

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

As a trained History/Modern Studies teacher, my career has been spent working in high schools for learners with additional support needs. A need to be versatile is apparent in such schools and I have taught in areas as varied as Maths, RMPS, PSE, Enterprise, and largely, thankfully, in Social Subjects. My substantive post is currently as a Principal Teacher in an ASN school with the title of 'Learning and Teaching and Raising Attainment' which affords me a wide range of responsibilities. The quest for further variety of experience has brought me to my secondment in Learning and Teaching Scotland.

I have been requested to review this book from my professional perspective and embarked upon this task with the presumption that it would not be immediately apparent within the book where the relevance for the ASN teacher was. I am so accustomed to literature being clearly aimed at Primary or at Secondary practitioners in a mainstream establishment and have become increasingly skilled at re-formulating information to fit my purpose.

My presumption, I'm delighted to say, was wrong. 'Assessment For Learning' was as relevant to my experience in ASN as I'm sure it would be for mainstream practitioners in Primary or Secondary education. This is one of Sutton's achievements, that 'Assessment For Learning' is inclusive of all practitioners by being inclusive of all learners.

This is a great book for dipping in and out of, for discussion with colleagues and for reference to at those times when you know things could be done better, but you need inspiration on how to achieve that. When I am back in my post I know I will revisit chapters 2 and 3 on Differentiation and Progression.

Differentiation is the bread and butter of everyday planning in ASN. With class sizes of no more than 10, and learners with significant needs, effective differentiation is more achievable, and arguably more necessary, than in mainstream settings. As a now fairly experienced practitioner in ASN the chapter on differentiation gave me assurance and corroboration of my approaches to learning and teaching. For new teachers in the setting it would be a great starting point as it contains very simple and clear guidance on how to effectively differentiate to meet the needs of learners. It strikes me that with the policy of inclusion placing more children with additional support needs in mainstream settings, this chapter will have increasing importance across all contexts of learning.

Chapter 3, on Progression, is an area where I am aware my school continually strives to improve current practice. The progression from associated primary schools or from mainstream settings into our school is an especially crucial period which requires sensitive approaches given the nature of our vulnerable young learners. This transition stage is difficult in any setting and I became increasingly aware, as part of the management team of the school, of the sheer volume of hours devoted to making this transition as smooth as possible. I read with anticipation Sutton's list of 'practical steps to improve progression'. Of the 16 practical strategies listed, many were familiar, which again reassured me that my school was approaching this task in a positive manner. However there were also suggestions, particularly with regards to ways in which teachers from different settings could work together, sharing expertise, information and facilities, to ease this transition process, that were less familiar to me. This is something I intend to revisit and discuss in detail with school colleagues, suggesting the use of Sutton's guidance as the basis for future models.

Throughout 'Assessment For Learning', Sutton's gift as a writer and communicator to the teaching profession is apparent. She takes many of the great concerns of teachers and schools, on which there are tomes written, and succinctly explains, exemplifies and

offers strategies for practitioners to consider. All within less than 200 pages – quite an achievement!