

Please cite this paper as:

Sliwka, A. and L. Tett (2008), "Case Study: Scotland", in *Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults: Improving Foundation Skills*, OECD Publishing.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172212187274>



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

Case Study: Scotland

Anne Sliwka and Lynn Tett

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Please cite this paper as:

Sliwka, A. and L. Tett (2008), “Case Study: Scotland”,
in *Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults:
Improving Foundation Skills*, OECD Publishing.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172212187274>

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT FOR ADULTS IMPROVING FOUNDATION SKILLS

Case Study: Scotland
Anne Sliwka and Lynn Tett

Table of Contents

Nature and scale of the challenge.....	5
Defining “basic skills” in Scotland.....	7
Assessment and accreditation systems for adults.....	9
Formative assessment	10
Case Study 1: Work-based Programmes: Haven Company/Inverness.....	12
Background	12
The Company: Haven Products Ltd. in Inverness.....	13
The WEA Literacy and Numeracy Programme at Haven	14
Initial assessment	14
The organisation of learning	15
Formative assessment embedded in the learning process	17
Professional development through networking.....	18
Case Study 2: Further Education College Programme: Jewel and Esk Valley College.....	19
Background	19
The College: Jewel and Esk Valley in Edinburgh.....	20
The adult returnees’ course	20
Diagnostic assessment and feedback.....	21
Formative and summative assessment	22
Case Study 3: Community-based Programmes: Buddies for Learning	25
Background	25
The volunteers - recruitment and motivation	27
A collaborative setting for learning.....	27
Formative assessment through individual learning plans.....	28
The learners' forum	29
Learning sessions	30
Negotiated learning	31
Conclusion: embedding formative assessment in the curriculum.....	31
References	34

Scotland's Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) programme, initiated in 2001, is the responsibility of two Ministers – the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Communities. The Scottish Executive's Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (ETLLD) advises Ministers on policy for the ALN strategy and support for the ALN Partnerships is provided through the Learning Connections (LC) Adult Literacies Team. Lifelong learning for all is seen as an important approach to community regeneration and social inclusion.

The Scottish ALN strategy places a strong emphasis on learner self-determination. Learning is to be relevant to the individual's lives as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners. Learner goals are set out in individual learning plans, and are balanced with learning goals set out in the ALN Curriculum Framework. Formative assessment approaches are used to track learner progress toward goals set out in the individual learning plan.

The case study also describes the ALN approach to summative assessment and qualifications. There are no end "tests" of either formal or informal learning in the ALN programme. Rather, demonstration of the achievement of these learning outcomes can be done in a range of settings and contexts and, when all the outcomes are achieved, lead to a specific qualification. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework also sets out a clear route for progression across all qualification levels that covered both "vocational" and "academic" qualifications.

The three programmes featured in this case study show how the ALN principles and approaches to formative assessment are being put into practice in different settings. The first programme, Haven Products, Ltd., is set in a workplace in a rural area near Inverness. The second programme, Jewel and Esk Valley College, is in a further education college in Edinburgh, Scotland's capital. The third programme, Buddies for Learning, is in a community-based setting in a disadvantaged housing area on the outskirts of Renfrewshire, a densely populated area in central Scotland. As the case study authors describe, all the providers face somewhat different challenges in their practice.

Nature and scale of the challenge

In Scotland, 800 000 adults (23% of the adult population) are estimated to have low literacy and numeracy skills according to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), carried out in 1996. This figure places Scotland, along with England, Ireland and the USA, behind European neighbours like Sweden, (7%), the Netherlands (10%) and Germany (12%). An analysis of

the Scottish cohort of IALS in 2001 identified three factors associated with low literacy and numeracy skills:

- Having left education at age 16 or earlier, (roughly 10% of the Scottish population will have left education at this age).
- Being on a low income.
- Being in a manual social class group.

Another survey (Scottish Executive, 2001) found that a third of adults who live in socially disadvantaged areas have low literacy and numeracy skills and they are:

- Six times more likely to be unemployed.
- More likely to suffer ill health.
- Less likely to be able to support their children's learning.
- Less likely to feel able to contribute to community life.

As a result of this research, provision is expected to focus on a number of priority groups:

- People with limited initial education, particularly young adults.
- Unemployed people and workers facing redundancy.
- People with English as a second or additional language.
- People who live in disadvantaged areas.
- Workers in low-skilled jobs.
- People on low incomes.
- People with health problems and disabilities.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) is the responsibility of two Ministers – the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Communities. The Scottish Executive's Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (ETLLD) advises Ministers on policy for the ALN strategy and support for the ALN Partnerships is provided through the Learning Connections (LC) Adult Literacies Team. LC is part of the Community Regeneration division of Communities Scotland, which is a Scottish Executive Development Department Agency. This separation is very helpful because it means that ALN is seen both as part of lifelong learning and as an important aspect of regeneration of communities. The ALN strategy is a key aspect of the commitment to closing the

opportunity gap in education, employment and health as part of the social justice strategy. Ministers are committed to not leaving people behind and thus the Development Department is the natural Ministry to ensure that social inclusion is the driving force behind the implementation of the ALN strategy.

Funding for provision is channelled from the Scottish Executive through the Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) provided to Local Authorities on a regional basis. The GAE is the figure that the Executive uses as an estimate for the cost of providing a particular service. It is used as the basis for calculating the amount of Revenue Support Grant that the Executive provides to Local Authorities. Funding is then routed from local authorities to Community Learning Strategy Partnerships, and from them to Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Partnerships who decide and demonstrate collectively how the resources can be used most effectively to meet local need. Specific examples of courses that have been funded through these Partnerships are provided in the case studies, which show some of the range of provision in Scotland.

Since 2001 over 100 000 adults have been helped and by 2008, more than £66 million will have been invested at a local level to tackle low levels of literacy and numeracy. This is the first significant investment in ALN provision in over 25 years and the establishment of Learning Connections in 2003 to support the development of provision created the first national support organisation since the mid-1980s.

Defining “basic skills” in Scotland

Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) is the term used in Scotland rather than ‘basic skills’. The key Scottish Executive policy paper, *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland*, (2001) defined ALN as ‘the ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners’ (Scottish Executive 2001: 7). ‘Basic skills’ was thought to imply a concern only with the technical skills of decoding and the manipulation of letters, words and figures and an emphasis on externally set needs for reading, writing and numeracy that had strong links to work-related skills. Instead the focus is on a *social practices* account that sees literacy and numeracy practices as being located within social, emotional and linguistic contexts where particular practices drive the routines, skills, and understandings of people. These practices are organized within specific contexts and include the feelings and values that people have about these activities (Scottish Executive/Learning Connections 2005: 3). For example, someone reading the main news story in a newspaper is not just decoding

the words but also using knowledge of the conventions of newspaper writing and of the particular political and philosophical orientation of the paper and so paying attention to both the culture and context. Similarly, adults in a supermarket are not just using number skills when making price comparisons, but also taking into account their prior experience with brands, family likes and dislikes and perhaps ethical concerns (e.g. organic, Fair Trade, not made with child labour).

