

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

**Can ESOL pedagogy be applied to GCSE and
Functional Skills delivery to develop
responsive teaching and learning?**

Buckinghamshire College Group – 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/>.

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Can ESOL pedagogy be applied to GCSE and Functional Skills delivery to develop responsive teaching and learning?

Buckinghamshire College Group

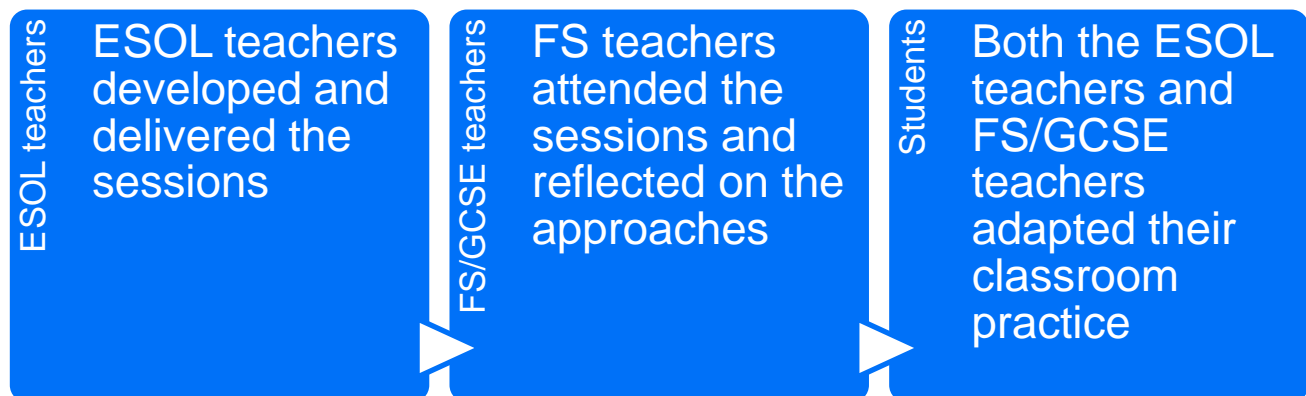
SUMMARY

This project aimed to utilise ESOL teaching methodologies, learning techniques and strategies to develop and enhance Functional Skills and GCSE English delivery to Study Programme and Apprenticeship students.

RATIONALE

The original remit of the project aimed to develop effectiveness of delivery of Functional Skills English to Apprentices who had English as a second language and develop Functional Skills delivery to ESOL students. However, at our first meeting, we discussed how teachers with a CELTA qualification or ESOL background tended to approach teaching from a student centred, learning by task, or discovery standpoint, whereas GCSE English teachers expressed that they sometimes felt constrained by the GCSE syllabus and compelled to deliver exam style content. Therefore, we hoped that exploring ESOL pedagogy would enable more active and discovery-led learning to meet individual needs.

Other Contextual Information



Our action research was part of The Education and Training Foundation's OTLA 8 Programme and involved the English and ESOL departments within our FE college. Our project was a planned collaboration between two departments to share teaching methodologies and expertise. The project had a layered approach in terms of the 'students' within the plan, act, observe and reflect model of research. Firstly, the project team comprised of the manager and two ESOL teachers who developed an in-house training programme. Secondly, this was delivered to six Functional Skills/GCSE teachers, who reflected on their learning in these sessions. Thirdly, the ESOL teachers and the Functional Skills/GCSE teachers adapted their practice based on their reflections on sessions to trial new approaches with their students, meaning twenty groups of students were

involved in the research.

APPROACH

Our project focused on the development of an in-house training course based on the key pedagogical teaching and learning principles of ESOL delivery. We developed a structure for our course, which originally focused on nine key aspects of language teaching:

- Foreign language lesson
- Lesson planning
- ESOL lesson formats, (please see The British Council website for further information e.g., [Presentation, Production and Practice](#) (PPP), [discovery approach](#), [Test, Teach, Test](#) (TTT)).
- Grammar and vocabulary lessons
- Clarifying and checking meaning
- Classroom interaction patterns
- Elicitation
- Feedback
- Effective reinforcement for motivation.

Through collaborative discussion and reflection, we refined and combined key techniques to develop our final course structure of five key sessions (see Appendix 3 for further details):

- Project launch/Foreign Language lesson
- Planning/lesson format and context setting
- Teaching grammar
- Teaching vocabulary
- Elicitation, feedback, and motivational techniques.

Originally, we planned for our delivery to be over ten weeks with a week of implementation and reflection between each session. We had also planned for all sessions to be face to face although this changed as the project evolved and some sessions were delivered via zoom.

