in their education.

While all participants in the Reading and Writing Circle have reading and writing difficulties, approximately 20% of the participants have an official diagnosis of dyslexia. 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..." The World Dyslexia Association estimates that 4% of any population has severe dyslexia, and a further 6% have some dyslexic characteristics.

In Norway, adults with an official diagnosis for a specific learning disability have the right to special education on the same conditions as children and youth in primary and lower secondary schools (not all municipalities offer special courses for adults with dyslexia, however). 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, there is no legal right to accommodation in work or other settings.

The pedagogical approach

At the time of the OECD case study visit, the "Verdal Model" had been in use for more than two years. The approach to teaching used at Verdal's Reading and Writing Circle was developed by the National Dyslexia Association, the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association, and the FFO.

The main features of the approach are:

- "Strategy learning" (tailoring of learning, and providing learners with different strategies for learning and test taking).
- Support of the Equal Man for new learners.
- Training provided to instructors and Equal Men by the local Dyslexia Association in Nord-Trøndelag, and guidance from National Dyslexia Association on strategy learning.

The instructors in the programme do not use the term "formative assessment", although many aspects of their approach reflect formative

concepts – including the focus on tailoring learning to meet individual learner needs, tracking learner progress over time, and peer learning, which are all key elements of effective formative assessment. Importantly, the instructors have access to a repertoire of evidence-based approaches for teaching reading to individuals with dyslexia or reading and writing difficulties.

The approach to teaching reading used in the Verdal Reading and Writing Circle is consistent with research on specific skills needed for reading. Whether readers have a learning disability, difficulty, or are “normal”, these skills include:

- *Phonemic awareness* – the ability to determine the fine tones of the language (for example, the ability to distinguish between the letters “p” and “b”).
- *Phonics* – the ability to link the fine tones of the language to representation.
- *The “rules of the language”* – how the sounds are represented by letters, including individual sounds and “diphthongs” (for example, “tion”, which is pronounced as “shun” in English, or the eight ways to represent the sound “ur” ... including why ear becomes early, are examples of diphthongs. In Norwegian, the sound /sj/ can be written in three ways - /sj/, /skj/ and /sk/. There are also difficulties with homonymous words, for instance “hjul” (wheel) and “jul” (Christmas).
- *Automaticity* – the ability to perform the prior skills rapidly.
- *Comprehension* – understanding of the meaning behind the words.

Individuals with dyslexia may have difficulties with auditory processing, sequencing and recall; frequently, they may not have mastered the first of the three steps described above. Various interventions for teaching reading to individuals with dyslexia are based on building these skills. Of course, no one model is appropriate for all individuals, and the success of different interventions varies.² The class observed for this case study focused on the above reading skills, with time spent on phonemes and phonics, and development of reading speed through work with the Drillpro computer programme.

² See also, World Dyslexia Network Foundation, www.wdnf.info

The Equal Men play an important role in helping to develop these specific skills. They have developed their own strategies – which they share with newer learners – to improve learning skills. For example, one of the Equal Men has created a 46-page handbook describing how to read Norwegian consonants and vowels in a manner that learners with similar reading difficulties could clearly understand. Another strategy aimed to help learners with automaticity. Rather than letting themselves get stuck on a particular word, learners learned to underline the word and keep moving on. Some of the learners noted that in the past they had stopped reading altogether whenever they got stuck, so realizing that they could still get the gist without understanding everything is an important breakthrough. They have also learnt to note key words and to block important texts. Instructors often use strategies such as brainstorming and mind-mapping to identify what learners already know and can do, and to build on this prior knowledge.

The instructors find that they have to differentiate learning tasks frequently. Those who work slowly have more time to complete tasks, while those who are faster get extra tasks, or help their peers. The instructors also say that they often refer to the Equal Men for help, because they are often better able to explain an idea. The Equal Men have been through this learning process, as well.

The instructors are not concerned, however, with varying approaches to assessment – for example, careful attention to questioning, providing feedback, and so on. They also say that these adult learners are very aware of what their problems are, and express their needs very clearly. For example, several learners have said that they do not like to use computers so much in the class, and are therefore now using regular written exercises more regularly.

A particular challenge instructors noted is in regard to a need for texts for adults with basic skill needs (there is now a text which instructors and learners like, but it is very rare to find good texts for adult literacy education). Some learners who are participating in the courses to earn trade qualifications may bring homework with them, and instructors and Equal Men will help with those materials.

Learners may also need access to accommodations for their learning disability or difficulty, ranging from such basic technologies as coloured plastic sheets to help keep letters from jumping around on the page, to a handheld scanning device, allowing the learner to transfer written text to the computer, and to use voice functions of the computer to dictate the text. Indeed, some learners with learning disabilities may never learn to read, or to read well, thus technology is very important for everyday functioning.

Self-advocacy skills, including the ability to tell employers and others what kind of accommodations are needed, are also vital.

The Equal Men

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 in the learning setting. The instructors and Equal Men see themselves as a part of a collaborative team. 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. The instructors and Equal Men take on different tasks related to pedagogical and social-psychological challenges

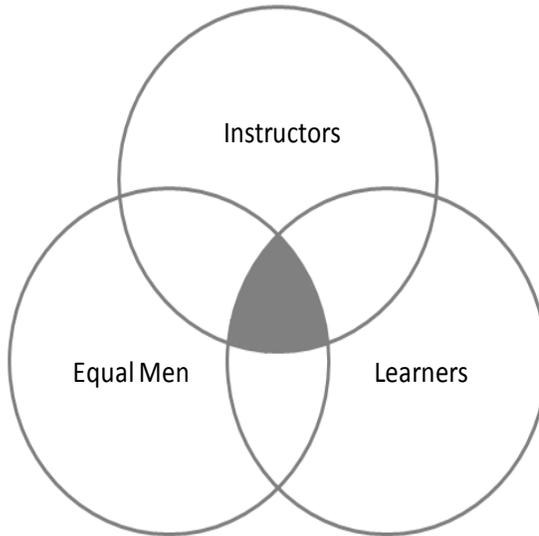
One of the special challenges for the Equal Men is to decide when he or she is a learner (as the Equal Men are also reinforcing their own learning during the course), and when he or she is an Equal Man supporting newer learners. These are two different roles, and the Equal Men need to be clear about which role they are playing and when.

All agree that good communication is very important to the success of the Equal Man approach. It has taken time and training for the instructors and Equal Men to build an effective team. The first year of the programme, the instructors and Equal Men say, involved a lot of hard work in sorting out roles. The instructors and Equal Men say they need to find their way with each new course.

