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

Spanish-language
Literature Review

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OECD

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This report is divided into two main parts. On the one hand, we offer a summary of the present state of the literature in Spanish on formative assessment, whilst on the other, we examine a number of paradigmatic cases.

Literature about formative assessment of adults in Spain

This brief account of the literature in Spanish on adult education focuses on three main aspects: research groups; the journals and organizations which publish this research; and the published subject matter most closely related to the education of adults and the improvement of teaching/learning processes in adult education through different models of formative assessment.

At the end of this section we offer a short summary and evaluation of the literature in Spanish.

Spanish research groups investigating teaching/learning processes in adult education

The volume of literature in Spain about teaching/learning processes, including formative assessment in adult education, began to grow significantly in the 1990s.

Amongst the groups which have been most productive we should mention the following:

- The Grupo 90 is a group of university teachers which researches learning processes in adult learners and encourages studies, doctoral and other postgraduate courses, seminars, summer schools, research and doctoral theses within the Spanish university system. This group organised three congresses about the learning processes in adult learners in the years 2000, 2003 and 2006. The results of the research reported in the first two congresses were published in *Primeras jornadas de investigación en educación de personas adultas*: Investigaciones seleccionadas para su presentación y publicación. (Barcelona: 2000), and II *Jornadas: educación de personas adultas en la sociedad dialógica* (Vitoria Gasteiz: 2003).

- *El Grupo de Investigación sobre Personas Adultas (CREA)* is another research team which emerged at the beginning of the 1990s at the Universidad de Barcelona. It has proved the largest and most influential group devoted to research in this field. It has fostered

research, in particular in the Federación de Asociaciones de Participantes (FACEPA), throughout Spain.

- In Seville the close relationship between the university and adult education groups in the suburbs has proved a paradigm for formative action which has been very influential in both formal and non-formal education. In the Canary Islands a team at the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria working with the local adult education centres has researched learning processes in adult learners and fostered the introduction of initial and formative assessment in this field throughout Spain. The Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) has been very active in fostering the exchange of information between teachers and researchers working on formative processes in adult education. Murcia University has studied learning processes in adults from a historical perspective. Meanwhile Valladolid University has been active in the study of the skills acquired in both formal and non-formal settings and the apparatus for their recognition and validation. The universities of the País Vasco, and of Santiago de Compostela have well-established research groups in local adult education centres which seek to systematise the rich experience of many teachers and learners working on basic level skills.

- Research has also been carried out in various non-university further education organisations working in the field of basic working-life skills. This work includes collaborations with Trade Unions and universities on fostering skills in semi-qualified and unqualified workers within the framework of the Fundación de la Formación Para el Empleo (FORCEN) at first, and subsequently in the Fundación Tripartita.

- Government organizations such as the Centro de Investigación y Documentación Educativa (CIDE) and the Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones (INCUAL) have also been active in this field. The latter is especially concerned with the assessment of formal and informal learning in work situations.

Journals and publishing houses working in the field of adult education processes

There are several publishing houses in Spain which publish in the field of adult education. *El Roure,* created by the CREA group, concentrates on this subject. The *Editorial Popular* with its collection *Papel de Prueba* provides support materials, texts for students and teachers working on basic

literacy and mathematical skills in the first stages of adult education. Equally important is the Federación de Asociaciones de Educación de Personas Adultas (FAEA) with its *Las publicaciones de la FAEA* as well as its informative web page. Both Murcia University and the UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) have published materials and in the case of the UNED, a collection of materials arising out of doctoral theses and the postgraduate courses on adult education it has held over the last fifteen years.

There are also specialised journals which publish on both theory and practice in the field of adult education. Noteworthy journals include: Diálogos. Educación y Formación de Personas Adultas, which has been published since 1995 and brings together both research and teaching practice; Quaderns d'Educació Continua also publishes studies and descriptions of practice from its base in the Centro Recursos y Educación Continua de Játiva, financed by local government in Valencia; Notas, Educación de Personas Adultas, a journal of the Madrid local government also offers information periodically on specific experiences in this field; Papers d'Educación de Personas Adultas, is a quarterly journal of the Association for Adult Education (AEPA) in Barcelona; more sporadically Materiales para la Educación de Adultos ,from the Canaries and others such as RED (Revista de Educación a Distancia) of the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia and Herramientas , a professional journal, while not exclusively devoted to adult education, carry considerable material concerning issues in adult education.

Literature related to formative assessment

In one study of the literature concerning teaching/learning in adult education[1] the authors highlight the use of the adult students' opinions as a starting point.

