EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT (OTLA)

ANTHOLOGY OF PRACTITIONER ACTION RESEARCH REPORTS (2020-21)

ccConsultancy, That Reading Thing, Skills Digital

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Dr Catherine Manning (National Head of Practitioner Research and Development, Education and Training Foundation)

For the past seven years, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has been funded by the Department of Education (DfE) to run Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) collaborative projects. These projects involve groups of Further Education (FE) practitioners working together to explore strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning around a particular theme.

The ETF commissioned Claire Collins Consultancy (CCC) to run this year's OTLA programme, building on their success of delivering this programme previously. When I attend OTLA events and read the project reports, I only wish that such a programme had existed when I was teaching in FE; it brings me great joy to witness the benefits this programme brings to so many practitioners in the sector.

ETF supports teachers and leaders across the Further Education and Training sector to help them achieve their professional development goals for the benefit of learners and employers across England. At ETF we offer a wide range of professional development programmes for this sector including leadership and management, digital technology, maths and English, technical education and more.

In particular, at ETF we recognise the value of practitioner research as an approach which enables and empowers teachers and trainers to take charge of their own professional development for the benefit of their learners and wider stakeholders. OTLA collaborative projects are designed to bring together practitioners from across FE providers to undertake small-scale research on a specific area of teaching and learning.

It is widely recognised that compared to schools, there is little published research about effective practice in the Further Education sector. One option is for us to wait for more research to be funded and published. Another more courageous and exciting option, in my view, is for you as practitioners to capture and share your own evidence of improvements you and your learners have made. By becoming research active and research literate, OTLA participants have the opportunity to engage with existing evidence and crucially generate further understanding of how to effectively teach and learn in the diverse, challenging, and life-changing sector.

This booklet contains reports of the research into teaching, learning and assessment produced by participants on this year's OTLA programme that will engage and inspire practitioners, leaders, and researchers across FE.

Where can I find out more about the OTLA programme?

You can find out more about the OTLA programme at **https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/professional-development/practitioner-led-development-and-research/otla/**

'THE GREATER YOUR STORM, THE BRIGHTER YOUR RAINBOW': SHARING POTS OF GOLD FROM THE OTLA PROGRAMME IN LOCKDOWN

Claire Collins (Programme Director, ccConsultancy)

Dr Vicky Butterby (Programme Manager, ccConsultancy)

This anthology of action research accounts contains 53 chapters written by practitioners from post-16 education settings across England, along with think-pieces from members of the 'OTLA' programme team.

Phase 7 of the OTLA programme was led by a team from ccConsultancy and our partners, That Reading Thing and SfL Network. Project teams received grants to support remission and take part in training alongside the action research they carried out. They were supported and mentored by a group of post-16 education and action research specialists, all of whom work in the post-16 sector in various roles as teachers, managers, teacher trainers, coaches and researchers.

This year, funding for project teams to undertake their action research came from three distinct ETF programmes: OTLA 7 (English), Shaping Success (maths and English) and Essential Digital Skills (EDS). Working under the inclusive umbrella of the OTLA programme, teams were able to explore pertinent, subject-specific aspects of maths, English and EDS, whilst also being able to connect with one another to share practice, discuss research findings and grow together as a research community. This cross-fertilisation across different ETF programmes helped ensure that project teams were able to learn from one another, and that key emerging themes and cross-cutting findings for our work as educators within post-16 learning could be collated and shared.

As you work through this book, you will notice that it is divided into sections. Each section contains a group of projects, supported by a Research Specialist Lead (RGL). Our RGLs were carefully matched to each group of projects, chosen because of their extensive experience as both subject specialists and action researchers. You can read think pieces from our RGLs at the start of each section, which bring together and theorise some of the overarching findings from their respective project teams. Working alongside each RGL, were a small team of highly dedicated and supportive mentors.

Each mentor had responsibility for a cluster of three or four thematically grouped projects, drawing upon a golden combination of teaching expertise and research experience to support project teams to shape their research, make meaning from what they discovered and articulate their findings. You can read a brief introduction from each of our mentors to their team's project reports.

Finally, and most importantly, you will find research reports from each of our project teams. We have no doubt that you will find them a vibrant and illuminating read, and we hope that the passion, knowledge and care of each of our practitioner-researchers shines through as you learn from them. The different colours represent projects within each mentor cluster.

In 2020, when we first embarked on OTLA 7, we had no idea that the COVID-19 pandemic would have such a profound impact on all our lives. A broad range of research projects were chosen for support and, as time went on, many teams included a focus on best approaches for supporting learners studying remotely and in isolation through a series of national lockdowns. Such is the beauty of action research that it enables people to respond to current conditions in real time.