In the class observed for this study, the instructors, Equal Men and learners are all clearly at ease with each other and there appears to be a relatively equal balance of power among all the participants. Instructors appreciate the role that Equal Men play in creating a positive and supportive environment. The presence of peers is very important to helping new learners feel comfortable as they step back into a classroom situation and expose literacy deficits they have long tried to conceal.

In addition to volunteering their time in the classroom, Equal Men also provide support such as transportation for class participants to and from the school. The Dyslexia Association supports outside activities, such as social events and occasional out-of-town travel (many adults with dyslexia, the president of the Dyslexia Association notes, have never left their home towns or stayed in a hotel). Social networks and peer support are an essential part of learner empowerment.

Figure 1. The success of the programme rests in the intersection of the learners, Equal Mean and instructors, the programme leaders say. Take one of these elements away, and an important synergy is lost.



Source: OECD.

The role of empathy

Instructors say that empathy is absolutely essential to teaching in this programme. Empathy, of course, refers to the ability of the instructor to put his/herself in the learners' place and to understand feelings – as well as to understand their specific learning challenges and needs.

The instructors have received training in “strategy learning” (strategy learning refers to tailoring of learning, and providing learners with different strategies for learning and test taking). They use approaches such as brainstorming with learners to reveal what they already know and to then build on it, or encourage learners to create their own rules to remember a new point of grammar, or to rephrase an idea. At the same time, the instructors say that they don't really think consciously about strategies when they are working with learners. Rather, they say, they see each learner and what he or she needs to make progress. They are more concerned that learners feel secure. It is apparent that while these instructors cannot always clearly articulate the strategies they are using, that they are indeed drawing

upon their expertise and “know-how” as experienced practitioners – their “tacit knowledge”.

Instructors also note that it is important to build rapport and to let everyone in the class get to know each other. They say it is also important to “lose the teacher mask”. Instructors are very often gratified to see learners grow – to become eager learners. The atmosphere in the classroom is relaxed, positive and supportive. There is a lot of joking. Coffee breaks and the chance to socialize are an important part of each evening.

Very often, learners have low self-confidence when they start at the Reading and Writing Circle. They may have heard that they are stupid, or think that they are unable to learn. Instructors build their confidence by ensuring that each learner works on a task he or she can manage (in other words, they scaffold learning – working step by step toward more difficult tasks). A very good sign of progress is when the learners catch the instructor making a mistake

The instructors say that no subject is off limits for discussion in adult classes – 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 the Equal Men. They are also invited to express their needs for teaching and learning. Learners can talk with instructors or Equal Men informally if they need anything or have a specific concern.

Instructors say they find their role from course to course. And because they keep a log following every class, they are able to track their own development since they first started teaching in the Reading and Writing Circle. They say that the logs also show that they no longer try to teach as much as possible in the 100 hour course, but rather, focus their attention on ensuring that learners have learnt well. They also cover the same topics repeatedly during the course to reinforce learning (this is also helpful when new learners join the class mid-way through the year). After awhile, learners are very open about what they don’t understand.

ICT

The programme leaders believe that ICT is so important, that they offer an additional 25 hours of computer training on top of the 100 hour reading and writing course. There are 12 computers in the learning area – enough for each learner to have computer time for as long as he or she needs.

The programme emphasises the development of practical computer-based skills, such as paying bills on line, registration for electrical services, and so on. It is also used as a tool for learning. For example, as mentioned above, the Drillpro programme is used to vary the teaching, and to give

learners a chance to practice their learning speed and comprehension. The programme also gives immediate feedback on the learner's performance.

Training with ICT may also be useful for those learners who want to complete their upper secondary school qualifications through Internet-based courses (adults have the option, as well, of participating in regular upper secondary school courses, either in schools developed specifically for adult learners, or with younger learners in mainstream schools).

Not all learners are fans of the computer work. Some feel that the computers get in the way of their learning objectives.

Funding

The Reading and Writing at Verdal does not receive funding from the county or the national government. The programme leader therefore stresses that adult education at Verdal Upper Secondary school is a commercial activity. They “have to sell the product of knowledge in order to exist”, he comments.

Programme leaders estimate that it costs about 12 000 Norwegian Kroner (approximately 1 600 €) to support each learner through the 100 hour course. (The course is free for learners.) Approximately 90% of this amount is provided by the Nord-Trøndelag and National Dyslexia Association. It covers instructor salaries, overhead, ICT and materials, training for instructors and Equal Men, and other related expenses. Additional funds for the Reading and Writing Circle has come from local businesses; union-supported scholarships; and from the employment service, Aetat³ (providing some support for the Equal Man project, as well as support for participants who are unemployed). The director of the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association and the Equal Men are volunteers.

The programme leader also works actively with employers and the public employment service to develop programmes to meet their needs. (The main industries in Nord-Trøndelag are farming, forestry and the internationally-known company Aker Kværner, which builds oil rigs for offshore petrol production.) The programme will send both instructors and Equal Men to companies to hold classes, if that is deemed to be the best approach. The programme leaders emphasises the importance of being flexible and mobile. Often, however, companies prefer that learners attend classes at the school Centre.

³ The newly established Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) took on the functions of Aetat as of 1st July 2006. The new NAV incorporates both work and welfare services.

Evidence

The programme leader and instructors point to improvements in learners' performance on tests, learners' and employers' expression of satisfaction in evaluation forms, and the low drop-out rate as evidence of programme effectiveness. They also point to improvements in learners' social lives, prospects for further education and employment, their ability to help children with their school work, and functionality in everyday life.

As mentioned above, all participants in the Reading and Writing Circle take the Radgiveren (entrance test) when they come into the programme. Upon completion of the 100 hour course, they re-take this test. According to the programme leader, all learners show major improvements. Indeed, the president of the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association claims that there are learners who have learnt more in the 100 hour course at the Reading and Writing circle than they have in all their prior years of schooling. It should be noted, however, that learners do not necessarily become fluent readers within the "100 hours" of the programme.

The Reading and Writing Circle has included learners as young as 13 years old with good results, although certainly the presence of younger learners changes the nature of in-class conversation to some extent. Indeed, the school head for Verdal Upper Secondary School would like to develop more opportunities for younger people to participate in order to help learners at risk of dropping out from upper secondary school. The school head sees the Reading and Writing Circle as a way to help learners build confidence and develop skills. It is a rare case of the compulsory school sector looking into a model in adult basic skills.

Learners and company clients complete evaluations at the end of the course. These evaluations show high levels of satisfaction with the course. The programme leader and instructors also have an ongoing dialogue about how to do things better, but they lack time to engage in any kind of formal improvement process. For courses developed for and adapted to company needs, there may be company-developed tests. These may include tests on comprehension of safety regulations, documents on quality control, use of ICT for company related tasks, or on general reading and writing. They are able to show evidence of improvements in these tests, as well.