In Spain the following paradigms within the framework of teaching/learning in adult education have received special attention:

The specific social paradigm in adult education

This is a very general paradigm characterised by the permanent revision of the teaching/learning process by both teachers and learners. Two

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[1] Analyses of the research include that of Alonso, M.J; Arandia, M.; Prado, R.; Flecha, R.; Oliver, E.; Puigervert, L in 2003 which examines research carried out between 1980 and 2000, and that of 2002 by Cabello, J. (Diágolos nº 30) and Valls, N. in PAPERS. Subjects covered within the field of formative assessment include teacher training in basic skills education, curricula, and evaluation of teaching institutions and co-operative correction as a teaching tool.

examples are: Oscar Medina Fernández's *Modelos de educación de personas adultas* in which he defends the active participation of and modification by all concerned in the process of evaluation, and the study of María Mercé Romans entitled *Así aprendemos los adultos,* in which there are guidelines for learning about, as well as from the learning process.

The paradigm of participatory (co-operative and active) correction

The literature on co-operative correction sets out to show that correction is not the sole responsibility of the teacher carried out after and separate from the learning process, but part of that process which can and should be carried out by the pupil who may be in the best position to judge what has and has not been learned.

Research in this area has centred on learning to write both in Spanish and in a foreign language for adult learners with elementary knowledge. Two characteristic examples are: María Antonia Olalla Marañónwriting on *co-operative correction in the learning of Spanish*, and that carried out by the team of Jim Lawley using self-correction via a computerised grammar checker in the field of foreign language learning.

While much of the work on co-operative correction has centred on more advanced learners, and therefore falls outside the remit of the present study, the present author has discussed its use in various articles and books with adult learners at a very basic skill level who nevertheless wish in the medium or even short term to attend university.

The paradigm of popular constructive assessment (spiral construction of knowledge model)

The literature on the participation of popular collectives in the processes of social learning and construction of knowledge goes beyond the academic framework focusing on a curriculum constructed in the light of the hopes, wishes and expectations of those learning. A characteristic example of this type of assessment is that of Manuel Collado Broncano in the journal Diálogos, who advocates the permanent interaction between scientific and popular knowledge resulting from the collaboration in space and time between those participating in the learning processes. Another example is that developed by working class Christian groups which advocate *knowing* the reality, *evaluating* what is known and then *acting* in light of that knowledge. The *acting* brings about new knowledge and questions which can be the focus of further *evaluating* and thereby better *acting* and so on in a continual ongoing process. Assessment thereby becomes a key element in learning processes, driving it forward.

The dialogue paradigm

Another focus of study is learning through dialogue and democratic learning communities. A key example is *Compartiendo palabras* by Ramón Flecha García; learning is the result of constant communication between people wanting to learn in reading groups.

The initial assessment paradigm

Finally we come to the paradigm of initial assessment used diagnostically. This type of assessment is much used in the development of workplace skills for the under-qualified and in the development of basic skills in adult learners.

With regard to the development of workplace skills for the under-qualified, this form of assessment is widely used by the Instituto de Cualificaciones y de la Formación Profesional (INCUAL) of the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia and forms part of a growing movement for the validation of formal and informal learning experiences. With regard to the development of basic skills in adult learners, a good example is that of the Canary Islands, where, by law, a Valoración Inicial de Aprendizajes (VIA) is compulsory. The VIA thereby constitutes an initial diagnostic assessment which determines what remains to be learned, thus improving the learning/teaching processes

Summary and personal evaluation of the literature in Spanish

In the opinion of the present writer, the literature on adult education can be divided into three categories: the academic, which looks at learning basically from the perspective of the school curriculum, the social, which views it from a participatory and social perspective, and finally the view from the world of work, which is beginning to recognize and value learning acquired through work experience.

This division reflects three main types of provision of adult education which unfortunately are not always co-ordinated: that which takes as its starting point and main reference teaching methods and attitudes common amongst secondary school teachers (this is especially prevalent amongst secondary school teachers who also work in adult education centres); that which attempts to introduce innovations in teaching practice, both academic and extramural (this is associated with teachers specially trained and/or experienced in adult basic skills education); and that which derives from the human resources perspective in a society experiencing dynamic change in its labour market. The latter is found in basic work training centres (which are

run by the Ministry of Education) and the centres of continuing formation (which are run by the Ministry of Work). These three types of adult education should logically be closely co-ordinated but in Spain, at least, they are not. This is not the proper forum to analyse the consequences of this lack of co-ordination.

