

## **Key Competencies – The Challenge KC 2007 12 – 13 July**

### **Formative Assessment – workshop**

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This workshop will explore formative assessment practices in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. It will draw on the fieldwork research being conducted as part of the Improving Formative Assessment Project. Judith is one of the fieldwork researchers, working with adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers.

### **Background**

Developing formative assessment practice can have a profound impact on the quality of learning and teaching, according to research on assessment in the national curriculum for schools. The two year research project (2005 – 2007), Improving Formative Assessment, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, NRDC and the QIA, has been evaluating how teachers and students in post-14 education and literacy, language and numeracy programmes for adults can enhance their understanding and practice of formative assessment. Led by Kathryn Ecclestone, Professor in Education at Oxford Brookes University, the research is informed by the work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam into formative assessment practices in secondary schools.

The research project aims to

- produce new insights and evidence about the links between formative assessment practices and students' motivation
- highlight factors that help and hinder change to formative assessment practices in different educational settings
- identify possibilities for development or improvement on a wider scale
- promote better motivation and educational achievement amongst students
- work constructively with policy makers, qualification designers, teachers and other researchers to disseminate ideas and findings

The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods (interviews, observations and questionnaires) in an intensive programme of 26 problem-based development projects covering FE and sixth form colleges and adult education settings. Teachers and students are involved in a systematic, problem-based approach to developing formative assessment practices.

### **The Workshop**

The workshop will provide an opportunity to explore:

- Key concepts and the underpinning theory to the research
- Strategies and approaches that teachers have used
- How strategies and approaches might be implemented in participants own professional contexts

### **Key concepts and underpinning theory**

The research is underpinned by the notion of assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. Understanding the different factors that impact on assessment and how these are different in different learning contexts is key if formative assessment practices are to become more than monitoring and compliance with assessment criteria. The focus of the research is rather on engaging learners with a subject and encouraging sustainable learning habits that utilise reflection on the *how* of learning as well as the *what*.

The workshop will therefore explore key concepts such as:

- Assessment for learning (as opposed to assessment of learning)
- Learning culture
- Learning identities
- Motivation

and how these relate to formative assessment practices.

### **Drawing on the fieldwork**

Formative assessment is not just about techniques or approaches, but can take different forms depending on the dynamics of the learning culture. This can affect whether assessment practices lead to purely instrumental learning as a way of gaining qualifications and meeting targets, or whether they lead to deeper forms of engagement with learning, greater motivation and “genuine challenge and progress amongst learners.”<sup>i</sup>

The challenge for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL tutors often is to find the time and space to develop practices that can lead to deeper learning amongst their students, whilst under pressure to meet institutional requirements regarding externally imposed targets. Evidence from the fieldwork gathered would suggest that development of such practices can have a powerful impact on learner engagement and understanding and that often quite small changes in practice can act as a springboard to further development. The workshop will offer opportunities to explore some of the strategies and approaches that teachers involved in the fieldwork have developed with their learners. Participants themselves can reflect on how they might wish to implement formative assessment practices in their own professional contexts.

### **References**

**Making Formative Assessment work** –Kathryn Ecclestone, in *Adults Learning* (NIACE December 2006)

**Formative in Name Only**, Kathryn Ecclestone, *Reflect*, Issue 6, October 2006

**Inside the black box. Raising standards through classroom assessment**, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam nferNelson1998

**Working inside the black box. Assessment for learning in the classroom**, Paul Black et al. nferNelson 2002

### **Web links**

Improving Formative Assessment website:

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/staffinfo/eccleston-FAproject.html>

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<sup>i</sup> **Making Formative Assessment work** –Kathryn Ecclestone, in *Adults Learning* (NIACE December 2006)