Chasing rainbows

Early in the programme, we began to plan how we would publish everyone's findings. We have always chosen a colour for our publications – 'the big green book' being our last anthology of research reports (for OTLA Phase 6). With so many different topics being researched this time, we knew this anthology would be a bumper edition, necessitating different coloured sections. We began to refer to it as the **'big rainbow book'**.

Moreover, rainbows were starting to have a special place in our lives, with windows across England (and the world) decorated with these seven-coloured arcs, expressing thanks to our nurses, teachers, ambulance teams, refuse collectors, delivery people and all the other key workers who helped us to navigate the choppy waters of the pandemic.

The rainbow became synonymous with hope and gratitude, and for us, also the power of action research to enable teachers to face the day-to-day challenges of teaching remotely and planning for the future, once this current storm had passed.

According to the Met Office (2021), *'rainbows are formed when sunlight is scattered from raindrops into the eyes of an observer.'* The Met Office also states that the weather conditions have to be just right in order to see a rainbow and that even in perfect rainbow forming conditions, you have to be in the right place at the right time or you will miss the moment (the sun needs to be sitting low on the horizon behind you and the rain needs to be falling in front of you).

Parallels can be drawn between being perfectly placed to appreciate the multi-coloured magnificence of a post-storm rainbow, and OTLA participants' own positionalities as 'insider' action researchers working within post-16 learning. By using action research as a vehicle through which they were able to collaboratively critique, develop and improve their practice, participants were able to draw out and share a nuanced collection of findings and recommendations for teaching and learning that might pass other researchers by (e.g., those less immersed in our sector).

Engaging in action research within post-16 organisations enabled them to *'draw upon the shared understandings and trust of [their] colleagues [and learners], with whom normal social interactions of working communities have been developed'* (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010 p.1).

By writing about and sharing our learning, as the project teams featured within this Big Rainbow Book have done, we contribute an original, contextualised technicoloured spectrum of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988) that have the potential to question and shift monochromatic thinking and approaches to educational reform.

In her writing on rainbows and mythology, author Terri Windling (2020) states:

> *'Mysterious and ephemeral, appearing and disappearing in the blink of an eye, rainbows in stories around the globe are magical pathways to Somewhere Else: the spirit world, the Faerie realm, the lands of the dead or the palaces of the gods.'*

Learners in post-16 learning are often also yearning to be 'Somewhere Else'. Many have been marginalised within other areas of our education system and are understandably sceptical about meritocratic ideologies and magical pathways to educational success and belonging.

The context of our work in post-16 learning means that we are often in the land of second chances, where people are encouraged to start afresh and renegotiate their relationships with learning. By drawing on the principles of action research, project teams were able to explore and develop learner-centred practices that supported learners not only to make academic progress, but to value their talents and feel heard and respected too. As you work your way through this anthology of research, you will see how this occurred in a myriad of ways.

Pots of Gold

In Irish mythology, a pot of gold is always said to be at the end of every rainbow. If we consider practitioner-led research to be a metaphorical rainbow of 'hopeful praxis' (Butterby, Collins and Powell, 2018) within and for our sector, our project teams this year have shown us that there is much to be treasured as the result of undertaking action research in post-16 settings.

We have seen that action research is a way to…

R – Refresh and revitalise

During our OTLA 7 Interim Dissemination event (December 2020), CPD lead Andy Convery described action research as *"refreshing parts of the sector that other research fails to reach"*. Whereas traditional 'academic' research approaches can sometimes feel out of sync with the 'proudly practical' nature of post-16 learning (Collins, Convery and Read, 2021), action research by contrast is an open and dynamic invitation to start where we're at, to investigate our practice and to make timely and pragmatic changes that benefit and support our learners.

The activeness of action research, coupled with its inherently optimistic nature, can help revitalise tired and frustrated mindsets, helping people become 'unstuck' in their work, and, to quote one OTLA participant, *"to fall in love with teaching again"*.

O – Obstinately overcome obstacles

Teaching in post-16 learning comes with its own unique set of challenges that those of us immersed within the sector are acutely aware of. Colloquially described as the 'Cinderella Sector' (initially by the Conservative politician Kenneth Baker due to the lack of government attention FE received (Baker, 1989) but more commonly within the

sector itself because of FE's marginalised status within educational policy, academic literature and political decision making), arguably, *"FE deserves a better future than its immediate past has offered it"* (Keep, 2020:xxvi).