In this report more attention has been given to the innovative social category for two reasons. First, the literature arising out of these initiatives, which has its origin in Oscar Medina's writing, is proving increasingly influential in the Centros de Educación de Personas Adultas run by the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Second, in the training of adults for the workplace, the terminology of assessment and validation of learning acquired through experience is just starting to be used in order to encourage adults to continue learning throughout their lives.

Although the specific term 'formative assessment' is seldom used in this literature, perhaps because it is felt to smack of school curriculum terminology, we feel that its meaning and purpose are present in the use of terms such as 'assessing and valuing adult learning experiences', 'highlighting co-operation in significant learning experiences' etc.

The key articles on participatory and co-operative assessment emanate from three sources which are proving very influential whilst, perhaps, establishing slightly different schools of thought:

- Popular education. The main source is the journal Diágolos in which we find literature concerning the so-called spiral construction of learning which emerges from people's education, and where education is seen as a process of progressive enrichment achieved through the three-step process: observing reality, evaluating reality, and acting on reality. The process then starts again: reality is observed once more, it is re-appraised, and then acted on again.

- Democratic learning. A second source of key literature is a series of publications from the Centro de Investigación Social y Educativa (CREA) of the Universidad de Barcelona, concerning democratic learning, and whose influence is increasing via the El Roure publishing house. It is from this source that the concept of cultural intelligence has spread. Cultural intelligence can be defined as the learning we derive from the most diverse sources and which enables us to participate in an equal exchange concerning the construction of knowledge.

- The third source comes from the field of linguistics and language teaching and is concerned with autonomous study of basic level English as a Foreign Language in adult learners. Its origin is the

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain's distance learning university, which has a special responsibility for adult learners lacking formal qualifications. It derives from a number of Doctoral theses and prestigious Research and Development awards from the Spanish government. It is concerned with empowering students through the processes of self-correction.

Case studies

The following case studies draw on some, but not necessarily all, of the paradigms discussed above.

Formative assessment via new technologies (active evaluation model)

A team led by Dr. Jim Lawley and Dr Rubén Chacón Beltrán in the Facultad de Filología at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), a university characterised by a population of students aged 25 and over with no formal academic qualifications, is developing a computer programme, *e-gramm*, specially designed for students of English as a foreign language with a very low level of proficiency, to improve their knowledge of English. The eventual intention is to modify this computer programme to help immigrants who need to learn Spanish.

The programme entails the active participation of students in their own continual assessment and serves therefore as a good example of formative assessment.

E-gramm is a grammar checker, similar to that in *Microsoft Word*, but specially prepared for students of English as a foreign language. It is free, easy to install via the Internet[2] and user-friendly. It has been developed since 2001 especially for use with courses for adults aged 25 and over and without academic qualifications who wish to apply for university. It enables them to detect and, in the light of corrective feedback, correct the mistakes they make when they write in English.

E-gramm is for adults learning English in an autonomous or semi-autonomous learning situation. It is a good example of how a social need – that of Spanish speakers to learn English – can be met in a non-formal learning environment. Although intended for lower-intermediate level students it has also proved popular with more advanced students who are anxious to avoid embarrassing 'howlers' in their written English.

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[2]   *http://www.innova.uned.es*

The programme offers two complementary filters: **incorrect sequences** and **problem words**. In the case of incorrect sequences, the computer programme highlights in colour the sequences of words in which it has detected a mistake and provides on-screen feedback which explains the errors, offering examples of correct usage and explaining how they differ from what the student has written. The student processes this information and makes the appropriate changes to what has been written. By clicking again on the incorrect sequences button the student will discover if that section of the composition is now correct. Clicking on the other button - problem words - causes the programme to highlight words which are often associated with error, and to provide feedback which will enable the student to decide if in this instance the word has been used correctly or not.

The project team analysed many hundreds of student compositions, detected the mistakes, encoded them computationally, fed them into the database, and wrote corresponding feedback, which enables students to modify their written production. The existing prototype of *e-gramm* is designed to detect 500 errors which accounts for approximately 60-70% of the mistakes made by Spanish-mother-tongue students at level B1 in the Common European Framework. The programme is capable of expansion to detect up to 80,000 errors and the aim is for the team to continue to feed its database. With *e-gramm*, correction is not automatic but instead requires students to understand the grammatical and lexical explanations and then write the correct version themselves; the expectation is that this cognitive process will produce learning. Self-correction by students in this way has in fact several key advantages:

Although many students would clearly benefit from extensive writing practice, in conventional classrooms with large groups of students, teachers are naturally reluctant to ask students to write compositions since they (the teachers) will then have to correct them outside school hours. When they do ask students to write compositions, teachers often use a cryptic correction system: to indicate that the student has made an error with the choice of tense, for example, they will write simply 'T' above a verb. Sometimes students fail to understand or misinterpret these abbreviations. Sometimes teachers can fail to detect errors because of time constraints. *E-gramm* on the other hand does not suffer from these human failings, and the feedback it provides is generous and explicit.

