

Review: Sutton, Ruth (1995), *Assessment For Learning*, Ruth Sutton Publications, Lutterworth – Barry Smith, Feb 2009

The greatest strength of this book is its accessibility. Despite being well over 10 years old it is still relevant today. As someone whose background is in maths and pupil support, there was a huge amount for me in this book. In fact in many ways it was ahead of its time, highlighting as it does the ideas of progression in learning (transition), the use of portfolios and standards and standardisation (local moderation), all of which are currently hot topics in Scottish education in light of new curriculum guidance. These ideas in themselves are not new, but the way they are connected with one another and to the principles of curriculum design in Curriculum for Excellence, is.

Sutton provides a balance of theoretical and practical perspectives to paint a picture of each of the elements described in each chapter: planning, differentiation, progression, marking, portfolios, standards and standardising, student involvement and 'value added'.

The progression Sutton describes is that of progressing from one learning stage or environment to another rather than progression based on everyday learning involving feedback and next steps. This is about how staff in schools can make best use of the information they have about the learning of youngsters at transition points, to ensure that at the next stage the youngsters are moving to, their learning needs are met as a result of the sharing of up-to-date, reliable information about learning. Sutton makes an interesting observation about progression 'records' (transfer information), and states that these 'are probably the least useful of all the progression strategies but seem to absorb the most teacher time and attention'. Sutton exhorts the freeing of time for staff to engage face-to-face as opposed to transferring information on learning through the use of written records.

The chapter on portfolios discusses the possible uses of portfolios and how they are able to communicate 'latest and best' learning for youngsters, why they are useful and for what purpose each of the items included is used. This was particularly interesting to me in terms of capturing the learning of the cross-cutting themes of a Curriculum for Excellence, literacy, numeracy and health and well-being. Schools, including secondary schools, are charged with ensuring every member of staff is aware of, and upholds, their responsibilities in relation to supporting the development of key concepts and skills in these areas. The use of portfolios may have a major role to play in this endeavour.

The discussion of standards and standardisation (local moderation) also provides food for thought. Sutton explores the benefits of using this approach to build teacher professionalism and understanding of what exactly it is that teachers are hoping that youngsters will learn through any given activity or experience and how this can be agreed through the sharing of expectations at the planning stage, thereby developing greater clarity of purpose in staff and students.

There is much, much more in this book that can possibly be done justice to in such a short review. I consider it to be an excellent addition to the library of any practitioner.