

Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Action Research Project

Mindset Over Mastery

Lincoln College – June 2022

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For further information regarding the Shaping Success Action Research programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-8/>.

The programme was delivered on behalf of the Education and Training Foundation by:



NATECLA



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Mindset Over Mastery

Lincoln College

SUMMARY

This project set out to investigate the effect of mindfulness activities on learner mindset and confidence. How important is the ability to remain calm and focused when writing compared to knowledge and skills? Which matters most - mindset or mastery?

RATIONALE

Learners currently face challenges related to their English skills which are preventing them from success in their vocational studies and gaining entry to their preferred next steps, be that employment, HE or Further Education. We wanted to explore the impact of tenacity and resilience on the achievements of learners with entry qualifications of GCSE grade 3 or below; not only as a way of improving grades but with the aim of encouraging learners to feel pride in their efforts and an increased confidence in their English ability, no matter what grade they achieved. A proportion of learners each year attend college following incomplete or non-traditional secondary education and there is an increase in the number of learners who have English as a second language in addition to those who did not achieve their desired grade. All of these learners face particular challenges which we hope will be improved with strategies for confidence and resilience.

Other Contextual Information

Our action research was part of the Education and Training Foundation's OTLA 8 Programme. The action research took place in the English department at Newark and Lincoln, initially with a group of learners at each site which then developed to incorporate all 16-19 Study Programme learners. As a team, we met bi-weekly for an hour's discussion and reflection as well as trialling mindful meditations. This enabled us to exchange ideas and support each other on a regular basis which resulted in increased confidence, engagement and commitment to the project.

APPROACH

- The project started with a general focus on positivity, reminding learners that failing is a part of learning. Our first lesson was writing a letter to our future selves using www.futureme.org and encouraging learners to be reflective. We also had a presence at the college welcome event where we started building relationships with learners with fun games.



- The next step was to trial a short meditation with a group of learners (one in a remote session and one face to face.) We identified what worked well and what didn't and fed back to the team in our OTLA 8 meetings. We also read the same meditation to staff so they could see how to deliver it and to enable them to experience the possible benefits.
- Learners in different classes at both Newark and Lincoln sites took part in meditations before writing activities. Some teachers felt more comfortable playing relaxing music instead of a meditation and we asked learners to submit ideas for a mindful music playlist. This was part of a Paper 2, Question 5 assessment on Viewpoint writing. Their responses, along with reviews of their favourite songs as well as the play lists were developed into a pamphlet to celebrate students' work. (Appendix 2)
- We developed a 'mindful' lesson and all the team tried it with their learners. This incorporated a nature walk in the college grounds using the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding approach. Back in the classroom, we gave learners an image to use as a visualisation, asking them to 'put themselves' in the picture describing what they could see using the senses. The learners' work was collated and incorporated into the Association of Colleges Creative 'LoveOurColleges' Writing Project which was then turned into a 'souvenir' book, created, and designed by media learners. (Appendix 2)
- We collected feedback from learners using a range of methods. Firstly, with a face-to-face discussion which we recorded and transcribed and secondly with an electronic Microsoft Form with qualitative questions which we shared with all learners. A short video interview was also recorded with learner A (Appendix 3) who found mindfulness to be particularly beneficial and was keen to share her views.