Aware that it is logistically impossible to correct all the mistakes that their students make, teachers often use the so-called PPP methodology (where PPP stands for presentation, practice and production). This is a methodology in which a grammar structure is first presented, then practised in a repetitive, mechanical way in the expectation that it will then be produced spontaneously and correctly. This methodology, essentially

behaviouristic and used throughout the world, aims to prevent students ever making mistakes; as there is the expectation that they get everything right from the beginning. Research, nevertheless, has shown repeatedly that this methodology works poorly, if at all, in the learning of languages. Far superior is a task-based methodology in which students are encouraged to write freely and abundantly on many different subjects so that their mistakes emerge naturally, since these mistakes are, naturally, learning opportunities. Reaping the benefits of this approach requires that the mistakes are duly corrected – preferably by the student. *E-gramm* begins to make this feasible.

E-gramm fosters *just-in-time learning*. It provides the student with the required information to determine if a phrase is correct or not at the most opportune moment; just when the student is most interested and receptive. It is a radically different methodology to the ubiquitous aforementioned PPP methodology in which the teacher provides grammatical rules which students are subsequently expected to apply to their own production.

At times only the student can decide if what (s)he has written is correct. A phrase like this, for example:

Actually, he is working in London

is grammatically well formed, and if the student wishes to say, in effect, '*In fact, he is working in London*', it is also correct. However, if the student means '*At present*, *he is working in London*', it is incorrect. The student, as the author of the phrase, knows better than the teacher which meaning is intended, and it is the student who should decide whether correction is required.

E-gramm provides students with highly motivating and useful work because they are working on their own written production. The time invested in correcting their own writing will be time well-spent because while evaluating each phrase of their compositions with the help of *e-gramm,* they are learning to use words of their choice correctly. Even when students decide that what is written is already correct, they will in the future use the structure or word with more confidence. By assuming responsibility for correcting their own writing, students become more autonomous.

E-gramm allows students to progress at their own speed. In conventional classrooms the assumption is often that all students need to learn the same thing at the same time. In contrast, *E-gramm* makes the most of one of the key advantages of learning in non-formal contexts.

Many students prefer to be 'corrected' in private by a machine rather than in public by a teacher. When interacting with *e-gramm* they feel less time pressure than when required to answer in front of a class:

Time to think, opportunities to rehearse and receive feedback, and the greater likelihood of success reduce anxiety and can result in increased participation and language learning. (Crandall, 1999, p. 233)

Another important consideration is that at a time when new technologies are being introduced so widely into language teaching, many programmes used in language laboratories are in fact little more than thinly disguised tests; multiple choice questions and reading comprehension questions with fixed answers. Until the development of *e-gramm* the possibility of pedagogic feedback on freeform written production was conspicuous by its absence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. To be really useful in such contexts the new technologies should perform functions that neither teachers nor books can execute.

Formative assessment in the centres for adult education

The centres for Educación de Personas Adultas (EPA) in Spain are designed for adults with few or no qualifications who wish to attain levels of basic competence. Typically these adults have been educationally marginalised and may have negative feelings towards the educational system and its methodologies. In 2005 there were 2 291 of these centres with 11 861 teachers and 336 253 students.

The teachers in these centres, aware of their students' needs, strive to foster a positive attitude towards learning, building on the co-operation and information provided by the adult students.

Below we will describe some instances of the way formative assessment is considered from different pedagogic perspectives.

The Centro de Educación de Personas Adultas de La Verneda(Barcelona). Formative assessment and the dialogue model

The Centro de La Verneda is a civic centre in a district of Barcelona which acts as a focus for the cultural life of the community. On its fifth floor is the Escuela de Adultos de la Verneda-Sant Martí. The methodology of Centro de La Verneda has two twin pillars: learning through dialogue and interactive groups.

Learning through dialogue is based on seven key principles:

- *Equality of dialogue:* everyone may speak and all are equal. In place of a hierarchical approach to dialogue based on the arguments of

power, we have an egalitarian approach based on the power of argument.