The programme leaders also point to the fact that they have not had to market the programme since its early days, as new clients learn of the programme from earlier satisfied participants. Sometimes the demand for their services is greater than what they are able to provide. However, the programme cannot expand within current levels of funding.

Conditions necessary for success

The programme leader points to the partnership between the Verdal Upper Secondary School adult programme, the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association and the National Dyslexia Association and the Equal Man project as key factors in the success of the Reading and Writing Circle. Their success is also due to effective staffing and focus on mastering important concepts. The small size of the programme ensures that learners will have more one-to-one time with an instructor or an Equal Man – something that is not always possible in adult basic skills programmes. Instructors also point to the importance of time – time to ensure that learners are truly learning and are mastering each skill. The instructors do not feel the need to rush through the whole of Norwegian grammar in a single 100-hour course. Moreover, they say, there is a lot of “unlearning” to be done.

The local and national dyslexia associations help to recruit Equal Men, provide vital guidance on appropriate pedagogical and psycho-social support, as well as financial support. The partnership with the Dyslexia Association has also been important in ensuring that learners have access to appropriate accommodations, and develop skills for self-advocacy regarding their disability and needs for accommodation.

The Equal Men provide support for learning, building learner self-confidence and motivation, social networks, and so on. The Equal Men also serve as models for new learners in the Reading and Writing Circle – they are individuals who are like them, but who are succeeding against the odds. One of the Equal Men, in addition to volunteering his time to the Reading and Writing Circle, is working through primary and secondary school requirements. His goal is to eventually earn a degree in Engineering. This learner says that when he started in the programme, he could not write his name properly. Relatively soon after he entered the programme, he started to make progress. “It was like the skies opened up” he says. Nowadays, he is eager to share his story and to speak publicly about his experiences and the progress he has made at public events on behalf of the Dyslexia Association and the Reading and Writing Circle.

Certainly, this model could be easily replicated in other settings. There are also possibilities to take the model even further in order to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities or difficulties. For example, programme leaders and researchers may consider what combinations of instruction, accommodations using assistive technologies, learners self-advocacy, and so on, might lead to even better outcomes for literacy, employment and social participation. How might this model be combined with reading and writing training tied to specific subject areas or employer needs?

The ALL findings that up to 30% of the adult Norwegian population read, write, and calculate at levels considered by many experts to be lower than necessary for everyday functioning in modern society (*i.e.*, lower than level 3), point to a need to push what is known about what works for this population much further.

Introduction to case studies 2 and 3: adult immigrant education

Case studies 2 and 3 examine programmes for adult immigrant learners – a rapidly growing population in Norway. Immigration now accounts for more than half of Norway’s population growth. At the beginning of 2005, the immigrant population was 8% of Norway’s population. One in three immigrants to Norway have lived in Norway for less than five years; 72% of immigrants in Norway have a non-western background. As of 1 January, 2006, there were 285 300 immigrants with a non-Western background living in Norway (see <http://www.ssb.no> for the most recent statistics).

The unemployment rate among non-western immigrants is three times higher than for the Norwegian population as a whole. While employment for this group increases significantly after four years of residence, it is often in elementary occupations. New refugees are resettled in communities throughout the country, near relatives and social networks and where there are opportunities for work.

The Introduction Act

As of 1st of September 2005, all immigrants to Norway granted residence permits are required to complete 250 hours tuition in Norwegian language⁴ and 50 hours in social studies in a language they understand. Participation is considered as both “a right and an obligation”. The aim of the training is to provide immigrant learners with greater opportunities for participation and integration into Norwegian society.

The Introduction Act requires that instruction be adapted to individual learner’s background and qualifications, and all learners are to have an individual plan (IP). It shall include a description of the learner’s final goal for learning as well as the basis for setting these specific goals; and a time table for learning and work practice for each semester. The IP may also include an optional language profile. The plan should be adapted if the learner’s long-term goals change.

⁴ All immigrants receive tuition in Norwegian, but it should be noted that they also have the right to receive instruction in the Sami language, as well. Sami has equal legal status with Norwegian.

The course work must be completed within three years from the date when the residence or work permit was issued. Learners may also receive up to an additional 2 700 hours of Norwegian language course work, depending on the learner's needs and the individual plan for training. Instructors may petition for support of additional lessons if the learner has not reached goals set out in the individual plan. However, additional studies are not obligatory. All course work up to 3 000 hours must be completed within five years.

Municipal authorities are responsible for organising tuition. However, curriculum, language tests, and funding are determined at the national level.⁵ Municipalities currently receive a combination of per-capita funding and/or reimbursement educational services, although it should be noted that many of the learning centres find that the new per-capita funding is insufficient).⁶

The national curriculum in Norwegian language and social studies for adult immigrants is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It includes competence goals for four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2). The notion of competence, as understood in Norway, refers to the “knowledge, attitudes and skills” necessary for functioning in everyday life and for mastering complex activities. Literacy and numeracy are understood as taking place in different contexts and having different purposes. There are three different tracks, which are adapted to meet the needs of a variety of learners – those with no educational background (Track 1); those with some educational background and who are accustomed to using a written language as a tool for learning (Track 2); and for more advanced learners (Track 3). The learner's mother tongue (Western or non-Western, or if the language is in a very different linguistic family from Norwegian) is also an important factor when placing the learner in a specific track. The tracks reflect progression and skills development, including skills for “learning-to-learn”. Learners may move between tracks if their progression is faster or slower.

The classes in Norwegian language and social studies are free of charge up to “level B1” (with the exception of persons with residence pursuant to the European Economic Area Agreement (EEA) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) rules, labour immigrants from outside the EEA/EFTA-area, students and au-pairs. Learners completing level B2 will

⁵ Prior to 1 January 2007 the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID) held the financial and legal responsibility, while the Ministry of Education and Research was responsible for the curriculum. As of the beginning of 2007, AID holds responsibility for all national functions.

⁶ The municipalities also receive an additional amount based on numbers of learners' who pass the Norskprøve 2 (level A2) or Norskprøve 3 (level B1). The municipality receives approximately 60€ for each learner on the new arrangement who passes the written test, and 60€ for each learner who passes the oral test.

gain competences to participate in college and university, but the tuition and examination of Norwegian competence is not free at this level.⁷

The curriculum does not provide guidance on teaching methodology, but the Ministry of Education and Vox have developed a guide which includes articles on the theory underlying the curriculum, and includes a website and DVD with examples of effective teaching practice.⁸

Learners can take tests at levels A2 and B1, and take sample tests in preparation for the final proficiency test in Norwegian. Learners may sign up for the proficiency tests when they are ready or when they have reached the end of their initial 250 hours of instruction in Norwegian.