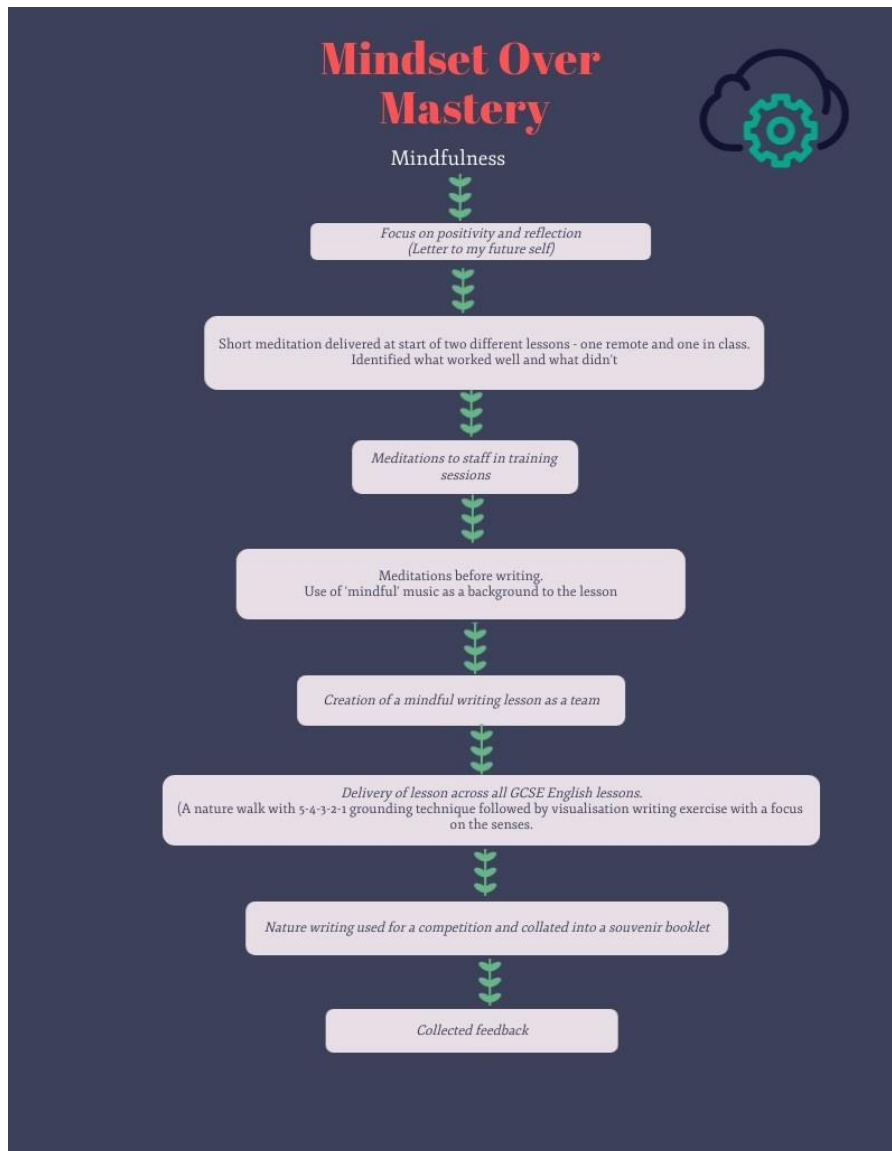


Figure 1.1 A flowchart documenting our research project approach

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

As a team, we committed to improving our knowledge and awareness of mindfulness through our dedicated time for teaching, learning and assessment (Golden Hour). We used this space to try out meditations, reflect on our research and create resources. It was particularly effective for encouraging and supporting the team, especially those teachers who felt less confident to deliver meditations but were happy to contribute in other ways in the form of reading texts in a slower, more mindful way.

Golden Hour also allowed us to share ideas such as the best YouTube videos for music for concentrating. Teachers reported that students responded well to Lofi (a blend of chilled out beats without lyrics) which suits most musical tastes.

Towards the end of the project, the English team took part in a yoga and mindfulness workshop delivered by an external professional which gave us a new crop of ideas such as the importance of

re-energising students through movement or by clapping their hands or arms in addition to calming them.



English teachers were given a Mindfulness resource kit (Cards Against Anxiety) and we are currently assessing how to use them most effectively in the classroom.

As a team, we realised collectively, that the biggest gains of mindfulness came from using it with writing skills. This led us to link the two ideas using visualisations. We used a carefully chosen image and asked learners to imagine they were in the picture by reading out a set of questions encouraging them to think about what they could, see, hear, feel, taste and touch. Later on, we added sounds and music to enhance their experience further. This had a noticeable impact which became apparent in the mock exams.

It showed that learners have connected with the idea of writing using the senses following the work on visualisations and *'putting yourself in the picture'*. We developed this further to use in our Easter revision sessions called 'Classtonbury'. The session was delivered in a sensory room with low lights and comfortable seating to induce a mindful atmosphere. We used a picture of a circus to coincide with our festival theme and this changed midway to represent the inside of the tent and at this point we introduced a short burst of overwhelming circus music. It was also used within the classroom after Easter for those who didn't attend Classtonbury.