Teacher reflection was a key factor in our research model and was incorporated into taught sessions and implementation weeks. We decided not to be prescriptive on the method of reflection that teachers should take and as a result we had greater participation in reflection.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

To an extent we met our objectives but not necessarily in the way that we had identified at the beginning of the project. As an organisation we had clearly identified what we wanted to develop, how we planned to do it and the impact we expected as a result. However, the very nature of action research meant it was not as straightforward as this and we ended up learning even more than we expected, as much from what did not work as well as from what did.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Teachers engaged with the language lesson (Appendix 4) and enjoyed it much more than we could have thought possible when planning the sessions. They all identified feelings of uneasiness, vulnerability, being engaged but uncomfortable, feeling confused but also interested during the twenty-minute language lesson. Teachers fed back that they valued this insight as some had forgotten what it could be like for students when learning. They all said they would consider this when planning. In terms of strategies used to engage and understand the language lesson, teachers stated asking questions/valuing repetition, mentally repeating sentences and teacher body language and gestures. They all reflected on the importance of these, and that the activity served as a reminder when planning to think about the smaller things and how these support students. In terms of changes to teaching the following was identified: activities to support repetition for students; strategies to support student perseverance as well as valuing and praising student perseverance; scaffolding activities; greater use of sentence starters; increasing feedback and positive reinforcement within lessons; linking first language to English for vocabulary; sentence structure and adding more images to help students visualise what they are reading.

Organisational Development

Organisationally, we had identified what we felt could support key improvements and wanted to support teachers to explore this aspect. As a management team, we wanted teachers to lead the project but, for various reasons outside of our control, the lead role kept coming back to managers. As an organisation, we felt that this may hinder exploration and engagement with the project, but that was not the case. The project provided managers with a clearer understanding of the internal battle some teachers have in terms of their ideas on how teaching and learning should be, and that changing or developing teaching from teacher centred to student centred is not always straightforward. Understanding this and supporting teachers to unpick this aspect is important to them being able to reflect on and implement changes. This was one of the key learning aspects of the project and has influenced next steps.

Professional Development

Our project had the following impact on individual approaches to professional development:

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
<p>2. Evaluate and challenge your practice, values and beliefs.</p>	<p>We had always planned to facilitate a collaboration and sharing of expertise between ESOL, and GCSE/FS teachers and the action research project provided dedicated time to explore key language pedagogy. The project enabled teachers from different departments and with differing lengths of service and experience to build positive relationships with peers, have professional discussions and explore key ideas and approaches to improve teaching and learning. This aspect we felt was a key success of the project and something we plan to continue to support teachers to do (see Appendix 5 for further details).</p>
<p>4. Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help students to learn.</p>	<p>For the teacher who delivered the Korean language lesson, the experience of delivering to peers enabled them to reflect on the reading aspect of GCSE delivery and the value of pre-teaching vocabulary for ESOL or EHCP students. The teacher decided to implement a Quizizz task initially midway through a session, but this was not so effective as students were then distracted by their phones. The teacher tried it again but as a starter prior to the reading task and this worked well. The lesson was much smoother, and they felt it added more diversity to the classroom and teaching environment. Students enjoyed the classes and liked being able to use their phones to do the quiz, and one student said they liked competing against the class. Others valued finding a definition or an image to help visualise the word.</p>
<p>9. Apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence.</p>	<p>Some teachers initially had reservations about the concept and felt their experiences as an ESOL and/or GCSE English teacher highlighted pedagogical challenges. Some teachers also felt that they needed to consider and evaluate their view that a teacher had a responsibility to teach. Therefore, they felt that in their own reflection and implementation they needed to bridge the divide between responsive teaching, learning and assessment and their current practices in the post-16 GCSE delivery and explore how to balance the two to optimise students' learning.</p> <p>Following the language session, these teachers applied more pair work and small group activities into lessons. Following implementation, teachers could see the benefits with activities less teacher-centred and more student focused. These changes to delivery allowed more time to check the students' work. This in turn seemed to increase the students' levels of self-confidence as they had already received one to one feedback prior to whole class feedback (see Appendix 5 for further details).</p>

LEARNING FROM THIS PROJECT

The concept of delivering a course to teachers to enable exploration and implementation into lessons was overall an effective concept. However, the approach for the course was not as effective as we had first planned. Timing of the project and staffing shortages due to Covid-19 impacted our original plan of a ten-week delivery. We planned to deliver the whole course face to face. However, because we wanted all staff to participate across all sites, some sessions ended up being delivered online. The language lesson was delivered face to face whereas the sessions on lesson format and grammar were remote online sessions. Therefore, we need to consider whether the language session went well because it was face to face or a more neutral lesson that all teachers could engage with. We realised that in order for teachers to fully embrace an approach they had to experience the modelling of it. Remote delivery at times hindered TTT or discovery model and made it feel more PPP, thus reinforcing the delivery we were trying to move away from.