The two case studies below show very different ways of taking on and building up formative assessment across a programme. They provide different examples of what effective formative approaches may look like in practice, and the kinds of tools that different instructors have found effective. They also provide important lessons for policy on the challenges of deepening and broadening effective practice.

Case study 2: portfolio methods at the Johannes Learning Centre, Stavanger

The Johannes Learning Centre is located in Stavanger, a city of 115 000 on the southwest coast of Norway. It is the fourth largest city in the country. Since the mid 1970s, offshore oil production has been the most important business sector in Stavanger – and has spurred other entrepreneurial development in the area.

The Johannes Learning Centre serves both children and adults. It includes a multilingual kindergarten and primary school serving an average of 70 immigrant children each year (1st to 7th grade). The centre has three departments in the field of adult education. The Competence Department at Johannes Learning Centre gives tuition in Norwegian language and social studies for immigrants at the age from 16 to 20, and lower secondary education for adults. There is also a department which provides tuition in Norwegian language and social studies for adult immigrants. In addition, there is a Resource Department providing special education to adults in need of re-education or skill-maintenance.

The Centre is located in a bright, colourful and very new building. It includes a canteen (a free breakfast is available to learners following the first

⁷ Please see Norwegian Country Background report for this study, www.oecd.org/edu/whatworks

⁸ *Ibid.*

morning lessons; this is in part an incentive for learners to get to classes), up-to-date ICT facilities (with 8 stationary computers, and 20 portable computers), a science laboratory and a multi-media library. Classrooms for each of the different departments are located in separate areas.

There are currently 54 learners in the Competence department, the focus of the case study. The learners range from 16 to 54 years of age. They are divided into five classes of 10 to 11 learners each. They are from Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Chechnya, Congo, Iraq, Somalia, Viet Nam and other countries – most of which are non-western. Some learners have already participated in or completed upper secondary school in their home countries, but want to earn a Norwegian school leaving certificate. Others have not had any prior schooling and are learning to read and write for the first time, and doing so in a second language.

Learners stay at the Centre from one to three years, depending on need and individual circumstances. Learners in Track 1 take 22 hours of Norwegian as a second language, three hours of social studies per week. They may also take computer or gym classes. As learners gain competence in Norwegian, they spend less time in language classes, and begin classes in mathematics, natural science, English, and other subjects or activities. New learners may join the programme at any point during the year.

There are 14 teachers in the Competence Department at Johannes Learning Centre with degrees for teaching from the University or the Teachers College. Six have further education in Norwegian as a Second Language. None have further education in pedagogies for adults.

Formative assessment in the Competence Department

A small core of instructors in the Competence Department use formative assessment as a systematic approach to teaching and learning. Two of the language instructors (Norwegian and English) have been using formative methods since 1993. Their initial interest in formative assessment emerged through participation in a nationally-funded project encouraging alternative approaches to assessment (that is, other than examinations). They worked with mentors outside of the Centre to design, modify, and adapt their teaching methods and to develop tools – including learning portfolios, learning logs, and rubrics – for classroom assessment. They also published

two articles in Norwegian on their experiences with alternative assessment across two frames.⁹

A third instructor, who has been at the Johannes Learning Centre for 9 years has recently started using formative assessment in his mathematics courses – inspired partly, he says, by the OECD case study visit. As head of the mathematics department, he is working with two other (part-time) instructors to develop and try out formative approaches in the Competence department. Within this small group, they are developing specific criteria for assessment, and are discussing how they can place more focus on the process of learning – and not only on tests. They now place more responsibility on learners for communicating their learning needs in their individual learning logs and during classes and in guidance sessions. The number of instructors using formative assessment methods across the Centre is nevertheless still limited.

Learning portfolios

The two language instructors use learning portfolios as their primary tool for structuring teaching, learning and assessment. The focus is on helping learners to understand the learning goals, what they need to do to reach those goals, and to track their improvement over time. As one of the instructors commented, it is about moving the focus from marks to “how did you get to this point? It is also about building learners’ respect for their own work”.

Learners are asked to keep and take care of every draft. Part of the idea is to let learners know that their writing is important – although it may not be 100% correct, it is not bad. One of the instructors remarked that she has been known to retrieve crumpled-up pieces of paper and put them back into a learner’s portfolio.

When learners deliver their first portfolio, they are asked to assess their work as being “very good, good, or not so good.” If there is a discrepancy between the instructor’s assessment and the learner’s, it is usually because the learners are rating themselves lower. At the same time, the portfolio review process is about more than deciding whether a specific assignment should be rated as “good” or “not so good”. As one of the instructor commented, “it’s about opening up, finding out how you are learning”. This instructor describes teaching learner’s self-assessment skills as needing to

⁹ “Mappevurdering i norsk som andrespråk ved Johannes voksenopplæringscenter 1998-1999” (1999) and “Mappevurdering i norsk som andrespråk muntlig og i engelsk ved Johannes voksenopplæringscenter 1999-2001” (2001).

“get into” learners’ minds. “You have to work with it step-by-step,” she says.

The instructors are strategic in deciding how to focus their assessments. For example, they might highlight things that need correction, and ask the learner to figure out what they need to do. Or, they might mark only the nouns that are wrong. The instructors usually don’t correct or highlight every mistake. The instructors will often sit down with the learners before they write their second draft to provide both written and oral feedback.

The instructors make sure that texts are dated so that learners can see their progress over time. The instructors review the full portfolio with learners in December, and again in March and at the end of the year, in June. Learners will see, for example, that they are more organised, are 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.

The portfolios are also intended to help build skills for learning-to-learn. This may involve skills such as keeping work organised (*i.e.*, with dates, headlines for new sections, space in the text so it is easier to read, and so on). It may also involve building fairly sophisticated skills, such as evaluating and improving upon work through self- and peer-assessment. It is important to help learners to understand that learning is a process, and that it may take them several tries to bring work to the standard they would like. Learners will thus be better prepared to deal with summative assessments and marks when they enter upper secondary school.

The instructors also try to be very clear about their expectations as to what learners should know and be able to do. Rubrics and evaluation sheets, and class discussions regarding criteria for judging the quality of learner performance are important for this. Each of the instructors also shares their week plan with learners (*i.e.*, on Monday there is focus on pronunciation, on Tuesday, on a specific grammar point, and so on). Usually learners have a week to work on an assignment.