- *Transformation:* learning through dialogue involves a process of transformation. There are no pre-established limits to people's capacity for improvement. The excluded can become culturally creative and the marginalised can go on to higher education.

- *Creation of meaning:* learning implies learning to think, sharing thoughts, feelings and dreams and acting positively in the family, the neighbourhood, the work place, and at a personal level.

- *Use of tools:* learning through dialogue does not exclude the use of tools, quite the opposite. Learning to use technology is one of the aims of the project. Through dialogue, people decide what they want to learn and invariably decide to learn as much as possible.

- *Equality of differences:* Starting from a positive evaluation of one's own culture, the aim is to achieve knowledge of a dominant culture in order not to be excluded. In the case of those from an oral literary tradition, the aim is not to continue in a state of illiteracy nor to relinquish this tradition but to acquire the knowledge which allows expression of this culture in the ways prioritized by society, and so be able to share learning and culture through dialogue. In this way the equality of differences is fostered.

- *Cultural intelligence:* everyone can learn, no-one has deficits. No one is uneducated; some know about one thing, others about another. However, dominant groups impose their value systems, characterising some forms of communication as intelligent and others as not. However Research has shown that those considered of low ability in academic circles may show great capacity in the workplace or family and vice versa. Some learn history at school, some by working in archives and some through discussing films with friends. Our intelligence is shown by our ability to learn what we needed in those contexts in which we have taken part. An emphasis on academic abilities excludes those who do not have them. On the other hand, using cultural intelligence during the learning process implies making use of practical, academic and co-operative skills common to all.

- *Solidarity*: This refers to the overcoming of factors which tend to exclude participants; the tendency for each to look to their own interests for example. Participants who know more about a particular aspect offer to help others, and advise the co-ordinator on how to give the classes so that everyone achieves their aims.

The interactive groups

Encouragement is given to the formation in classes and workshops of small interactive groups of people who help, teach and collaborate with each other. The formation of these groups propitiates the development of solidarity, dialogue between peers, and the overt expression of knowledge, skills and cultural intelligence. The classes cease to be centred on a single teacher.

The methodological innovation of the interactive groups allows the sharing of knowledge and the burden of teaching; one of the best ways of reinforcing learning is by teaching others, and those who have recently learned new material are well-placed to understand the difficulties experienced by others.

Formative assessment in the context of dialogue in the centre

Surprisingly, many social plans are implemented without the involvement of those affected. The educational project in this adult education centre is based on the right of those affected to design the kind of centre which they want and to indicate the transformations which the programme of activities should effect.

The educational practice of dialogue implies a permanent relationship between 'experts' and participants based on the assumption that all can detect and interpret learning needs and potential, and intervene accordingly.

This relationship between 'experts' and participants is based on Garfinkel's theory which posits that the latter have the cultural awareness that enables them to interpret their own reality. Habermas affirms that everyone is capable of language and action and Freire that people can transform as well as adapt. Passive identification leads to the active construction of identity.

Formative assessment is not carried out by the experts (teachers), but by the teachers in collaboration with the participants and is based on the following principles:

- The participating pupil is the subject not the object of the formative process.

- The participating pupil is an agent of change. Society is created not mechanically though its systems but by people working to transform social structures.

- All can speak, so all can interact through dialogue. This is a universal concept present in all cultures.

- In addition to the intelligence of the expert there is cultural intelligence. The expert's interpretation is not superior to the participants'. The teacher is a participant as well, in both the process and the interpretation of actions. It is a question of evaluating with and alongside others – not of evaluating others.

- The different types of knowledge (of the teachers and the participants) are co-ordinated to find viable social solutions.

Given these principles, assessment is the process by which any activity in the centre, be it a course, a workshop, or an academic year, is evaluated and improved. Assessment is an integral part of the educational process. The participants drive assessment. The co-ordinators should foster participation and encourage purposeful criticism and the search for consensus amongst the participants.