Work samples show that this method of writing in class has been well adopted by students who struggle to start a story or description. They can transplant the ideas created in the classroom directly into their writing and can re-use or adapt a phrase each time they begin writing. An example from the case study of Ben Harris (Appendix 2) clearly shows this: *'the wind rustling the fallen leaves next to the dilapidated wall'* in the mock exam also appeared in his most recent question 5 practice: *'I can hear the rustling of the leaves on the trees'* In the May example, Ben was then able to develop his response by adding more detail about what he could see *'I look around and see a squirrel running up a tree then a family of owls nesting in the trunk.'* In his baseline assessment, Ben struggled to add this level of detail which minimised how much he could write.

Professional Development

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
2. Evaluate and challenge your practice, values and beliefs.	Our project provided time and space for us to come together as a teaching team to create opportunities for mindfulness, not only in our own practice but in those of our students. By engaging in research activity and asking learners for their perspectives, we were able to understand how much learners valued being given a quiet time for reflection as well as the importance of a calm learning environment.
3. Inspire, motivate and raise aspirations of learners through your enthusiasm and knowledge	Throughout the year, learners have had access to a range of experiences not normally associated with the English classroom. Going outside the classroom to walk through nature provided them with a memorable link that they have been able to call on repeatedly in their writing.
6. Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners	As a team, the project has given us an opportunity to meet regularly to discuss and feedback on teaching and learning. We felt revitalised by the freedom to try something different and reflect on its impact.
11. Manage and promote positive learner behaviour	Using meditations with students was, at times, challenging. However, the result afterwards was always a calmer and more focused classroom which improved learner behaviour.
13. Motivate and inspire learners to promote achievement and develop their skills to enable progression.	Students have begun to feel more confident after seeing their writing skills improve. Where once they would have struggled to start, they have reported that writing about the senses greatly helps them feel in control of what they are doing. This in turn, motivates them to do better and creates an enthusiasm to keep aiming for a higher grade.

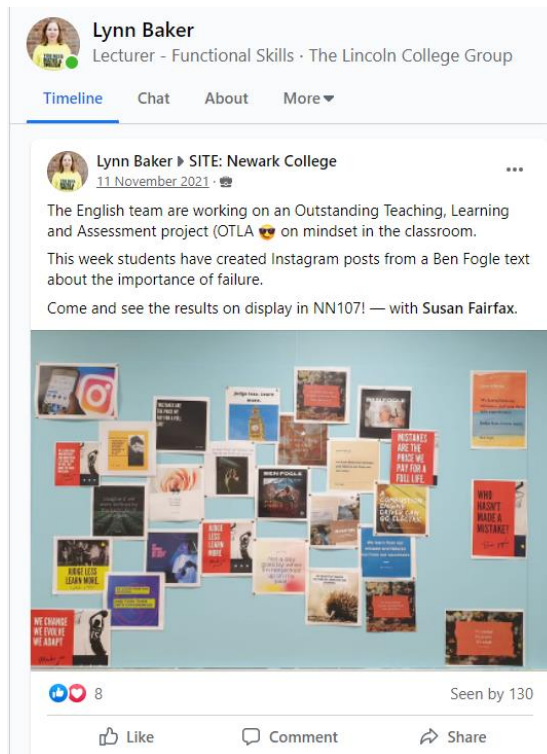
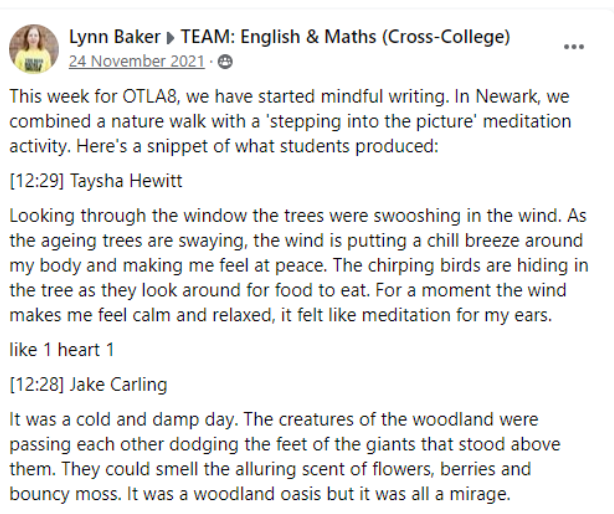
Organisational Development