The social practices approach is generally thought to be an effective approach to teaching and learning because purposeful learning builds on learners' prior knowledge and experience to shape and construct new knowledge rather than seeing the learner as an empty vessel to be filled up. Learning is seen as a social activity embedded in particular cultures and contexts where the learner's real life and everyday practices provide the teaching and learning resources rather than a pre-set curriculum. The different contexts for learning of family life, private life, working life and community life provide the motivation for learning and an important role for the tutor is to help to transfer learning from one context to another so that the underlying principles, patterns and relationships are applied in a variety of contexts. It follows from this that assessment of progress is based on distance travelled by each individual because it is based on the learner's own goals. The results of learning that matter most are applications of knowledge, skills and understanding in the real life situations of private, family, community and working life and studies of adult learner persistence (e.g. Comings *et al.*, 1999) show that learners are more likely to achieve in an environment that they see as closely related to their life goals.

This Scottish approach to adult literacy and numeracy learning, in whatever context it is delivered, is promoted through the *Curriculum Framework for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* (Scottish Executive/Learning Connections, 2005) that aims to show how this can be done with the learner at the centre of the process. The framework has been constructed in two parts. The first part summarises some of the main findings from research in order to identify the key principles of learning, teaching and assessment that should underpin the adult literacy and numeracy curriculum. The reason for this is that practitioners who understand what they are doing, and why, can be more effective. The second part provides a very practical toolkit supporting practitioners in developing learning programmes that implement the key principles. Case studies of current adult ALN practice provide practical examples for guidance. Together, these parts explain the processes undertaken by learners and tutors to identify, plan, carry out and review learning programmes for individual learners.

Assessment and accreditation systems for adults

Formal accreditation for all qualifications is provided through the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), both in school and post school. ALN is accredited through the five Core Skills qualifications in ‘Communication’, ‘Numeracy’, ‘Using Information Technology’, ‘Working with Others’ and ‘Problem Solving’. How these are used in practice is explained through the Jewel and Esk Valley case study. Qualifications enable people to progress from school to Further and Higher Education or to obtain employment. People without qualifications are more likely to be unemployed and living in poverty so qualifications provide access to better life chances.

There is an overarching Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) that places qualifications and learning programmes within a national framework based on the levels of the outcomes of learning and the volume of these outcomes. The reason for developing this integrated framework was to provide a clear route across all qualification levels that covered both ‘vocational’ and ‘academic’ qualifications. There are 12 levels ranging from access to learning (1) to doctorates (12) and increases in level of demand relate to factors such as complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding and the independence, range and sophistication of application. Core Skills are at level 2 and an example of a learning outcome at this level would be that a person can ‘use familiar words and graphic clues to identify the main points of a piece of writing and to find information and meaning’ (e.g. find times of departure and arrival from a bus timetable, TV guides). SCQF credit points are used to quantify the outcomes of learning and are based on the amount of time an ‘average’ learner at a specified level might expect to take to achieve the outcomes (www.scqf.org.uk). In the Core Skills Units an average learner is expected to have 40 hours of tuition.

There are no end ‘tests’ of either formal or informal learning, rather good practice is seen as building on learners’ existing strengths and assessment is based on them demonstrating their competence in achieving the specific learning outcomes. Demonstration of the achievement of these learning outcomes can be done in a range of settings and contexts and, when all the outcomes (usually four) are achieved, lead to a specific qualification. The achievement of all four learning outcomes can be difficult for some learners. For example, many literacy learners could demonstrate their ability to ‘speak so others can understand’ but may not be able to ‘read with understanding’, meaning they are not able to achieve all four outcomes of the Communications Core Skill. To address this issue, SQA are developing a system that will offer accreditation of individual learning outcomes that

can be recorded so that learners can move on when they are ready to take all the outcomes and then gain the qualification.

Many providers can offer access to accredited learning options through their ALN partnership but progression to accreditation is not a necessary measure of success. There should be no barriers to taking qualifications other than learner choice and many learners will gain confidence through the ALN programme that would encourage them to consider taking a qualification that they would not have considered when starting out. Often learners move from non-accredited provision in a community setting to accredited provision in a Further Education College.

Formative assessment

Assessment in ALN is defined as a process that helps learners to identify their current skills and knowledge, to plan their future learning and to know how well they are doing in achieving their own learning needs and goals. It identifies, describes and demonstrates evidence of a person's current knowledge and skills and can also be used to recognise and record learners' achievements and to assist in identifying how teaching and learning processes can be improved. Formative assessment involves supporting and managing the process of learning and teaching through enabling learners and tutors to monitor their learning progress based on the learner's identified goals and outcomes. Having set their own learning goals, learners regularly review their own progress and this is based on the distance travelled by each individual towards these goals.

Most learning is recorded in individual learning plans that are built and maintained with the ideal of maximum learner control. The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Negotiated between tutor and learner, this seeks to identify learning goals, to record and recognise progress towards them, and to reflect on the learning to develop new goals. The ILP enables learners and tutors to know how learning is progressing towards the goals identified at the beginning of the programme and is therefore a key part of the formative assessment strategy. In the regular review of the learning goals, usually carried out every 6 weeks, tutors and learners discuss how learning is going in relation to:

- The growth in skills, knowledge and understanding.
- How easily new skills and knowledge can be applied without reference to the tutor.
- How well they can be transferred to new situations in real life outside 'the classroom'.

For example, a learner may have the overall goal of being able to fill in a job sheet accurately at work, which would involve the skills of spelling and writing accurately, the knowledge of which bits of information go in which boxes, the understanding of how forms are used to generate customers' bills. It would involve the learner in filling out the job sheet on his own at home and then gradually filling it in more quickly and finally doing it effectively at his workplace. Once this goal has been achieved, then the learner can identify a further goal or decide that he has learnt enough for now and leave the programme.

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

One of the principles that underpin the Scottish approach to ALN learning is 'promoting self-determination' – defined as 'learners developing confidence by reflecting on and assessing their own progress' (Learning Connections/Scottish Executive, 2005: 3). This presents a challenge to ALN tutors in Scotland regarding evidencing progress, as there is no pre-set curriculum to follow and local partnerships are free to tailor educational responses to suit local need, demand and circumstances. There is no doubt that enabling provision to respond to learners places heavy demands on tutors. They need to be able to call on a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding: teaching skills sufficiently robust to enable them to tailor learning programmes to individual needs and preferences, the skills of engagement associated with Community Learning and Development work, as well as principles of guidance.

Learner achievement of qualifications is not a measure of accountability in ALN. Rather learner progress is measured by the changes that occur in relation to their lives as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners. Formative assessment is thus at the heart of teaching and learning in Scotland. It enables learners to see the connections between what they are

learning and the real life applications of that learning. The activities for formative assessment are closely integrated with teaching and learning activities and the results of such assessments are used to assist learning.