Log books

The mathematics instructor uses a log book to structure teaching, learning and assessment. He marks a “+/-” in the learner’s log book to highlight whether he/she has completed the problem correctly, or needs to re-do it. He 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 book also provides a way for learners to give him feedback about their own 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 also use log books. In the language classes, the learners sometimes use the log book to ask for things they want to focus on 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. It is important that learners not try to hide what they don't know or to find excuses, because they cannot learn anything that way, these instructors say.

Scaffolding

“Scaffolding” is central to the teaching of each of these three instructors. In other words, they provide as much information as the learner needs to make progress, but no more. Learners should feel secure – they do not need to “fall down” in order to learn.

In language classes, learners begin with fairly simple language on subjects close to their personal lives. They gradually move to more abstract issues, such as politics in their home countries, the education system in Norway, and so on. Instructors do not correct every mistake – they will focus on one or two points, and discuss them with learners.

Each of the instructors has frequent mini-conferences with learners during a lesson. These mini-conferences focus on providing learners with specific suggestions for improvement – for example, suggesting that a learner work on the pronunciation of “pt”, rather than merely telling the learner to work on pronunciation. The instructors also use the individual conferences to encourage learners to reflect on what helps them learn best.

The mathematics instructor comments that since he has become more systematic about using formative assessment, he has been differentiating between learners more. For example, 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 under 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. For example, an Iraqi carpenter in one of his classes clearly had no fear of geometry and had strong spatial abilities, but was not initially ready to work with mathematical theory.

This instructor is also focusing on helping learners do fewer things well, rather than asking them to do all of it badly, as he says. He finds that his learners are coping better, building their confidence with math, getting through emotional blocks regarding their learning.

Building a culture of trust

The instructors emphasise that a culture of trust is essential to effective formative assessment. Learners need to know that they are important to the instructors, and that the instructors care if they are actively participating in the learning process. It is also, in part, about respect for the work.

Building a culture of trust within the classroom also requires that the assessment process be seen as positive. As one instructor emphasised, “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 – and goes to great lengths to ensure that learners value *all* their own efforts. Learners will understand that it is their improvement over time that matters – that it is about the process of learning.

Each of the instructors creates time and space for learners to give feedback on their own concerns and questions. For example, one of the instructors has “class time” once a month with coffee and ice cream. During this session, she asks the learners if there is anything difficult, bad, or positive that they want to talk about.

Another instructor asks learners to use the log book to talk about their own feelings, or sometimes to complain about something in the class. She may ask the learner if she can read the log to the class (keeping the author of the log anonymous) so that everyone can talk about the issue. If the learners write about an individual problem, she may have an individual meeting with them to talk about the issue. Neither instructor corrects grammar in the log book. The instructors say that learners tend to be very honest and open in their log books.

Creating a positive classroom culture is an ongoing challenge. One of the instructors said that the class entering the previous fall had been one of the most difficult she had ever worked with. They are finally more focused on learning now. As this instructor comments, “you make your classroom; it’s not there.”

Active involvement of learners in classroom assessment

All instructors in this programme using formative approaches place a strong emphasis on the active involvement of learners in classroom assessment, including self- and peer-assessment. Instructors have developed a variety of creative approaches to ensuring that the learners are engaged in the learning process.

In a primary level Norwegian language class we 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 of the lesson. 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.

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 among each other. The instructor guided learners when needed.

Before learners presented their story to the full class, learners received a rubric to assess their fellow learners. The instructor explained the rubric, and discussed criteria for a good performance with learners. The first group came to the front of the class, and one of the members read the story loud. 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 to learners 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 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 reveals 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.

Guidance hours

Department administrators introduced "guidance hours" (akin to "study hall" in secondary schools) to the schedule in 2000 as part of the modular approach. Initially, there was a lot of instructor resistance to the development to the need for and approach to the guidance hours. For example, there were disagreements among instructors as to exactly how active they should be during these sessions. Should the instructor merely be available for learners wanting to ask questions, or should he/she actively check in with individual learners to see if they are on track with their work? Most of these questions have been debated and worked through over time, and generally, instructors now see guidance as positive and useful.

Those instructors using formative assessment as a systematic approach to teaching and learning say that guidance hours are key to getting to know individual learners better. The mathematics instructor notes that it is easier for him 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 during guidance hour if they don't understand something.

Guidance hours also help to level the playing field for learners who are not able to complete their homework at home, because they are working, have children, or for other reasons. There is a schedule for which subjects learners are to focus on during each guidance session. There is also a great deal of peer co-operation.

Evidence

One of the language instructors has tracked outcomes for 94 learners who were in the programme between 2001 and 2004 (not all of whom have worked with the portfolio). Among these 94 learners:

- 47 have completed or are completing upper secondary school;
- 19 started upper secondary school, but didn't complete it;
- 9 didn't start upper secondary school at all because of employment, pregnancy, or for some other personal reasons;
- 15 were not possible to track;
- 4 are still at the Johannes Learning Centre.

Conditions necessary for success

The two language instructors participating in this case study have sustained and deepened their practice in formative assessment over more than ten years. They admit, however, that it is more difficult to practice formative methods when other colleagues are not engaged in the same didactic discussions. Instead, they have had to look to mentors outside of the school for support and direction. They have also participated in a variety of professional development opportunities to build their repertoire of methods.

It is encouraging that the instructor newest to using formative assessment has found it fairly easy to build formative methods into his mathematics classes, and that colleagues within the department he heads (mathematics) are also open to discussing and experimenting with formative methods. This instructor is also thinking about ways to incorporate formative assessment in the science and social science courses he teaches, but it may prove more difficult to raise interest in formative assessment among colleagues in subject areas in which he is not the department head.

The instructors interviewed for this study say that the Competence Department at Johannes Learning Centre encourages instructors to participate in professional development courses, but that there are too few discussions about teaching methods within subject departments. The time

that they do have is often too short to get into discussions of any depth (one-half to one hour). Moreover, instructors and learners who are new to formative assessment need time and experience with this approach to understand that it is effective.

The head of the Competence Department at Johannes sees the new national curriculum and the new focus within the Introduction Act on tailoring learning for individual learner needs as an opportunity to encourage wider practice of formative assessment within the department. She also sent several instructors to a nationally-sponsored professional development conference related to the new legislation and formative assessment following the site visit for this case study.

The department head at Johannes is concerned, however, that instructors do more than merely add a few new methods to their repertoires in conformance with the requirements of the curriculum and the Introduction Act. Deep changes in instructors' approaches to teaching and learning, she believes, will require that instructors be convinced of its relevance to their own work, and its effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. Instructors will also need to be more open to discussions of teaching methods among themselves, and to visiting and learning from each other – as well as from mentors outside of the Centre.