Within the organisation there has been continuing interest in the project and we have been sharing our findings through cross-college Golden Hour and workshop led training days as well as delivering short meditations to staff in other departments. The Construction department has expressed an interest in developing techniques to support bricklayers as the workshop is such a noise filled

environment. One of the bricklaying tutors shared this relaxation video of brickwork sounds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lea71cTCYY> and we will be working together to see if it helps with learner focus and concentration.

The exams office has also been keen to work with us to incorporate elements of mindfulness to reduce exam stress. They investigated with JCQ the possibility of playing mindful music as learners enter the exam hall and although this was not possible within the regulations, we will be working together to provide a calming environment for learners immediately before they enter the exam. Members of the English department are delivering a training session to the exams department after Easter on how to support learners in distress, which will begin with a meditation delivered to participants so they can appreciate the benefits of mindfulness. (Appendix 4, shows feedback from the examination manager following the session.)

Throughout the project, updates have been shared on the organisation's internal Facebook (Workplace) to promote, highlight and inform others about the project.



A member of the quality team has also expressed interest in setting up a college mindful 'community of practice' to share and support the introduction of mindfulness in the classroom.

LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

The action research project has changed the way, as an English department, we think, plan and approach our lessons. Low impact music without lyrics such as Lofi (Appendix 5) has become a staple in our classroom whenever there is a period of concentration required. Learners enjoy being given a calm environment to work in and most learners actively ask for the music to be put on. Students have submitted songs that help them study to a Padlet which we will use to give students a choice in what they listen to (Appendix 5). We have also learned to slow down in our speech and

especially when reading texts. This came directly from reading out meditations during the project and it has a dual benefit in that it not only helps the learner to focus on the text more clearly but also acts as a mini meditation to calm and focus them.

We will continue to use visualisations and layer them with sounds to create an almost 3D experience as a stimulus for writing and we intend to create a resource bank with different settings. It has proved an invaluable method to not only increase confidence but as an accessible activity for all levels of learners. Walks outside or visits to The Collection (a local museum) will also become a more regular element of our lessons.

Some teachers will continue to develop their delivery of mindful meditations at key points within the year, such as, before assessments or at the start of term. However, others now feel more confident to approach it in their own way or simply play mindful music.

Personal reflection

As we near the end of the project, it has moved on beyond our initial aim of encouraging learners to be more resilient and mindful. Two separate branches have developed from the Mindset Over Mastery Tree. Firstly, the organisation is increasingly recognising the value and potential of mindfulness as a tool to combat stress and anxiety - not only for students, but equally for staff. It is a bold statement; however, I am confident that this project has increased awareness of mindfulness in the classroom and encouraged discussion and creativity about how it could be best employed. The second branch is specifically connected to English and the effectiveness of using mindful techniques as a method of improving writing. Using images, sounds and thinking about the senses acts, in some small way, as a replacement for cultural capital. Students who have not been to the beach, or walked in a wood, or visited a circus have nothing in their memory banks to call on when asked to describe these images. Giving learners additional stimuli immediately before the act of writing frees them from the embarrassment of not knowing what to write.