In the following sections, we present three case studies that were chosen because they demonstrated good practice in formative assessment and so that they would illuminate its implementation in three different types of settings and in different geographical contexts. The first one is set in a workplace in a rural area, the second in a further education college in the Capital city and the third in a community-based setting in a disadvantaged housing area on the outskirts of a large town in a densely populated area of central Scotland. All the providers face somewhat different challenges in their practice so the case studies illustrate innovative approaches to formative assessment that take account of their individual contexts.

Case Study 1: Work-based Programmes: Haven Company/Inverness

Background

Making time and providing a place for learning in the workplace and during working hours has been an important way of enabling employees to participate who would not normally think of engaging in ALN tuition. Employers have been encouraged to make such provision for their employees through a national initiative promoted through Learning Connections. This has taken the form of a media campaign, “The Big Plus for Business”, which was designed to encourage businesses to take part through providing funding for tuition and explaining how beneficial a better-educated workforce would be to employees’ productivity and retention. The tuition is provided through a number of organisations, but the main organisation delivering work-based education is the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA). This is a national, democratic, voluntary organisation that seeks to encourage access to education throughout life, especially for those adults who have experienced barriers to learning as a result of economic circumstances, social isolation, limited confidence, low self esteem or lack of educational opportunity. The WEA is a member of the ALN Partnerships in nearly every area of Scotland.

As a national provider the WEA was well placed to develop provision for both national and local employers through its collaboration with the local Partnerships. Whilst the Big Plus campaign was quite effective nationally, with a range of employers agreeing to participate, very few companies had actually put themselves forward in the case study area – the North of Scotland, known as the Highlands and Islands. Instead the WEA staff had

approached a number of employers directly in order to get them to participate in work-based training. The Haven Company was one of several that agreed to take part after the advantages to the company and their employees had been explained and an appropriate training package had been negotiated. Attending work-based programmes is sometimes difficult for employees as they may feel their employers will be critical of their lack of skills but it is clearly not a problem in a company like Haven.

The Company: Haven Products Ltd. in Inverness

Initially founded in 1947 to provide employment for disabled WWII veterans Haven is now a company that tries to provide meaningful employment for individuals with a range of different disabilities such as autism, arthritis and epilepsy. Currently, Haven employs 24 individuals, four of whom do not have a disability. The company does not work for profit, receives government funding towards each individual working at Haven and can apply for additional government grants to buy equipment. Any profit made at Haven is required to go back into the business. Its employees have a 21-hour work week and earn just above the Scottish national minimum wage.

Haven's manager is in charge of finding jobs for the individuals working at Haven. Currently Haven offers a range of services, among those photocopying, packaging, laminating and assembling small parts such as in hazard switches for cars. Elizabeth, Haven's general manager, describes it as challenging to find work for the employers as this type of unskilled work can increasingly be done by machines at lower costs. Haven is about to lose the assembly work because for this labour-intensive kind of work the employees are competing with machines in not only price but also time. Some companies moving into Inverness, a city that has attracted several new companies in recent years, would rather donate money to Haven, "but we don't want a cheque, we want employment", the general manager points out.

Haven's employees are normally recruited through the Disability Employment Advisers at the local Job Centres. Haven does see itself as a sheltered work environment. If people are asked to move to a new job for the same salary they tend to decide to stay at the company because it is seen as a friendly working environment. Haven's philosophy has always been to give everybody a level of ownership over what they are doing. That has obviously resulted in a high level of responsibility among the employees. Elizabeth, who has previously worked in business, calls Haven the "only place I've ever worked at where people come 15 minutes before their work starts".

The WEA Literacy and Numeracy Programme at Haven

The decision to start a work-based literacy and numeracy programme at Haven was made in August 2005. An administrator from the Highland Council had made Haven's manager aware of the training opportunities funded by the WEA. According to the manager, most of the disabled persons working at Haven consider learning at their workplace as less threatening than having to go into a formal educational setting. Several of the employees had rather negative school experiences and are afraid of having to undergo formal certification.

In August 2005 a room was partitioned off the company's main workshop area. With used office furniture donated to Haven the company was able to set up a "learning centre" there. The WEA provided seven laptops which are all networked with Internet access and connected to a data projector. Visual aids are seen as important to get the learners' attention. Each student was also given a starter pack containing a calculator, highlighter pens, rulers and notebooks that were part of the Big Plus Campaign.

Learning takes place during work within the 21 hours of work time. Every employee at Haven can take part in the courses independent of his or her actual ability level. There are currently three weekly courses: A communication class that meets for three-hours for 16 weeks and two ICT courses with a focus on literacy and numeracy that meet for 2 hours per week for 10 weeks. Fifteen out of the 24 employees participate in these programmes, thirteen of whom had recently completed a 10 week introductory computing course.

Initial assessment

Before the courses started, the programme co-ordinator of the WEA interviewed every employee interested in taking the course to get an idea of the person's actual level in literacy, numeracy and ICT. The initial assessment also consisted of gathering background data on each one of the students, such as the neighbourhood they live in, and their history of schooling. In this informal interview context students were then asked to assess themselves with regards to spoken communications skills, literacy, numeracy and IT skills. The programme coordinator and tutors approve of the limited amount of paper work involved in the initial assessment. It is perceived that formal testing would cause too much emotional stress for a group of learners with mostly negative school experiences and might deter people from learning. This initial assessment is designed to enable both the learner and the tutor to identify what they already know and what areas of

learning they want to focus on. It is only when the work begins that the ILP can be drawn up.

At the beginning of each course students are asked what their overall goal is and what they want to learn in order to achieve it. Andrew, for example, who works in packaging for the local hospital, has been using spreadsheets in his work and now wants to learn how to generate spreadsheets himself on the computer. The individual learning goals that each student sets for him/herself are recorded in the ILP. Throughout the ten-week-course, each student is asked whether they feel that they have achieved these goals and if they want to add more or amend the ones they first set. This enables students to be in control of their learning and change their goals if they find that they can do less or more than they originally planned.

Teresa, one of three tutors points out, “we’ve had people that have had one specific barrier that kept them from learning, and once they have defined and overcome that there is nothing to stop them”. Andrew, for example, had been diagnosed with epilepsy as a pupil and was told not to use computers because a flickering computer screen might trigger an epileptic fit. Andrew had always thought that he would never be able to work with computers until the programme coordinator at Haven made him aware that the newer LCD monitors would not have the flickering that can trigger epileptic fits.

The organisation of learning

The course programmes comprised learning a whole range of different skills such as writing a letter, spellchecking it, taking photos with a digital camera, copying and pasting photos into a word-file, attaching files to an e-mail, sending e-mail, designing greeting cards and printing. People are working towards individual goals although there are common elements in understanding how to use the basic functions of a computer. Each session of the course involves working together on a common goal such as sending an email or word processing a simple letter but the tasks are also designed to meet each person’s own goals. For example, as part of the course students went on a local excursion and subsequently wrote directions on how to get from Haven to the local Marks & Spencer supermarket in Inverness. Another learning task was using a computer to write a simple recipe on how to prepare tea. Together all learners developed a group ethos (“Everyone is welcome”, “Be patient and help each other” “Be supportive and respect each other”), typed it up on the computer and designed it using large colourful fonts.