Changes in the curriculum and legislation also provide opportunities to reflect on strategic directions for the Competence Department. They will need to reflect on the department goals, strategic directions for reaching those goals, and benchmarks for tracking their progress. The department head refers to the importance of “double-loop learning” – in other words, ensuring that members of the department look at the fundamental assumptions underlying their work, the way in which they learn from experiences and adapt to identified needs of the learners, and the department itself. This would be a “formative” approach to organizational management.

Case study 3: portfolio methods at the Adult Learning Centre, Arendal

Arendal is a summer resort town on the southeast coast of Norway, with a year-round population of approximately 40 000. The primary industries include small boat manufacturing, mechanical manufacturing, electronics, as well as one of the world's largest silicon carbide refining plants. The unemployment rate of 8% is at least double the national unemployment rate of 3-4%. A large proportion of immigrant residents are unemployed.

The existing Arendal Adult Learning Centre was founded in 1992. The Centre provides all forms of education for adult basic skill learners – Norwegian language classes with a total of 230 learners (50 are in an

introductory programme for immigrant learners), a special education programme for adults with disabilities (with approximately 80 participants); and, a basic skills programme for adults working toward secondary school completion (primarily an evening programme with approximately 130 learners). There are 35 instructors at the Centre – many of them part-time – serving the approximately 450 learners. Learners may join the programme at any time of the year if there is an opening. Programme leaders say that there are few drop-outs.

The programme has served learners from over 52 different countries since its founding. In our visit, we met learners from countries such as Burma, Congo, Zambia, Jamaica, Ukraine, Chechnya, Macedonia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria. Learners in the programme range from 23 to 55 years of age. Course sizes range from approximately 11 to 20 learners.

The Centre offers the three tracks of Norwegian and social studies as set out in the national curriculum and Introduction Act. The Centre also offers work experiences and cultural participation. Many of the learners are preparing to continue studies in upper secondary level school, and to earn their school leaving certificates.

The Centre has no explicit mission statement, but in separate interviews the programme leader and instructors agreed that the goal of the Centre is to ensure that teaching is of high quality and meets the needs of the learners. The larger goal, they agree, is to help the learners to function independently in Norwegian society, and to take advantage of opportunities for further education, in work and in social life.

Development of the “I Can” portfolio

In 2002, the Arendal Adult Learning Centre was awarded a European Union Grundtvig grant¹⁰ to develop a portfolio for learning Norwegian language. It is based 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. The European Language Portfolio was introduced across Europe in the European Year of Languages (2001) and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

¹⁰ The Grundtvig programme is one out of four programmes in the EU’s Socrates programmes. The Socrates programme is a team work programme for all education in Europe with 31 countries involved.

The portfolio includes a grid listing criteria for language competences as accepted throughout Europe, a detailed language biography describing the passport owner's experiences in different languages, a checklist for competences, and a dossier with examples of personal work and official documents to illustrate competences. It is intended to reflect both language learning and cultural experiences, whether gained at or outside of school and can be updated regularly. The hope is that it will serve as a complement to regular educational certificates.¹¹

A small team of instructors at the Arendal Adult Learning Centre worked with partners in several other European countries – including Germany, the Czech Republic, Finland and Spain – as they developed the Norwegian version of the portfolio. The Norwegian portfolio is based most closely on a Dutch model, but has been adapted to reflect Norwegian circumstances. It includes checklists for competences needed for a variety of everyday situations (for example, finding housing, looking for a job, and so on). The Norwegian model also draws upon an Irish model, known as Milestone, which provides checklists for the progressive development of competencies necessary for English-language fluency. The team at Arendal Adult Learning Centre tested the portfolio across four reference schools (based in Kistiansand, Haugesund, Trondheim, and Sagelva).

While the language passport will be helpful in communicating competences in different languages with potential employers, it also includes a self-assessment grid, which is intended to serve as a tool for learning and to track the learner's progress. First, it provides learners with a clear idea as to what they need to focus on in their language learning in order to meet their goals – from such basic skills as finding an apartment to more ambitious goals for further education, work, and parenting. The competencies are described in very specific and detailed ways. For example, "I can understand short and simple instructions" [*e.g.*, related to a specific situation, such as making an appointment with the doctor].

The final version of the portfolio, which is called the "I Can Portfolio" has recently passed the quality control process in the European Union and should be validated by the Council of Europe. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Vox will make the portfolio available for use in Norwegian language programmes throughout the country. Its use will be voluntary. However, officials acknowledge that sometimes it is difficult to move from providing information about new tools to actual implementation.

¹¹ Please see also Norwegian Background Report, www.oecd.org/edu/whatworks

Putting the portfolio into practice

Although only a small team of three instructors at Arendal Adult Learning Centre were closely involved with the Grundtvig project, 10 additional instructors tested it in their classrooms. In addition, two instructors from reference schools also tested different portions of the portfolio. Importantly, these instructors have started to think about and use the terms “formative assessment” and “self assessment” – something they did not do systematically prior to starting their work with the portfolio. They have also focused on how best to give learners positive feedback.

Those learners using the portfolio, instructors comment, are also more aware of the fact that there are different levels and types of skills in Norwegian than they had been in the past. For all learners, it takes time to take responsibility for their own learning and to actively use the portfolio as a tool for prioritizing where they will spend their time and effort. Each of the checklists is intended to develop practical skills for everyday use so learners may put them into practice right away.

Once learners get used to the portfolio approach, they start to look back at what they have already learnt. They are able to develop a feeling of accomplishment and to build confidence in their ability to take on the challenge of learning Norwegian and coping in a new society, and to look forward to what they still need to do (to move up to a higher level course, and to meet personal goals). They can also be more systematic and organized about how they approach these goals, too, as the progression of learning is clearly laid out for them.

Instructors emphasise that the portfolio is not to be used as a text book. The instructors find that the portfolio is more effective with learners in Tracks 2 and 3. That is not to say that it should not be used in Track 1; but instructors do not expect that learners will start to use the checklists to guide their own learning without some coaching from instructors. Arendal VO is now involved in a project, the aim of which is to develop a portfolio for people with little or no school experience (Track 1).

Instructors interviewed for this case study say they have had mixed results in using the portfolio as a way to tailor their teaching. Sometimes, for example, the learners throw the worksheets from the portfolio away, so it is difficult to track their progression and to pinpoint areas for further work without the record. Instructors also note that they need to discipline themselves to follow up on the portfolio in class (it is not always the focus of the lesson), and to be more firm about what they expect from learners (for example, on completing assignments and keeping up with classwork). One of the tasks for further development of the portfolio, therefore, will be to develop a more systematic approach to its use.