REFERENCES

Duckworth, A. (2017) *Grit: Why passion and resilience are the secrets to success*, London: Vermillion

Dweck, C.S. (2012) *How you can Fulfil Your Potential*, London: Robinson

OTLA 7 (2021) Resilience, Sheffield College. Accessible at <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-2/7-4/>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Project Team

Project Role	Name	Job Role	Contact	Twitter Handle (optional)
Project Lead	Lynn Baker	GCSE English Lecturer	Lbaker@lincolncollege.ac.uk	@lynnnb
Project Deputy	Jayne Brown	GCSE English Lecturer	Jbrown@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Sue Fairfax	GCSE English Lecturer	Sfairfax@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Charlotte Hope	GCSE English Lecturer	Chope@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Emma Hogg	GCSE English Lecturer	Ehogg@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Mandy Radley-Mitchell	GCSE English Lecturer	Mradleymitchell@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Heather Fluck	GCSE English Lecturer	Hfluck@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Marc Chapman	GCSE English Lecturer	Mchapman@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Sarah Braund	GCSE English Lecturer	Sbraund@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Project Team	Debbie Wallis	Head of Study Programme	Dwallis@lincolncollege.ac.uk	
Mentor	Dianne Robinson	Mentor	Dianne_robinson@ntlworld.com	
Research Group Lead	Claire Callow	Educational trainer and consultant	clairelcallow@gmail.com	@claire_callow

Appendix 2: Learner Work

Documents and media below are stored on this Padlet: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_Lincoln

Case Studies

[OTLA 8 Case Studies.docx](#)

Featuring work from three learners in different vocational areas, these case studies track the development and improvement of their writing from the baseline assessment in September through to exam preparation in May.

Learner work before and after mindfulness visualisations

[Mindful Writing Comparison.docx](#)

This includes 'before' and 'after' examples of learner work from the first three months of the project.

Showcasing learner work

The two links below are booklets of learner work created to make students feel proud of what they achieved. The Association of Colleges collection was curated from samples of writing using a visualisation and a walk-through nature. 'A Design For Life' was a viewpoint writing assessment about the effectiveness of listening to music while learning.

[AOC CREATIVE WRITING FINAL.pdf](#)

[MUSIC A DESIGN FOR LIFE.pdf](#)

Appendix 3: Feedback

Documents and media below are stored on this Padlet: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_Lincoln

General Learner Feedback

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=3xUG5R7rhEioVnVoieaCimZGUlivIXxIoTEjIHTvOGFUNVY3Q1c4MjJDT0MySUJEN1ZVTjNHNVaOS4u>

3. What was good about it?

12 Responses

4		helps you concentrate more
5		Nothing
6		Help you work
7		the questions
8		yeah i focused and i like it
9		You get to listen and use your imagination
10		It make your think and block the out side world
11		Calming
12		using your brain

4. What didn't you like?

12 Responses

4		there isnt anything i dont like
5		It isn't something I would do
6		Nothing
7		nothing
8		nothing
9		Not sure
10		Nothing I liked all of it
11		Nothing
12		nothing

This is a summary link for a Microsoft Form used to gather general information from a group of 12 learners throughout the college. Although the numbers are small, it is clear that mindfulness had a positive impact.

Small Group Learner Feedback

[Mindfulness focus group.docx](#)

We used a face-to-face group of 3 learners to hold an honest and reflective discussion about mindfulness.

Individual Learner Feedback from Learner A

[Taysha Hewitt Mindfulness feedback.MOV](#)

This learner found mindfulness to be especially helpful and was keen to give her views in a short video interview.

Appendix 4: Team Feedback

>

2. What does mindfulness look like in the classroom?

2 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	Debbie Wallis	Some not tried it yet. Slightly hyper, giggly learners to calm in the classroom.
2	Emma Hogg	Giving students the 'space' to absorb a task and attempt it. Intro with music in some lessons where appropriate, allowing students to express their thoughts / feelings in a safe environment

3. What barriers (and possible solutions) are there for you trying mindfulness in the classroom?

2 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	Debbie Wallis	Teachers apprehensions. Asking a different member of staff to do that part of the session.
2	Emma Hogg	Fearful from a perspective of a facilitator- new territory. Forgetfulness

4. What barriers are there for students?

2 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	Debbie Wallis	Peer pressure, image, phones, something new.
2	Emma Hogg	Mindset of students. Asking them to consider something they may not have thought of before. self consciousness. Could be uncomfortable and triggering for students (when asking them to reflect)

5. Think of 5 activities that you would consider 'mindful' - how could you use these in the classroom?

2 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	Debbie Wallis	A trip to the moon at the Collection, Sensory walks, Mindful music, Used for calming and relaxing learners ready for assessment.
2	Emma Hogg	Music in lessons. Journaling and diary writing in the form of a character.