As the ten-week-course is about to end the four students, two men and two women of different ages, work on projects they have, with the help of their tutor, chosen individually. A young female learner suffering from autism, Vicky, is designing an Easter greeting card on the computer. An older man with severe arthritis has taken a digital photograph of his cat that he inserts into a letter to a friend in which he talks about his cat and its character. A middle-aged woman has written a letter to a friend and is now pasting a photograph into the letter, before she mails it off. At the end of the two-hour final session of the course students are to send their work to Elizabeth, Haven's general manager by e-mail.

The fourth student, Andrew, has developed several spreadsheets to be used for his packaging work for the local hospital. In addition to the two-hour course, Teresa, the tutor, spends an extra hour per week on one-to-one coaching with Andrew. She identified his skill needs initially by interviewing Andrew and by shadowing his performance at work. She then identified the ICT requirements for the hospital work by talking to the current operator and obtained an overview of the company's requirement from the line manager. The core aim of the one-to-one coaching was to further develop and to broaden Andrew's skills in ICT so that they would be transferable to other job roles. She approved the ILP with Andrew, the line manager at the hospital and the WEA to make sure that the learning goals would satisfy all three partners in the process.

Formative assessment revealed that Andrew quickly grasped the new processes and was able to retain those skills from one week to the next. Teresa was thus able to adapt the agreed learning plan to respond to Andrews developing skills and personal interests. In the final course session, Andrew and Teresa agree on a new task for him to do: to create an Excel sheet that will allow him to keep track of his monthly personal expenses for food, his car and mobile phone. Andrew quite proudly points out that he is now able to do spreadsheets on the computer all by himself. "What I've done in teaching him IT skills is boosted his confidence level", the tutor says of Andrew's development over the course. "He is learning to develop himself. I'm now pushing him to ask his boss to do more demanding work".

The second group of four that comes in that day has already completed one ALN course. While the first one was geared at developing basic IT skills, the learners in this group are now ready to focus on numeracy mostly using computers to progress. The advanced learners in the group are aiming at formal accreditation from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). After completing the WEA course at Haven they will enter a 45-hour-course leading to the accreditation of their Core Skill in Communication at Access 3/Intermediate 1 at the local Further Education College.

The fact that the “classroom” is part of the workshop accounts for a special atmosphere. Learners are allowed to come into the learning area whenever they wish. According to the programme manager they don’t, however, make use of that offer out of apprehension of “getting stuck” when working on the computer on their own. None of the people taking part in the courses at Haven has a computer at home, so using computers in everyday life is a new experience for all of them. In talking to the students about their insecurity with regards to using the computer on their own, Sheila, the programme manager, compares the experience with how she felt when she was getting her driving licence when she did not yet own a car.

Formative assessment embedded in the learning process

Formative assessment is very much seen as embedded in ALN learning. Because of the range of disabilities tutors need to respond to a broad range of individual learning needs. Especially for individuals with problematic school experiences, ALN teaching must be non-threatening. If it was just replicating what learners had experienced in schools, many of the adults the programmes want to target would most likely never take up learning or would drop out soon. During the two-hour course we observe that individual students get a lot of attention from the tutor. Some of the students need more scaffolding where the tutor builds bridges from the individual’s present understanding and skills to reach a new level of knowledge. The tutor’s role is to structure the task so that the demands on the student are at an appropriately challenging level to enable progression. Only one of the four students was able to work by himself for long stretches of time.

Formative assessment takes place whenever a learner is able to complete a specific task, which is recorded on the individual’s ILP. Learners are asked to assess their current level of practice with regard to their overall goals in terms of whether they can “do the task well”, “manage to do it” or would “like to do more on the topic”. These self-assessments guide the tutor on what she should concentrate on and also help people to think about their own learning abilities and needs. For the learners that are following the accredited Core Skills course in Communications, the SQA has developed very open evidence requirements that can be adapted for the individual learner. For example, to satisfy the outcome ‘speak so that others can understand’, learners are required to give a talk that lasts for at least two minutes to at least one other person and respond to questions for at least another two minutes. The whole presentation can be recorded on tape or video and this provides the evidence that it has taken place. This means that in Haven the learners can talk about the things that interest them to the rest of the group in a familiar setting that they do not find intimidating and it can be formatively assessed so that learners have many opportunities to practice.

For example, Joe is very interested in football, so he has given a talk to the rest of the group about his favourite team and they have asked him questions about it. Since this talk is being formatively assessed Henry finds it an enjoyable experience, unlike in his school where he found that no one wanted to hear about what he thought. Once Joe has built up his confidence in talking, he can be formally assessed.

The learners' written projects are kept as records of what they have learned and are seen as evidence of their employability. Completed work is kept in a folder as confirmation of a learner's achievements and it forms a portfolio of work that contributes to both the formative and summative assessment of progress. Often physical and mental health issues cover up the learners' actual gifts and abilities. For some of the learners the courses provide a vital second chance to get ahead with their education. Andrew, the epileptic student, is a good example of someone who has "fallen through the loop", as the programme manager puts it. He clearly has the skills and motivation for further learning, but the mishandling of his disability in school has stopped his development for years.

At the end of the course there is normally a "public" award ceremony. At last year's ceremony the manager of the local football company was invited in to present employees with their certificates, an event that made it into the local paper with an article and a group photograph.

Professional development through networking

Teresa, the tutor, does not consider herself a "teacher"; she prefers to describe herself as a trainer. As she finds classrooms quite intimidating, teaching in the more intimate small-group setting at the workplace suits her well. Sheila, the local programme coordinator, reports to the local Partnership and the WEA. Tutors working for the WEA have formed a Scottish wide network and meet regularly. Teresa finds sharing of information within the network very useful, because people willingly exchange material and experience. The WEA keeps a materials bank, from which the tutors take materials and into which they feed material they have developed themselves. The Internet provides a wealth of material on which the tutors draw. As part of its Reading and Writing Campaign (RAW) and 'Skillwise', the BBC, for example, is providing a range of worksheets and online activities that WEA tutors frequently use in their teaching.

The WEA and other state agencies involved in adult education provision do provide professional development opportunities, but the workshops have to be taken in the tutors' own time. Teresa considers the training to be too theoretical and to lack a focus on the practical skills of lesson planning and understanding specific learning difficulties. She has developed her own

course structures and outlines, which she has documented in great detail. She sees them as a pilot and hopes that future tutors can benefit from what she developed. She says that she learned most through reflecting upon her own experience with the students but thinks that she could still benefit from a more comprehensive professional development scheme.

When asked for the most important policy measures to improve learning for adults with disabilities, Sheila, the programme coordinator, points out that further resources to help learners with specific disabilities would be needed to make the programme work for all, for example a interpreter for a deaf student. She also perceives it a weak point of current delivery that the tutors have to wear “too many different hats”: it is difficult for those who deliver workplace basic skills courses and identify employees and employers learning needs to also market this national initiative and look for businesses to participate.