Classroom observations across the three course levels revealed a clear progression of learning and consistent focus on assessment of competences. There was an impressive coherence in instructional approaches across the three levels.

A focus on meeting learning standards and understanding criteria

Across courses observed in Norwegian levels learners were focused on specific learning goals and the development of competences. In the basic Norwegian class (Track 1) observed, the learners were preparing for a final examination on level A2 in Norwegian (Norskprøve 2). The learners in this class generally have little to no prior schooling (although one learner had an advanced degree in his home country, but nevertheless preferred to stay in this basic course).

At the beginning of the lesson, the instructor and learners read criteria for reading skills together (the criteria are outlined in the portfolio). The instructor then provided learners with a set of tasks related to the competences being developed, and materials for practice. These included a job-notice and an apartment vacancy notice. The instructor had developed specific questions, starting with fairly basic and straightforward questions and then moving to an increasing level of difficulty, in order to test comprehension. Learners were asked to guess how many of the 31 questions included they would answer correctly.

Learners in the second group observed, a Track 2 class, were new to Norwegian language, but they generally have had some previous education in their home countries. At the beginning of the lesson, the instructor told learners that they should identify those tasks which they “can do” and those which they “must practice”. The exercises were focused on telling time (which is fairly complex in Norwegian) and learning names for colours and members of the family.

In the Norwegian Track 2+ class, the instructor similarly started the class by noting that learners had 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. Materials included an intermediate level textbook in Norwegian, an exercise book, and an assessment worksheet for self-assessment. The instructor later asked learners to identify ways in which they could assess their reading comprehension without the help of a worksheet. She asked learners questions such as: “How can you test yourself to see if you understand? How can you work afterwards? How can you check if you understand new words?” The instructor solicited ideas from the learners. They suggested that they could co-operate with other learners, develop their own questions, and so on.

Instructors note that the Learning Centre is careful to place learners according to language background (that is, western vs. non-western) and years of schooling, as outlined in national curriculum guidelines. There is nevertheless a considerable mix of ability levels. Sometimes, learners with higher education backgrounds progress at a slower rate than their peers with little to no education. The instructors say that this poses real challenges.

They do adjust approaches to meet the varied needs of learners – as observed in classroom interactions, and according to feedback from the learners. Instructors say that they find it more difficult to individualise oral training; it is much easier, however, to respond to each learner individually in their written work.

Building relationships with learners

The instructors have formal conversations with pupils twice a year, usually focusing on something in their portfolio (described below). One instructor notes that she often asks learners to share their autobiography when they start in a course as a way to introduce themselves, and build their confidence in basic language skills. The autobiography also helps to reveal the experiences and skills which may be helpful in learning. There are also regular informal conversations during classtime, in “Guidance”.

All learners are required, by law, to develop an individual plan in co-operation with the learning centre. The individual plan should specify learning goals. For learners who are part of the Introduction programme the individual plan should include elements such as work practice, health care and other relevant areas, in addition to goals for Norwegian language learning. Instructors and learners track progress toward goals together. The version used at Arendal was developed by two of the instructors at Arendal VO and two workers at the refugee office in the municipality.

Instructor scaffolding, peer and self-assessment

Each of the instructors also focused on scaffolding learning, and encouraging learners to work as independently as possible (either individually or in pairs) on specific learning tasks. In Norwegian Track 1, for example, the instructor gave learners the option to work independently or with a classmate as they completed the tasks and answered questions. The majority preferred to work alone. The instructor walked around the classroom and learners asked questions. The instructor did not answer the questions right away, but encouraged learners to cooperate, and to use the dictionary to find the answers. At times, the instructor explained a word that many in the group appeared to be finding difficult to the whole class.

Later, when the instructor wanted learners to practice their skills for reading aloud, she asked the learners to work in pairs to practise speaking and to check their answers with each other. The class then reviewed the exercises together. The instructor explained words, corrected pronunciation, and asked follow-up questions. At the end of the exercise, the learners checked how many answers they had gotten correct as compared to how many they had predicted. In this way, they were able to get an idea of the accuracy of their own assessment of their level.

In Norwegian Track 2, the instructor asked learners to work together in groups of three (there were twelve learners in this class). The learners cooperated quite actively, working on speaking and reading tasks. When the instructor was asked to help, she used examples from the classroom, and tried to give learners only as much information as they needed before they could get the answers on their own. Following completion of these tasks, learners chose what they would work on – for example, focusing on their self-identified “must-do’s”, reading a textbook, or working on the computer.

The more advanced learners in Norwegian Track 2+ also worked in pairs to answer questions. As in Track 1, the learners were asked to estimate what percentage of questions they would answer correctly, and then to compare that estimate with their actual performance. The instructor guided the learners, giving more attention to those who needed it. Those who had answered 70% of the questions correctly could assess themselves as competent in this task.

Time and learning

Instructors say that they would like to have more time to work with some of the learners. Those who are in Track 1 need more time to develop strong basic skills. The majority of learners in this track are functionally illiterate when they join the programme. Instructors would also like to offer more language training for some of the learners at the B2 level. (Currently learners must pay to participate at this level, consequently their participation is limited.) At the same time, instructors feel that full-time language programmes are problematic: learners become too tired at some point and are unable to absorb any more.

Study workshop

Every week there is a study workshop for learners at all levels. This is an important time to help learners focus on developing strategies for learning. These may range from basic strategies, such as how to best organise materials and create time for study, to helping learners develop

systems to make their learning more efficient, or reinforce ways in which learners can take advantage of the environment around them in order to advance in Norwegian. Learners who have children at home, work responsibilities and so on may find it difficult to do homework, so the study workshop helps them set aside some quiet time to work independently, as well.

In the study workshop, learners are free to choose what they will work on and how they will reinforce their learning. Learners will often draw upon the portfolio and the week plan provided by instructors to decide where they should focus their attention during the study workshop.

Work experience

Learners in the Introduction programme are required to participate in work experience one day each week. Usually, the Centre helps find positions for learners in businesses in the local community. Learners are able to use their Norwegian skills in a work setting and to build up their curriculum vitae for the local job market. This may include working as a classroom assistant, with older people, in a shoe shop, in a beauty shop, or in a textile shop. The work experiences tend to be most successful when the learner is working in an area related to what he or she wants to do.

The more advanced learners write a journal about what they have done during their work experiences, and any new things they have learnt, such as vocabulary, or tasks. For jobs that tend to be very repetitive from week to week, the instructor may suggest new tasks to stretch their Norwegian practice. For example, one learner who was working as a teaching assistant in a kindergarten class wrote a children's book in Norwegian.