We also realised that changing approaches to delivery is not always straightforward and teachers need time to unpick their views of the way they think teaching and learning should happen as well as have more time to reflect and implement methods. We had an expectation the teachers in the group would embrace, implement, and develop teaching learning and assessment activities at the same rate as a result of the course, which was unrealistic. Some teachers thrived within the sessions; they had 'lightbulb moments', were open to implementing and trialling new approaches and were not put off if they did not work first time. However other teachers struggled to see how the concepts could be applied and needed more scaffolding of activities to identify changes. Some teachers also had reservations around the timing of the course with exams looming and struggled with balancing experimentation with supporting students to cover what was needed for exams.

Moving forward, we plan to complement these structured language sessions with a lesson study approach (EEF 2020 and see also Appendix 6). Encouraging further collaboration through the joint planning, delivery, and observation. Our next steps are to revisit the sessions and use the Lesson Study model within the summer term as we can then link this to adapting schemes of work.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Project Team

Project Role	Name	Job Role	Contact
Project Lead	Nafesa Hamid	Acting Curriculum Manager	nhamid@buckscollegegroup.ac.uk
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Appendix 2: Learner Case Studies

Case study for student A.

An ESOL student studying Functional Skills as part of their study programme.

Context

As a Teacher I participated in language session and used English (L1) to discuss responses in Korean (L2) with peers before providing a final answer to the teacher leading the session. Consequently, this strategy was applied in lessons specifically to student A and student B who are both ESOL students, sharing the common language of Romanian (L1) and English (L2). I provided a task-based reading question individually and then in pairs. In the peer collaboration, use of L1 was effective in filling vocabulary gaps and in deciding how to use sentence structures to answer the task. When faced with difficulty, the student with stronger English would explain vocabulary gaps to the second student who was weaker using their first language. This led to a more successful answer as a result through collaboration.

Case study Student A

At the beginning of student A's learning journey, he was questioned about his confidence in speaking & listening, reading and writing skills - "I get shy when I talk, I forget how to use the English words, I can't think". The student's first language is Romanian and second is English. He was paired up with another more confident Romanian student to complete a speaking & listening and reading task, a strategy taken from the OTLA language session. When asked about working with a Romanian-speaking peer, student A answered, "yes, he helps me to find words and translate".

Regarding impact on student A's own learning, "I feel little shy but I can talk more, I can understand the question". It was evident that support from a slightly stronger peer gave student A more confidence in speaking & listening, as well as reading and writing.

In terms of the outcome, student A was very surprised to learn he had surpassed his peer in the reading and writing exams "I can't believe, I did better, I passed". Student A is now exhibiting much more confidence in his reading and writing skills.

At this point in student A's learning journey, he is now feeling confident enough to correct his peer's translation and is more confident to write about his passion of football.

Case study for student B

The student in focus: Student B had been out of formal education for 3 years. He has had a rather turbulent time over those years.

Student B would arrive late to lessons, or suddenly leave the lesson without asking for permission. "I wasn't feeling well, I need to cool down". However, he demonstrated very good communication skills (especially in small groups or class discussions) and he was very candid and open about his past, "I haven't been in school for years".

I would always welcome him back into the lesson and would praise his positive inputs – "my old teachers would just tell me off, thanks". The use of positive reinforcement and student led activities

was an effective strategy from the OTLA session because his attitude improved, as well as his punctuality and writing skills.

Student B passed his FS English with very good marks, having finally achieved academic success after many years of education failure. In the interview – “I haven’t passed anything in years”.

He now realises that he is capable of achieving. As a result, he is now working towards developing GCSE skills and he says, “I don’t want just to pass, I want to get more than a 4”, a challenge that he wants to take on and overcome.

He enjoys working with peers on tasks through task – teach – task approach and this makes Student B feel proud of his work as he is receiving recognition from his peers/teacher, increasing his confidence in succeeding.

Appendix 3: Language Course Structure

Course structure for 5 key language sessions we planned to deliver and what we aimed to achieve.

Access via this Padlet link: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_9c_BuckinghamshireCollegeGroup



Course outline for delivery of key language pedagogy.