In the final course session that we attend students are asked to evaluate the course. As the generic evaluation form provided by the WEA does not seem suitable for this particular group of learners, the programme coordinator has developed her own evaluation method in collaboration with tutors. Together with the students, she goes over a simple list of those things they learned in class. She encourages learners to talk about what they liked about doing a specific task and what they disliked. At the end of a course employers are asked to fill in a form stating how the course has benefited individual learners. According to Haven's manager, Elizabeth, participation in the course has brought a range of benefits for Haven's employees and the company. The courses have enhanced the participants' motivation at work. All learners looked forward to their weekly courses and developed further ambitions for learning as a result of having participated in work-based literacy and numeracy learning.

Case Study 2: Further Education College Programme: Jewel and Esk Valley College

Background

In Scotland Further Education colleges (FE) offer a range of programmes that are mainly designed to equip people with vocational skills which are usually accredited through the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Literacy and numeracy provision is made through the Core Skills of ‘Communication’, ‘Numeracy’, ‘Using Information Technology’, ‘Working with Others’ and ‘Problem Solving’. Students in FE usually study another subject and do Core Skills simultaneously, but there is also dedicated

provision for Communication (covering speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and Numeracy (covering communicating and applying numerical information, understanding and applying numerical skills and applying numerical skills to solve problems).

The College: Jewel and Esk Valley in Edinburgh

This college offers a wide range of vocational subjects at both advanced and non-advanced levels. Literacy and numeracy provision is located within the Faculty of Integrated Curriculum Services. The programme leader for this area has responsibility for learning support and study skills, Core Skills, and the ‘Headstart Programme’ that provides a range of short courses for those with additional support needs and bridging programmes for people with additional support needs within the college. All students at the college are screened in relation to the Core Skills of ‘Communication’, ‘Numeracy’ and ‘IT’ to find the level at which people are working. The learning support team is there to provide support across the college and team-teach in Core Skills. They also offer bridging programmes for people with additional support needs. The majority of students are studying another subject and are doing Core Skills alongside this. Communication, Numeracy and IT can also be taken on a drop-in basis at the College’s Library Learning Centre using computers and subject related software. In addition, there are specific courses that are funded by the three local authorities of City of Edinburgh, East Lothian and Mid Lothian on ‘Improving your confidence and skills in English’, ‘Improving your confidence and skills in numeracy’ and the ‘Adult Returners’ Course’ – the course studied for this project.

The overall goal for ALN provision in the College is to help students develop their reading, writing and numeracy skills within the context of their private, family, community and working lives in order to develop their critical understanding, self-development and lifelong learning. The tutor’s role is to help learners’ identify their strengths and build on these in order to meet their own learning goals.

The adult returnees’ course

This course is designed to prepare students for further study, training or employment. It covers four study areas:

- Improving reading, writing and speaking skills.
- Improving number skills.
- Introduction to computers.
- Study skills.

The tutor is a full time lecturer and has post-graduate qualifications in Community Education and in Teaching in Further Education. She has also participated in a number of staff development sessions on assessment and accreditation from the Scottish Qualifications Authority and on teaching and learning in adult basic skills organised by the national body Learning Connections and by the City of Edinburgh Partnership.

The course is advertised through the college prospectus and word of mouth. There are always more applicants for the course, which only has 12 places, than there are available places so there is a waiting list. All applicants for the course are interviewed and found a place that is appropriate for them.

There are target numbers for people participating in this class set by the three local authorities that provide its funding. Targets are also set for the types of groups participating as follows: people with limited initial education; unemployed people; workers facing redundancy; people with English as a second or additional language; people who live in disadvantaged areas; workers in low skill jobs; people with a health or disability problem.

All participants who complete the course will achieve accreditation in ‘Communications’, ‘Numeracy’ and ‘Information Technology’ through the SQA at the level that is appropriate for them. This may mean that some achieve a higher level of accreditation than others. An external verifier moderates the achievement of the learning outcomes and examples of suitable forms of assessment are available to tutors. Tutors can develop their own assessment instruments but these must be approved in advance by SQA as meeting their standards of fairness, consistency and transparency. The course tutor we observed had developed a range of assessments designed to build on learners’ existing strengths. Another important goal of the course is to build a sense of community among the course members so that they can share ideas and support each other.

Diagnostic assessment and feedback

All students have an initial interview that provides information on health, previous learning and work experience, current abilities in communication, IT and everyday maths before they start the course. People who are particularly worried about coming to College can come before the course begins. For example, one student came to the college six weeks before the course started and received one-to-one tuition with the tutor to help prepare. During that time she gained some IT skills and was also able to use the software package ‘Text Help’ that reads out a given text, a programme designed for dyslexic persons. The individual tuition gave her a

head start. Although she was still worried about joining a group, the fact that she knew the tutor helped her to integrate.

At the beginning of the course, students complete a form about how they feel about their reading, writing and speaking skills, number skills, IT and study skills, assessing themselves on a scale from 1 to 10. The students and the tutors then reassess these forms at the end of the course. Students are also asked for their initial learning priorities. After the first week an ILP is developed which students discuss in pairs to help them think about what is available for learning. At the end of the course there is a review of progress. This is undertaken by a whole group discussion of what progress means and then individuals complete a form indicating what they feel – based on their perception and on accomplishments they have achieved in various areas of their lives. This approach is based on research on the ‘learning journeys’ taken by adults that suggest that they have ‘spiky profiles’ as they have experience in some areas that they can draw on in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding (Rogers, 2001). The process is to work on what students know already and what they need to know to achieve their goals. Students are asked to reflect on how they feel at the beginning and the end of the course and to also look back on their ILP.

Formative and summative assessment

Formative assessment is seen as the most effective way of enabling learners to improve their work and therefore underpins all the work done in the course. All students have an individual folder in which they keep their work and comments are provided on their strengths and areas for development. Individual needs are identified from their work and then targeted support is provided. Detailed feedback is given on all work done within a few days of completing it. Then learners correct their work and it is checked again. Common difficulties are identified and discussed in pairs or larger groups so that learners can help each other. This builds on the strengths of each learner in the group and enables them to share and learn from each other.

A number of the learners have mental health difficulties so their particular needs are taken into account in developing group work. For example, one student, Tammy, said she suffered from depression and did not like mixing with other people. Thus, she had gone swimming at the start of the course during lunch break so that she did not have to talk to the others. After three weeks the group had decided that 30 minutes were sufficient for a lunch break so she did not have enough time to go swimming and gradually started talking to people. Tammy thought it took about three weeks before she felt comfortable with working in a group, even though she

had to work on various tasks with a partner from the very first day. Eventually she became good friends with four people in the course and now feels much more confident with other people.