One of the aims of the assessment process is to break the vicious circle:
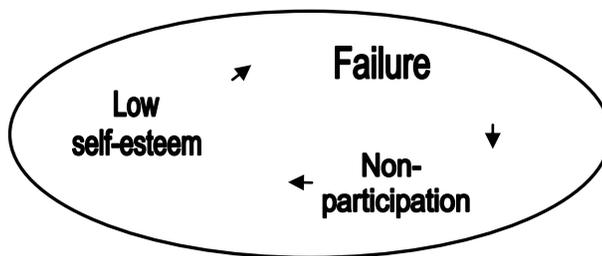
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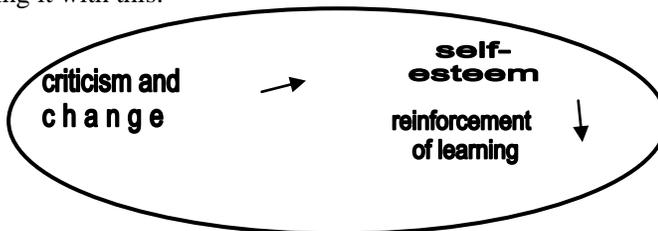
How to carry out assessment

The common criteria for formative assessment are: attendance and participation in class.

Attendance is vital because most learning takes place in the classroom since adult students are otherwise occupied at other times and in other

places. Moreover, continuous assessment requires detailed communication with the teachers.

Learning through dialogue presupposes active participation in class. Active participation through questions and contributions facilitates, at least in part, assessment of knowledge levels. It is through active participation in class that grasp of content, procedures and also expression of attitudes can be detected.

Each group can continuously assess its progress. The co-ordinator remains open to comments made during the activity, while getting to know the participants and the problems and solutions. If a participant and co-ordinator disagree over an assessment, it is the participant who will have the last word, provided basic minimum attendance requirements have been attained.

Each term a group will set aside a time for assessment of progress. Participants take the lead in discussing progress and proposing changes and improvements. The end of each term is also the opportunity for each person to self-assess progress.

Co-ordinators of each group or level meet each term to discuss progress of groups and share evaluations of each person. A written summary of this assessment is subsequently made.

The Centro de Educación de Personas Adultas in Ávila: formative assessment and the spiral learning model

This centre is in a province in central Spain, and may be taken as representative of many small adult education centres with few students and few teachers. The case study described below however is representative only of a small group of innovative teachers who have tried to introduce new elements into a social situation with little dynamism far removed from the large cities.

We will examine various stages in the teaching/learning process, the importance of the frequent feedback and information provided by participants, and the way this information is used to improve the teaching/learning process.

Ice-breaking

Since participants often have reservations about the educational system, teachers strive to create a friendly collaborative atmosphere. An initial

question which facilitates dialogue is: "What is a person like you doing in a place like this?"

The aim is to discuss motives and past circumstances which have led to attendance at the centre.

The teacher explains the teaching/learning process and asks participants to give their opinions

With the intention of giving value to past experiences, including skills acquired in everyday life, the teacher invites comments on a phrase like this: "Nobody learns anything alone, everyone learns from everyone". The aim is to show that relations will be collaborative in a group united by its intention of learning and teaching more and better with everyone contributing.

An open-ended questionnaire for individual and group comments, to be summarised by all

Indispensable preliminary information on the teaching/learning process is provided by open-ended responses to a questionnaire which helps establish each participant's situation and attitude towards the material to be learnt.

The questionnaire usually contains questions such as: What do you expect from this course? What do you fear? How do you feel at this time? What earlier experiences of school have you had? What cultural handicaps do you feel you have?

Defining the aims of the educational programme in the light of this information

In light of these responses, the aims of the learning experience are established: what knowledge is sought and why, and what personal, social and professional benefits will be derived.

Designing the collaborative process

Bearing in mind the Centre's Official programme, the contributions made and the ensuing discussions, the course curriculum is designed. Participants see that their contributions are valued.

Agreeing on procedures and methodology between teachers and students

The methodology used becomes, from this perspective, not only a means but also an end. Students learn how to learn.

Evaluation and 'stock taking' of process and product every month

The seriousness and integrity with which the programme is designed leads each month to the use of one or two sessions to review what has been learnt, what has not been learnt properly, and the reasons for delays and shortcomings in the learning process. To this end, various perspectives of considerations are viewed, such as: we learn as much or more from our mistakes as from our successes; assessment is not to give a mark but to establish what has been done well and badly in the curriculum with regard to knowledge, procedures, and attitudes in the daily work of each member of the group, including, of course, the teacher; assessment is not outside the learning process but rather something which raises our awareness of learning. We learn by assessing reality and ourselves.

In light of different assessments, modifications are introduced in the programme so that the learning process follows this route: action-evaluation-new action and so on until the end of the course. Assessment becomes in this way a formative element because it fosters democratic tolerance, and because its progress in spiral formation prevents the repetition of the same material at the same level of awareness.