Session number	Session and outcomes	Activity
1	<p>Korean Language Lesson Mini language lesson on basic Korean, followed by analysis of learning and reflections on teaching techniques and methodologies that could be implemented.</p> <p>Analyse and evaluate a range of background experiences students bring to class</p> <p>Identify and recognise similarities and differences between languages and strategies students use to build on previous learning</p> <p>Evaluate methodologies and identify strategies and techniques to apply in GCSE/FS learning</p>	<p>Main aim of session is to put teachers in the shoes of students.</p> <p>Questions prior to session: On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you... with planning responsive TLA to meet needs and starting points? with active/experiential learning? What are your current practises of responsive TLA activities to meet individual needs and starting points? What do you need to change or develop? What are your current practises of active/experiential learning?</p> <p>Korean content student will learn Students will learn to say: Hello/Good bye My name is ... This is a ...</p> <p>Reflection questions How did you feel during the micro teach? Do your students sometimes feel like this? What strategies did you use to try and understand and engage in the lesson? Do you think that your students try to apply previous learning strategies to tasks? What will you change as a result of your experience today? How will you include and develop previous learning to unravel concepts students already have?</p>

Appendix 4: Language Lesson

Power point of language lesson we delivered as part of our structured course to put the teachers in the shoes of students.

Access via this Padlet link: https://padlet.com/c_collins2/OTLA8_9c_BuckinghamshireCollegeGroup



Appendix 5: Teacher Reflections

Teacher reflection 1

Teacher reflections on the professional standard of applying theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence.

Apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence.

Some teachers initially had reservations about the concept and felt their experiences as an ESOL and/or GCSE English teacher highlighted pedagogical challenges. They felt that second language acquisition traditionally involved the need to practise communicative skills in the classroom and could not see how this would transfer easily to the context of the post-16 GCSE delivery.

Some teachers also felt that they needed to consider and evaluate their view that a teacher had a responsibility to teach. Therefore, they felt that in their own reflection and implementation they needed to bridge the divide between responsive teaching, learning and assessment and their current practices in the post-16 GCSE delivery and explore how to balance the two to optimise students' learning.

Following the language session, these teachers applied more pair work and small group activities into lessons. During a GCSE creative writing class, students were asked to complete a writing task with a partner. Following implementation, teachers could see the benefits with activities less teacher-centred and more student focused. These changes to delivery allowed more time to check the students' work. This in turn seemed to increase the students' levels of self-confidence as they had already received one to one feedback prior to whole class feedback. Teachers identified that their next steps would be for students to change partners and work with a less familiar student.

Teacher reflection 2

Teacher reflections on the professional standard of evaluating your practice with others and assessing its impact on learning

Evaluate your practice with others and assess its impact on learning.

For post-16 GCSE delivery to be a rich learning environment, teachers felt it was necessary to encourage communication and plan tasks which engaged students into active learning as a way of building students' motivation and self-confidence. As part of GCSE examination, students are required to analyse unseen extracts. Students who are successful in this examination are generally those who have developed a broad vocabulary. This can place ESOL/EAL students at a disadvantage. Therefore, following sessions on different lesson formats, one teacher identified three ESOL/EAL students and applied the TTT (Test, Teach, Test) approach to learning activities.

Students were asked to analyse how and why the writer had used language to describe the characters. The teacher observed that these students were having difficulty with some of the vocabulary, for example, the word "petulant" and why the writer had chosen this particular word to describe the character's behaviours. Following the teaching stage, students were then able to complete the written task and receive feedback. The TTT approach was applied alongside active learning strategies. The teacher reflected that the benefit of this approach was that during the first

stage students were able to discover the language themselves which can be motivating and helped build confidence. The testing stage was also motivating for the students because it improved their knowledge and reinforced what they had thought. It is hoped that through repetition of this approach, students will become more motivated. A further benefit was that it allowed students to work at their own pace and for the teacher to offer one to one support to groups of students.

Appendix 6: The Lesson Study Model

Here we share a brief overview of lesson study model, which we are using to support us with our next steps for our project.

Lesson study requires teachers/educators to work together and identify a curriculum area or class to continue to develop our students learning “ensuring that all learners are stretched and challenged; improving the quality and relevance of vocational learning; and tackling disengagement.” (DFES 2005).

Lesson study is a form of teacher led professional development, which allows us to consider long-term goals for students’ and teachers’ development. It allows teachers to collaborate and promotes the teacher as a reflective practitioner. The focus should always be on the student and on their learning and progress.

Appendix 7: Participants and Stakeholders

No of learners?	30	No of staff?	21
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)		Comparative trial (e.g. comparing participants' outcomes against a 'control' group)	
Other (specify):	Action Research.		

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