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

The course structure is based on individualised formative assessment. For example, every one of the nine students in the course had 30 minutes of one-to-one support from the tutor either before or after the start of each day. Each person would complete their assignment, then give it to the tutor who would provide comments on what was positive about the piece and then name areas for improvement. After that the student would do all the corrections and then give it back to the tutor. Completed work was kept in a folder.

At the beginning of the course students could write about anything they liked and the case study student, Tammy, found that as long as she was writing about herself she didn't have to worry about the content but could concentrate on the structure instead. Tammy learnt to do mind maps and now uses them to plan her shopping. It was also helpful that the assignments were discussed during the class and students were given detailed notes on what they were to do to improve their assignments. These were completed outside of class time so that students were not under any time pressure to get them done. Being under this type of pressure makes students anxious, so they don't get things done as well as they would if they had sufficient time. Many people from the course took their assignments home with them. Tammy preferred to work at the College on the computers there, because at home she had her two sons to worry about and she preferred to keep her college work separate.

She started off the course gradually and initially did not have very high expectations, but Tammy recognises that there are many things in all aspects of her life that she can do now that she couldn't do before. She is working

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

Tammy has learnt many strategies for improving her reading, spelling and writing by, for example, learning some of the rules of English spelling. She was always willing to ask questions and found that other people in her group had been worried about the same things but had been afraid to ask. Eleanor, the tutor, was very good at finding the different ways in which people learn, for example if people were best at listening, doing or observing. Tammy also learnt that she could help other people, for example with their numeracy although she still emphasised what she could not do rather than what she was good at. In the class everyone talked about the good and bad points of their work but she still put herself down and needed help to find out what she could do.

Tammy felt that she had benefited most from the course in gaining the self-confidence to tackle things in her personal life. To some of her friends she suggested that the best way out of unemployment was to go to college and do something with your life as she had now done. She feels that she has had a lot of support from the tutor and the college and also from the other students to realise her potential and wishes that she had started taking courses years ago.

The key priority of the course is to make sure that the content is relevant to the interests of the individuals participating. This involves finding a hook that suits the individuals and that will engage them in learning and later move on to summative assessment. The approach taken by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which provides the national standards for Scotland, encourages the use of formative assessment as an appropriate method for good quality teaching and learning as part of the path to summative assessment and accreditation. The tutor's goals are shaped by the learning outcomes of the SQA Units. As these are very open, learners can achieve them by following their own interests. One outcome from the

Communications national unit, for example, is to ‘produce simple but detailed written communication’ and this can relate ‘either to an issue of personal interest, or an area of study, or the work setting’. This means that learners can use their own interests to do this and the tutor can develop the learners’ skills, knowledge and understanding through formative assessment. There is also considerable encouragement to use formative assessment and innovative student-centred methods in ALN work as the evaluation framework for Scotland states that good quality teaching involves ‘learning activities that are closely matched to purpose, learners’ preferred learning styles and any particular learning difficulties’ (2001: 13). The assessment of progress is based on distance travelled by the individual learner so formative assessment, based on the learners’ goals, is an integral part of learning and teaching and is thus embedded in the curriculum.

Tammy reflected on what she had expected to get out of the course at the beginning and what she had achieved at the end. She said that although she didn’t think her reading had improved very much she now had a strategy about breaking the texts down and reading small parts at a time. In everything else, particularly listening and talking, she had improved tremendously based on her initial assessment of her own abilities. She had also completed all the learning outcomes set out in her individual learning plan and had achieved all her Core Skills in Communications, Numeracy and Information Technology at ‘Intermediate 1’ level. In addition, she was now enrolled on the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) and was applying for the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Social Care.

Case Study 3: Community-based Programmes: Buddies for Learning

Background

Roughly half the provision for ALN in Scotland is community-based and takes place in a range of community-centres and other places where individuals in local communities feel comfortable about visiting, particularly in geographical areas that suffer from multiple deprivation where people are less likely to participate in education because of stigma or embarrassment (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2004). Provision is also targeted at existing groups such as parents wishing to help their children with homework or long-term unemployed groups and is based in venues that are appropriate for the group. In these types of settings individualised tuition is provided for members of the group, which usually spans a wide range of capabilities. Attention is particularly given to the promotion of warm relationships within

and between tutors and learners so that a good social atmosphere as well as a positive learning environment is developed.

Buddies for Learning is one example of a community based initiative operating in the Renfrewshire area which provides support and learning opportunities to adults aged 16 and over who wish to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy. Each learner is offered a range of learning opportunities focusing on literacy and numeracy specifically geared to their own needs. The project is provided on a one-to-one and supported learning basis, in a group work setting. Every learner works on the basis of an agreed ILP and is encouraged to make choices about his or her preferred style of learning (visual or auditory, for example). As Buddies for Learning tries to accommodate learners needs as much as possible, learners can select from a variety of locations and times. Learning sessions take place in 13 different locations in and around Renfrewshire, mostly in Community Learning Centres.

The programme was started in 2000, initially funded with resources from the European Social Fund. In 2002, the Scottish Executive dedicated new resources to ALN development to each local authority. Since then these funds have been distributed in response to the submission of successive Action/Strategic Plans for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

In Renfrewshire, this funding is made available to Renfrewshire Literacies Partnership through the Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership. To access resources, local providers put in funding bids for the provision of literacies services to the Renfrewshire Literacies Partnership's funding allocation group. Organisational targets (number of learners, number of sessions, number of locations, where sessions are offered etc.) go into the bid and subsequently serve as an accountability framework. End-of-year-reports are prepared and submitted through Renfrewshire Literacies Partnership to the Scottish Executive. So far, the progression of individual learners within the programme is not taken into account. Gathering large-scale evidence on learning progression within Buddies is seen as rather challenging given the diversity of individual learning goals and outcomes. As there is now a higher demand for more quantitative evidence, a reporting system based on quarterly reports is currently being developed. Quality management and programme evaluation is based on self-evaluation using the indicators developed in the good practice framework contained in "Literacies in the Community: resources for practitioners and managers" (Edinburgh City Council/Scottish Executive 2000).

The volunteers – recruitment and motivation

Volunteers are actively recruited through local media campaigns and other PR activities. A Scottish Qualification Authority Professional Development Award, Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning (ITALL, a 2 ½ hours a week over fifteen weeks training course) prepares the volunteers for adult literacy learning. Volunteer ‘buddies’ who work with the learners undergo training sessions to help them identify the individual learner’s specific needs. In the training sessions they learn how to develop and support spelling, reading, writing and numeracy and they are also given the chance to share experiences and learn from other volunteers. Most volunteers are still working, though some are retired. As they typically have more time constraints than the learners, they get to choose a time slot that works for them. The volunteers we talked to stressed how much they get out of the programme. When a retired language teacher, for example, first heard of Buddies in the local newspaper, he felt it would be important to do this type of work in order to give something back to the community. After several years of Buddies tutoring, his primary motivation is the personal rewards he gets from observing the learners’ progress. A female volunteer tutor, who became aware of the Big Plus programme through a TV commercial felt that she needed to get active, because as an avid reader she just could imagine how much would be missing from her own life if she was unable to read.