Assessment through dialogue in non-formal learning processes (Centro Penitenciario de Nanclares de Oca. Vitoria-Gasteiz)

Since the academic year 2000-1, the CEPA Paulo Freire in Vitoria has organised a Literary Discussion Group in the Centro Penitenciario de Nanclares de la Oca. This event is the fruit of collaboration between staff at the prison and the Asesoría de EPA del Berritzegune de Vitoria-Gasteiz. The students are inmates of the Centro Penitenciario de Nanclares de la Oca. The teachers are also from the prison and the CEPA Paulo Freire.

In learning-to-read workshops the teacher sometimes becomes the active party and the learner someone more passive who merely receives. To avoid this undesirable outcome, the Acción de Innovación Educativa offers an alternative methodology.

The Literary Discussion Group has three defining criteria: the selected readings are all universal classics, the participants are not graduates, and they are very active in the selection and very free in their interpretation of

the works. These criteria refuse to accept the notion that many people are incapable of communicating with great writers because they lack the necessary cultural preparation. The Literary Discussion Group meets once a week for two hours. Participants choose a book, decide how many pages will be read that week and discuss their interpretations and responses during the meeting.

In the Literary Discussion Group there is no attempt to discover and analyse the author's intention, rather the value of the meetings lies in the attempt to stimulate reflection and conversation about members' different interpretations of the work. Mere reading is insufficient; it is also necessary to discuss what has been read in order to understand behaviour in society – our lives reflected in literature.

The co-ordinator chairs the meeting, deciding whose turn it is to speak. In line with the principles of learning through dialogue the co-ordinator is a participant, not a leader. Rather than imposing an interpretation as correct, the co-ordinator should encourage everyone to reflect and contribute so that a temporary consensus can be reached. This consensus of course may itself be later questioned. The co-ordinator learns as much as everyone else, and encourages those who participate less to contribute more.

The methodology is based on formative assessment and the continuous practice of writing and reading, as well as the revision of one's own texts. The exchange of texts and observations helps students to feel less isolated during the learning experience, which includes the following stages:

Phase 1: taking possession of the language

The guiding principle is that for anyone to become interested in writing they must have first taken possession of the language and learnt to enjoy and play with words. In this first phase assorted texts are read with this aim.

Various didactic principles are applied in the course of this phase such as:

- *The connection between the workshop and life*: the world and individuals' experiences of it form a solid basis for enriching the workshop.

- *Interaction*: the personal involvement of participants is necessary for the creation of social identity.

- *Reflection*: Reflection is indispensable for growing, maturing and learning. Reading requires reflection and constant internalization. Participants discover what interests, pleases, moves, stimulates and

motivates them. This is a process of search and discovery for the reader.

- *Creative action*: participants are equipped with strategies for literary and linguistic analysis to help them enjoy works of literature.

Second phase: opening the doors to fantasy.

Gianni Rodari's book "Gramática de la Fantasía", offers a series of exercises which break though the psychological barriers which inhibit literary creation. Although not everyone need be an artist, no-one should be a slave: words belong to everyone and these exercises pave the way for the first stories and short fiction.

Third phase: correct expression

Once inhibitions have been overcome and participants have discovered that they can express themselves in writing, the time has come to improve style. To this end, interactive exercises drawn from various textbooks are used.

Correct expression in the context of learning through dialogue aims to discover personal potential. It is a question not only of observing what the participant does but also of discovering through dialogue and co-operation what (s)he can do, bearing in mind that the individual's capacity for improvement only becomes apparent when conditions are propitious. In this sense attempts at expression bring to the fore each individual's potential.

Learning entails acquiring new strategies to complement existing ones. This normally happens at a subconscious level. Here, however, there will be a conscious attempt at reflecting on the experience of learning the art ofexpression. Thiswill attempt to delineate the strategies which individuals and groups can make use of and which will form part of the bank of resources upon which all participants (students and teachers) will subsequently be able to draw.

Plurality and Technology in assessment in the framework of the Universidades Populares (UU.PP)

The people's universities are a cultural development project which work in towns to improve social participation, education, formation and culture, and to enhance the quality of life at both an individual and community level. The people's universities attempt to guarantee and make effective the rights to education, formation and culture for all. The institutional and social

significance of the people's universities is illustrated by these statistics: 2 000 000 people participate in the programmed activities; 200 000 people are matriculated in the 4 000 courses, workshops, seminars and programmes; 2 600 professionals make up the teams which work in the people's universities; 230 people's universities make up the FEUP, and act in more than 250 municipalities in 22 provinces in 11 Autonomous Regions.