During one of our fortnightly Golden Hours (a specified hour focussing on Learning and Teaching across college), the English team were put into 2 breakout rooms and asked to discuss Mindfulness and feedback through a set of questions on the above form.

Evaluation from individual team members

Charlotte Hope – English Teacher

My initial doubts about the efficacy and practicality of using mindfulness in class were addressed by Lynn in guidance sessions. She modelled the guided meditations for staff, which gave us the familiarity and confidence to try them out in class. The teachers also got a chance to observe the process live, during Classtonbury. The idea of 'mindset over mastery' has really made an impact on my teaching practice; it was a great reminder of how we can keep Maslow's hierarchy of needs in mind in the classroom.

Sue Fairfax – English Teacher

I enjoyed the meditations that Lynn did for us a team of teachers - but felt unsure about doing this myself for a class of 16-18 year old students. I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and did a couple - which were better received than I had expected - but I wasn't sure how useful I felt they had been, nor did I feel comfortable doing them. However, this led to me using the background music from the meditations, and later music more generally, as a way of settling students, providing a calmer environment, and as a stimulus for different moods in the classroom - which I think has had a positive impact on the students.

The other outcome that I have found extremely useful is the visualisation texts that we have read to the students - as a way of getting them to focus on how they can use the senses to added depth to their writing. By asking questions within the context of a piece of reading I have found that students are more able to get started on their writing and imagine themselves in a situation. I intend to develop this further by sharing the text with the students so that they can use some of the vocabulary from the text as they put their own piece together.

Focusing more on the student's mindset - rather than just the mastery of the content of the GCSE course has also made me more aware of pace - and I am trying to slow down when reading and give more time for students to complete work - which I've learnt from the meditation time.

Wider evaluation from the examination manager following a training session

Hello,

Just wanted to share this with you. I'm sat just about to undertake the complex task of redoing our GCSE English and maths timetable to accommodate changes that need to be made for students, but I am doing this accompanied by lofi music. It makes such a difference, I'm so pleased you were able to spend time with us and share. I mentioned it to the team, and one said that she was doing the same thing yesterday 😊

Many Thanks

Rachel

Rachel Greenwood

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Appendix 5: The use of music as mindfulness



[Access the audio here.](#)

A collection of music suggested by students along with sounds used for visualisations. Added to a Padlet: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_Lincoln2

The original Padlet board may be accessed here: <https://padlet.com/lynnnbaker/zu5drqbveyh460ad>

Appendix 6: Visualisation Resources

Documents and media below are stored on this Padlet: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_Lincoln

Visualisation 1 – Nature



An example of the visualisation image we used as a stimulus along with nature walks and writing using the senses. This was used alongside a 'woodland sounds' relaxing soundtrack while they were writing.

[Access the audio here](#)

[Sensory Language Original1 - Copy.docx](#)

Visualisation 2 - Winter



[Access the audio here](#)

[Mindful writing part 2 - snow - Copy.docx](#)

Visualisation 3 - Circus



[Access the audio here](#)

[Revision Mindful visualisation circus - Copy.docx](#)

[Circus tent visualisation](#)

Appendix 7: Participants and Stakeholders

No of learners?	30	No of staff?	14
No of organisations?	1	No of employers/ stakeholders?	1

Appendix 8: Research/ Evaluation Approach

Participant/observer (e.g. practitioner reflective accounts, logs)	X	Interview/survey (e.g. polls, questionnaires, learner interviews)	X
Observation of practice (in person, video, observation notes)	X	Document analysis (e.g. learner work, session plans, annotated resources, policies)	X
Custom test/assessment (of knowledge, skill, attitude, participation) for your 'intervention'		High-stakes learner assessment (e.g. A Level results, End Point Assessment, BTECs)	
Before/after assessment (e.g. measures of progress or change in attainment, participation)	X	Comparative trial (e.g. comparing participants' outcomes against a 'control' group)	
Other (specify):	Action Research		

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