A collaborative setting for learning

In the past, the dependency of learners on individual tutors has been seen as a problematic issue in adult literacies learning in Scotland generally. As a consequence, Buddies is based on a collaborative learning setting, which reduces dependency on an individual tutor and creates multiple learning opportunities for all involved by utilising the skills, understanding and knowledge of a wide range of people. An individual called a supported learning tutor manages each of the learning sessions. In addition to the supported learning tutor there are at least two, often more, volunteers. Unlike the volunteers, who are only reimbursed for their travel expenses, the supported learning tutors are paid for their work.

The collaborative arrangement helps to overcome the isolation and pressure ALN tutors often experience in one-to-one learning settings. It allows the supported learning tutors to increase their effectiveness through maximising time and priorities. As the setting gives tutors ample opportunities to observe one another and to share their skills, it provides new volunteer tutors with a support structure allowing them to gain experience and to increase their competence quickly.

The collaborative setting provides learners with a wider variety of resources than a one-to-one setting would do and thus increases the chance of meeting different learning needs. The setting reduces dependency on one particular tutor and provides learners with a choice of their support network. The collaboration between supported learning tutors and volunteer tutors of different levels of experience is seen to provide benefits for all involved. The mutual learning accounts for progression opportunities for all: some learners go on to become volunteers, and volunteers can be employed as supported learning tutors.

Most learners come on their own initiative, some get sent to Buddies by institutions like local job agencies and there are enough places to meet demand although sometimes people have to wait for a few weeks before they can start tuition. The Buddies staff consider it indispensable that learners come of their own volition. An initial meeting is scheduled to clarify a learner's interests within two weeks of their request for tuition. In addition to national criteria applied to adult literacies funding, only two criteria are taken into account when deciding to accept a learner into the programme: learners have to show an initial motivation to take part in Buddies and they need to be able to articulate their own learning needs. One of the initial assessment's core purposes is to find out what a person is actively interested in or passionate about, so that this interest can serve as a starting point for learning. The first ILP is completed within seven days after the initial meeting.

Formative assessment through individual learning plans

After the initial meeting learners sign an agreement which is kept in their Individual Learning Plan. Learners, along with their tutors, fill in their learning plans, which are kept at the location and are checked by the supported learning tutors every session. Every session in their learning plan, learners with the help from their tutors write down what they have achieved in each session and set the next goals for themselves. This way, learning plans provide both continuity and flexibility. As students become more confident about their own learning they can aim at more ambitious learning goals. Every six sessions, the individual learning is reviewed in a dialogue between a learner and the supported learning tutor, a process that provides both formative assessment through a discussion of how far the learner's own goals have been achieved and reassurance for the learner. Learners are allowed to stay in the programme as long as they still have an individual learning need. After 24 sessions a new, second learning plan is started for those learners who decide to continue their learning process. Some learners get to a point at which they decide that they have learned what they had wanted. Some simply discontinue participation in the courses, others move

on to do more formal educational work at further education colleges. Buddies currently does not offer any certified provision so that individuals who want more formal certification move on to other programmes such as “Digital Buddies” or “Core Skills” taught at FE colleges. Roughly twenty percent drop out of learning and another 20% move on to other educational opportunities.

Initially there is often an element of scepticism when learners first come to Buddies as for most, formal learning carries rather negative connotations. There have been learners who even left their coats and hats on during the first sessions. This lack of confidence makes it necessary to provide “quick wins”, e.g. enabling learners to write their own name and address within two sessions. As most learners had difficult, sometimes even traumatic school experiences, it is seen as the staffs' responsibility to spare learners yet another bad learning experience. One of the learners, Susan, for example, experienced the premature death of her sister and was suddenly expected to look after her sister's young children during the last years of her schooling: “The school at that time wasn't prepared to help someone like me, so I just dropped out”, she explains.

One Buddies learner points out that he did not even have the skills to join a bowling club before attending Buddies for Learning, because even that required certain literacy skills. Taking part in the Buddies programme has provided Susan with great confidence in her own ability to learn. “Now that I've begun to understand how I can learn, I want to learn more and more”. Audrey, a staff member, explains that most learners who had a really bad school experience attribute the failure entirely to themselves rather than to their teachers or the culture of schooling. To underscore that participation in Buddies will not be a reminiscence of negative school experiences, the staff have made an effort to make Buddies sessions as unintimidating and welcoming as possible: Learners can make themselves a cup of tea or coffee whenever they want to. One of the learners, Debbie, points out how the Buddies atmosphere makes her feel at ease: “Wednesday morning, when I attend the Buddies session, is a highlight in my life. I normally have a hard time getting up. On Wednesdays I'm up at seven, I take a shower and I'm ready to go”.

The learners' forum

A forum, which has been created to give learners a voice, brings together learners frequently to talk about improvements to Buddies. The dialogue taking place in the learners' forum is seen as a form of evaluation. The learners' forum also organises trips to local museums and other local

attractions to help learners develop additional skills in the group setting, such as planning a trip, reading a bus schedule, etc.

Many of the Buddies learners were taught in school in a way that undermined their confidence in themselves and in their learning. Participants in the programme said that they were made to feel that it was their fault if they did not understand something at school. Buddies operates on a reverse philosophy: if learners do not understand, the philosophy is, that it is the tutors' problem not the learners. In the initial assessment tutors try to identify individual learning styles to take these into account whenever possible. The group learning setting makes it possible to then have different tutors explain the same thing to the learner. As every tutor has a particular way of explaining, this is actually seen to increase the probability of a learner's understanding. During the learning sessions everyone in the groups is actively encouraged to support everyone else's learning. Peer support is also important with students helping each other to understand particularly when using software programmes on the computer.

Learning sessions

Sessions always open half an hour before the more formal learning starts to enable volunteer tutors to have individual access to the Supported Learning Tutors, however learners also come in to socialize with one another and have discussions with tutors. Some of the learning takes place in the form of tutor-supported individual learning using ICT, during which volunteer tutors provide immediate and contextualised feedback. An elderly learner is quite proud to point out that four months earlier, when she started in Buddies, she had never used a computer in her life. Now she just bought her own computer because she enjoys the learning so much. Frequently, the tutors organise group learning activities. For example, when the ban on smoking was introduced as legislation in Scotland in 2006, most learners had strong opinions. As the motivation to work on this issue was clearly visible learners were asked to write a few sentences about their view on the smoke ban and these were then discussed in the whole group. Each learning session includes “tea time”, when the entire group gathers around a table to discuss various issues over a cup of tea.

Most of the learners taking up Buddies show an interest in literacy learning. Numeracy tends to be asked for by individuals with specific needs. One woman asked for support with developing numeracy skills because her husband who had recently died had always done the accounts and now she wanted to learn how to do them. Other individuals come to Buddies for numeracy help because they want to go on to further education to train for jobs requiring numeracy skills such as in construction or the police force.