Evidence

It is too early to provide any solid evidence of improved outcomes for learners with the new "I Can Portfolio". Instructors do say that they are more aware of learners' levels of competence, as well as the need to tailor teaching to meet their learning needs. Instructors say 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.

These are encouraging indicators of success. More empirical evidence on the impact of specific approaches and techniques would help instructors to learn more about what's working and where improvements might be made.

Conditions necessary for success

Although only a small core group of instructors at the Arendal Adult Learning Centre were involved in the Grundtvig project to develop and pilot the “I Can Portfolio”, nearly one-half of the instructors in the Introduction programme are now using the materials. The fact that use of the portfolio has spread so broadly throughout the school attests to the importance of word-of-mouth and the appeal of these easy-to-use materials. However, instructors say that they do not talk about teaching and learning during the work week, and feel that their use of the portfolio would benefit from professional discussions. There is a widespread desire to create the time and space to do this.

The programme leader and instructors have engaged in some initial self-assessment on implementation of the portfolio, and are planning to bring in outside experts to evaluate their progress. They will be evaluating the implementation of the portfolio, the impact of the portfolio on learning, and on integration. They will be working more systematically toward the main goals and on following results.

Instructors and the programme leader do note that the curriculum in Norwegian language and social studies places more emphasis on assessment, on establishing and meeting goals for learning, and the importance of giving feedback. It does not provide detailed guidance, however, so instructors would like to have more opportunities to discuss how to implement such methods most effectively. They also need to work together to better define some of the descriptions of competencies in the new curriculum – for example, clarifying terms such as “some knowledge” or “able to write a text about...”. As they note, they are following the law, but at the same time, the law needs to be interpreted. Some instructors suggest that it may be helpful to meet in small groups to focus on specific subjects such as assessment, as the core group involved in the portfolio project did throughout the process of its development.

Instructors at the Arendal Adult Learning Centre agree that, in general, they have a lot of support to develop their teaching. This is in line with what

the programme leader expresses as one of her most important goals – that is, to provide instructors with many opportunities to get involved in different projects (such as the Grundtvig project) and to learn. Under her leadership, instructors at the school have also been involved in a project on social inclusion (with the Folk Culture Association), and a project on the use of computers in teaching.

The programme leader is a former instructor and upper secondary school head. She has been active in sports her whole life, and attributes her concern with motivating instructors to do more and to do well to her sports background. She also spends a great deal of time on raising the profile and visibility of the Centre. She sits on the municipal council with other municipal leaders, and is part of a group of strategic leaders in the municipality. In order to improve the integration of their immigrant learners, she is in regular contact with IMDI (the Directorate for Integration and Diversity, Integrerings- og Mangfoldsdirektoratet), local trade and industry and voluntary organisations.

The Centre will move to a new building within the next few years, so the programme leader has been actively involved in plans for the building. She believes that the new building will be very important to raising the status of learners. The current facilities, she feels, are marginal and therefore the learners feel marginal. The new building will be approximately 30 000 square meters. The Learning Centre will share the space with other organisations, although final decisions regarding which organisations have not been made.

The programme leader's agenda for the next few years focuses on the new building, deepening formative assessment practices through the portfolio, developing further strategies to improve the quality of learning, developing more opportunities for learner work practice in the community, and strengthening ties with local agencies also serving refugees, such as the Red Cross.

Opportunities and challenges

The three cases above have examined the use of formative assessment to improve teaching and learning for adults in language, literacy and numeracy education. These cases point to positive results for learners.

In recent years, Vox and the Directorate of Education and Training have been successful at providing more opportunities for instructors and programme leaders to network at national meetings and to share ideas and best practices, including formative assessment. But policy officials also

acknowledge that information sharing has rarely led to adoption in other programmes.

The national curricula developed for various adult LLN programmes provide another potential means for influencing not only what is taught, but also how it is taught. The curriculum for Norwegian language and social studies, for example, stresses the importance of adjusting teaching to meet the needs of different learners – which is at the heart of formative assessment. However instructors say that there is little direction on how to do this. Instructors in various adult LLN programmes will need access to more tools and guidelines and to professional development if they are to integrate formative assessment into their regular practice.

Indeed, the country background report developed for this study¹² points to the importance of curriculum in influencing teaching practices. The report notes that the guidelines for the previous curriculum for primary and lower secondary education (L97), as well as for adult education, emphasised teaching methods that relied on the process of development, with feedback as an important component. It argues that instructors in Norway have, therefore, likely been using teaching methods and approaches to assessment that resemble the key elements of formative assessment without discussing it or being consciously aware of it.

Yet instructors are much more likely to be deliberate and systematic, and to deepen their practice of formative assessment when they are conscious of what they are doing and why, and to pay attention to the impact it is having on teaching and learning. A more explicit focus on formative assessment for adult foundation skill learners would help to raise its profile, and to engage instructors more actively in debate on improving the quality of teaching and learning through formative assessment.

Since 2005, the Directorate for Education and Training has been developing a competency-based curriculum for compulsory level education (the new Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion). There has also been increased focus on formative assessment (as well as summative assessment) in compulsory education. These developments in the compulsory sector are important for at least three reasons. First, the emphasis on competencies in both compulsory and adult education creates a kind of seamless approach to lifelong learning. All learners – no matter what their age – are working toward well-defined goals. When balanced with effective formative assessment, there is also attention to helping learners develop skills for “learning-to-learn”. Second, instructors in adult programmes in Norway

¹² See www.oecd.org/edu/whatworks

must have training in general or subject-specific teacher education.¹³ Some instructors teach both younger learners and adults and thus have a wide view on learning across the lifespan. Third, the Directorate for Education and Training develops curriculum for compulsory level education which is also used in the adult sector for adults who are taking primary and secondary school. Curriculum developers are bound to be influenced by developments in one or the other sector. There are thus many opportunities for cross-fertilization, although there is some way to go before they are fully realised.

Finally, it is important to pay attention to developing and adapting strategies for adult basic education to ensure that they are effective. The Norwegian government has made significant public investments in adult basic education since the introduction of the Competence Reform, but until recently there has been little attention to gathering information on programme outcomes. In other words, the government itself has lacked the ability to be “formative” in its efforts to track progress and shape systemic strategies. Recent policy priorities for better documentation of programme outcomes, and development of more effective evaluation of adult competences will help to address these gaps. As instructors are more likely to take on new practices they believe will be effective, a stronger evidence-base regarding “what works” in teaching and assessment will also help to encourage wider take-up.

References

- OECD and Statistics Canada (2006), *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2007), *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, OECD, Paris.

¹³ It should be noted that the average age and tenure of instructors is relatively high, so they have not necessarily been exposed to perspectives related to teaching Norwegian as a second language.