Assessment in the conceptual framework of the people's universities

Amongst the central principles of the people's universities is the intention of institutionalising the participation of those who run the organisation, and the technical and administrative staff, as well as those who attend as students.

The people's universities, conceived as dynamic ongoing projects, aim to assess the socio-cultural progress made. The assessment aims to offer continual information which favours the modification and adjustment, and the making of informed decisions. The teaching/learning process is improved by various kinds of assessment:

- **Needs Assessment --** This aims to identify the needs, interests and expectations of groups and people associated with the project, and to improve knowledge of the context so as to establish realistic objectives.

- **Design Assessment --**The coherence and structure of the teaching/learning programme (general and specific aims, actions, methodology, resources) is assessed.

- **Assessment of the Process --**The organisation, activities, suitability of curriculum, the human resources, the materials, the time taken, the satisfaction of the participants, and the modifications introduced.

- **Assessment of the Product --** An assessment of the results and impact.

- **Assessment of the medium and long term results --** An attempt to evaluate the medium and long term consequences of the project. This phase is difficult to carry out because so many participants subsequently lose touch with the people's universities. Nevertheless, it is important to attempt this evaluation since educational and socio-cultural projects are evaluated in the medium and long term.

During these assessments it is important to detect strong and weak points, to take advantage of achievements, and to continue making progress in search of alternative solutions to the problems encountered.

The various agents involved should participate in the assessment processes, so that there is both a top down and a bottom up information flow, facilitating a realistic decision-making process. It is important, too, to organise the information collected in the light of the interests and functions of the various agents involved, highlighting the information most relevant for each. Assessment of this type offers staff a way of making principled, coherent, informed decisions which will improve their place of work and reach the objectives proposed, based on objective analysis and well-grounded knowledge of reality.

Summary and personal evaluation of the cases described

We have endeavoured to select cases which reflect the plurality of the adult education teaching/learning processes which are rooted in student participation. Full student involvement, while not necessarily a smooth path, is, when observed and evaluated either individually or collectively, the best representation of formative assessment (even if, as we have suggested above, it does not always use its terminology).

We have selected four cases: the Grammar Checker, the Centros de de Educación de Personas Adultas (two different centres; la Verneda and Ávila), and representative experiences of education in Centros Penitenciarios and the Universidades Populares. We decided not to include examples of the validation of workplace experiences because although connected to formative assessment, they belong to a very different area of experience.

The Grammar Checker is an excellent example of a new kind of teaching tool which fosters autonomous learning in a way that focuses on students' own writing, enabling them to turn mistakes into learning opportunities at a time when they are especially motivated and receptive since they are improving their own chosen form of expression. The fact that it is available free on the Internet means that its social impact is already proving very important.

The two Centros de Educación de Personas Adultas selected in fact represent two very different methodologies, despite belonging to the same national institution. One of them, La Verneda, in a large suburb of Barcelona, has become something of a reference point for adult education throughout Spain due to the close relationship it maintains between theory and practice. It is a crucible for the reflection on and evaluation of teaching/learning processes, which in turn generates new ideas and methodologies. Its status as a reference point means that it receives many researchers, as well as teachers and lecturers from the Universidad de Barcelona; its teaching practices are those of a collective project backed by

its team of teachers and student body. Ávila, meanwhile, was chosen because it typifies the small, provincial adult education centre found throughout Spain in which innovation usually depends on the initiative and drive of a particular teacher or group of teachers, and whose social impact is very localised.

Nevertheless both cases are underpinned by the same idea of generating processes of democratic, participatory learning in which the review and evaluation of this participation become the central focus of learning.

The case of the Centro Penitenciario in Vitoria has been selected because it typifies a non-formal learning experience, because it is innovative, and because it is representative of the literary discussion groups which are becoming extremely popular in Spain. The idea of formative assessment which underpins these literary discussion groups is that learning takes place by building on prior knowledge through its expression in public and its correction, corroboration and development by others. The literary discussion groups encourage collective reading and shared learning experiences thanks to the public interpretation of the chosen text which each participant offers, and the observations and corrections which the rest of the group then make.

The social impact of this initiative in the prison has been enormous and the experience is now under way in other prisons. In general, literary discussion groups are becoming very popular and influential in adult education centres throughout Spain.

Commenting on the people's universities was considered necessary given the enormous popularity of these institutions in Spain, not only in the suburbs of large cities like Madrid, but also in rural settings and provincial capitals. The underlying idea with regard to formative assessment is to constantly improve and modify teaching practice in the light of carefully examined experience.

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