Learners primarily interested in literacy tend to also ask for numeracy instruction but the majority of numeracy learners do not tend to go on and work on their literacy skills. At the same time not every tutor is prepared to support numeracy learning so in terms of focus in Buddies, literacy has the edge. As all learners and tutors work in the same room, individual learners frequently observe what others are doing and are inspired to aim even higher.

To attract new learners into the programme, community workers pursue a range of outreach activities. They leave Buddies information leaflets and marketing gadgets at various social agencies, such as those for the homeless or for drug addicts. They actively address and talk to people in community centres. Sometimes they choose unusual ways of targeting new learners. Buddies/Renfrewshire, for example, left simple leaflets with a contact phone number in plastic bags of the local shop where parents buy their children's school uniform, because being able to help one's children learn has turned out to be a real incentive for adult literacy and numeracy learning.

Negotiated learning

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

Conclusion: embedding formative assessment in the curriculum

The overall approach to ALN in Scotland emphasises that teaching and learning should be relevant to the learner's chosen goals and that learning

options should be flexible and responsive to diverse needs and aspirations. Learning is assessed through the distance that learners have travelled in reaching their own goals through the Individual Learning Plan and so this approach is particularly appropriate for using formative assessment as a means to demonstrate progress. All three case studies have shown that the ILP is the key way in which formative assessment is embedded in the learning process although how it is used varies depending on the particular context. In addition the self-evaluation system, the staff training and development programmes and the focus on learner centred teaching all contribute to the embedding of this approach in practice.

The self-evaluation system, developed by the City of Edinburgh and the Scottish Executive (2000), and used by the ALN Partnerships to report on the quality of overall provision annually to the Scottish Executive, supports the use of formative assessment in the learning and teaching approaches used in ALN. The self-evaluation framework sets the criteria by which programmes should be evaluated in relation to entry and exit to programmes, guidance and support and learning, teaching and the curriculum. The criteria for judging the quality of the learning and teaching and the curriculum are that: approaches are relevant to learners' chosen contexts and goals; preferred learning styles are identified and respected; learning options are flexible and responsive to diverse needs and aspirations; interaction and dialogue between learners are actively promoted and purposeful; knowledge, skills and understanding are developed in context; and learning is presented as an enjoyable and positive experience (2000: 8). Evidence for the quality of learning, teaching and the curriculum is gathered by each programme from all the tutors who record the learning outcomes of all students via the ILP that sets out in detail the learning outcomes, the learning necessary to achieve them and the sequence that learners and tutors should follow towards their achievement. In addition, course outlines and lesson plans, learners' evaluation of progress, learners' achievement of the goals set by them in their ILPs and achievement of Core Skills Units (if appropriate), are all compiled and provide evidence of the overall quality of learning and teaching for the programmes. This evidence is compiled by each ALN Partnership, summarized, and then sent to the Scottish Executive as evidence of the quality of provision. Areas for development are identified and then reviewed and feed into an annual cycle of improvement. The self-evaluation criteria have four levels and all the case studies reported on here have achieved the highest level (4) over the past two years. The Managers all reported that they intend that they will stay that way, through ensuring that there is continuous improvement.

Another way in which formative assessment is embedded is through staff development that focuses on the 'social practices' approach with the

learner at the centre of the learning process. Tutors new to adult ALN teaching take the ‘Introduction to Adult Literacies Learning’ (ITALL) programme that forms a Scotland-wide ‘foundation’ level qualification. There is also an “ESOL Literacies: Teaching Adults Reading, Writing and Numeracy” – a 10 session course for qualified teachers of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) to enable experienced teachers to work with learners whose English is rudimentary. A ‘Teaching Qualification in Adult Literacies’ became available in January 2007 for experienced tutors on an in-service basis. Parallel to this, a cohort of experienced practitioners will be trained as ‘practice tutors’ to ensure that effective support is available to course participants throughout the substantial practice-based elements of the course. In addition training and additional materials to support the implementation of the ‘Curriculum Framework’ that promotes the Scottish approach of a ‘social practice model’ to adult literacy and numeracy learning has recently been implemented thus enabling the framework to become embedded into the daily practice of ALN tutors.

The approach taken in Scotland requires a very flexible and intensive commitment from staff and this does mean at times that tutors are under a great deal of pressure. It also requires more intensive work than is normally available, especially in the light of the finding of Comings et al (1999) that learners require at least a 100 hours of tuition if they are to make good progress. It can also mean that learners on community-based programmes may get little encouragement to progress beyond their agreed learning plans onto more formal accredited programmes (see HMIE, 2005). The emphasis on learners’ achievements in terms of personal growth and self-confidence can also lead to insufficient focus on assessing the success with which they apply the skills they gained in the classroom to real-life situations. This is a complex task that requires imaginative assessment that enables such success to be recorded without intruding into learners’ private and family lives. The case studies illustrate the variety of ways in which this can be done but it clearly requires a strong commitment from experienced staff for this to happen, sometimes at personal cost as staff use personal time to enable learners to have the best possible experience.

Finally, the focus on learners identifying their own goals lends itself to processes of formative assessment that in turn leads to setting new goals in a virtuous cycle of achievement. Research carried out by Lyn Tett and colleagues demonstrates that being assessed formatively on their achievement is enabling many people who would not have participated in education to make real progress in achieving what they want in the various aspects of their lives. This research, an “Evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Strategy” (Tett et al, 2006) provided

examples of the goals that learners have achieved in their own words in the four contexts of family, work, public and private lives.

These included:

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

A final quote from this report shows how learning that is based on the formative assessment of the distance travelled can impact on all aspects of a learner’s life.

It made a whole lot of difference to how I feel about myself since I learned to read better. You feel better when you learn to do a lot of things for yourself you know. It helped me to realize things about myself, be more mature, and make up my own mind. I speak up a lot more now. Before I came to the course I would never have done that because I didn’t want to make trouble. I’m being taken more seriously at work now. I’m not just a woman who left school and then had lots of kids.

Formative, learner-centred assessment within a social practices approach that focuses on the social, emotional and linguistic contexts of people’s everyday lives as well as their cognitive development appears to act as an empowering process that can lead to the transformation of people’s lives.

References

- Aldridge, F. and A. Tuckett (2004), *Business as Usual? NIACE Survey on Adult Participation*, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester.
- Comings J. *et al.*, (1999), “Persistence among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes”, <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report12.pdf>

Edinburgh City Council/Scottish Executive (2000), *Literacies in the Community; Resources for Practitioners and Managers* (LIC Pack), Edinburgh City Council/Scottish Executive.

HMIe (2005), “Changing Lives: Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland”.

Rogers. J. (2002), *Adults Learning, Fourth Edition*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Scottish Executive (2001), *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland Report* (ALNIS), Edinburgh Stationary Office.

Scottish Executive/Learning Connections (2005), *A Curriculum Framework for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland*, HMSO, Edinburgh.

Tett, L., S. Hall, K. Maclachlan, G. Thorpe, V. Edwards and L. Garside (2006), *Evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative*, Scottish Executive <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20102141/0>.