More recently, there have been calls to reject this 'cinderella status' (Daley, Orr and Petrie, 2015; Petrie, 2015) and instead celebrate the creativity, autonomy and collective strength of FE-based practitioners.

By engaging in action research, OTLA participants have been able to explore, discuss and share grass roots, contextualised understandings of teaching and learning within post-16 learning. The research findings in this anthology reflect our practitioners' passion for their work and illuminate the unique potential our sector has *"to say yes when everyone else has said no"* (Duckworth and Smith, 2017:6).

It is within this spirit that our practitioner researchers have bravely battled the additional emotional and practical challenges of the global pandemic, working alongside colleagues and learners to obstinately overcome obstacles, to navigate national lockdowns and to establish, renew and make meaning from remote and blended learning practices when face-to-face teaching was put on hold.

Y – Yoda yourself and your assumptions about how learners learn

During his training to become a Jedi Knight (Star Wars V, the Empire Strikes Back), Yoda explains to a young Luke Skywalker that *"you must unlearn what you have learned"*.

Action research asks us to do the same; we need to be open and willing to challenge our assumptions, to investigate the effectiveness of our teaching practices from a fresh perspective and to put our tacit (practice-based) knowledges to the test.

In her book Action Research for Professional Development (2017), Professor Jean McNiff describes action research as *"critical and risky"* (p.35).

Jean goes on to remind us that *"improving one's thinking in order to improve one's practices involves questioning what we think is the case, and possibly changing our positions in light of greater honesty. This can be uncomfortable, and often requires considerable courage."* (ibid).

G – Gradually gain momentum as a voice for post-16 research

The OTLA programme enables practitioners from different settings, geographical locations and subject specialisms to come together with a shared aim of improving teaching and learning practices for learners within our sector.

By collaboratively engaging in research activity, by reflecting on our findings and by discussing them with colleagues, we form rich and vibrant *'constellations of practice'* (Mycroft and Sidebottom, 2018) that help us discuss, develop, critique and shape our work.

When we share our research findings, when we amplify learner voices, and when we actively engage with what other researchers have found, we show that we value our thinking, that we value our insight and that we value our contribution to knowledge as practitioner-researchers within (and beyond) post-16 learning.

The accounts produced by our OTLA teams in this anthology thus form a substantive body of grounded, contextualised research findings for our sector that illuminate the values above, helping us gradually gain momentum as both knowledge producers and as a collective voice for 'what works' in post-16 learning.

B – Build better relationships with learners and with one another

A reoccurring theme during OTLA action research projects past and present centres around the importance of developing caring and trusting relationships with learners in order to support their educational progress. McNiff (2017:42) reminds us that action research is grounded in *"dialogical, inclusional and collaborative"*, practices that by their nature support and underpin learner-centred approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

When people's opinions and perspectives are listened to, valued and acted upon, we are inevitably creating conditions where relationships can deepen, and meaningful learning can occur.

I - Inspire impactful improvements for learners and one another

Action research has at its heart the concept of improvement (McNiff, 2017), and our OTLA research teams were each united in their desire to make personal and operational changes to improve learners' educational experiences and outcomes.

Central to many projects was the concept of holistic improvement, with research teams exploring how they might better support learner wellbeing, confidence, self-worth and self-belief, as well as how improvements might be made in relation to learner retention, progress and achievement.

Impact can be a difficult thing to measure, and often needs to be reviewed over time. Anecdotally however, practitioners shared stories of learners *"not asking for the time every 2 minutes"*, of *"coming back to class after break"* and of *"seeing themselves as writers with something important to say"*.

Several participants also reported better relationships with learners and enjoyed closer working practices with colleagues from within and outside of their organisations and departments.

One participant shared during our OTLA Celebration Event that action research had given them *"time to think and time to breathe"* with another saying, *"action research shows we are not alone, we all have similar challenges and difficulties, and we can work together to solve them."*

V- Validate values-driven, learner-centred pedagogies for post-16 learning

Engaging in action research can be simultaneously exhilarating and challenging. As we open ourselves up through the research process and reflect upon our research findings, we may discover that our previous assumptions about effective teaching and learning are disrupted or even subverted. Action research encourages us to consider our personal and professional values and interrogate how our current practices align or fall short of these (McDonagh, Roche, Sullivan and Glenn, 2020:82).

Over the course of the OTLA programme, practitioners continually reiterated the importance of developing learner-centred approaches for teaching and learning, of 'seeing the person beyond the grade' and of creating a climate of care that fostered high expectations and continual positive regard. From hand-delivered work packs to the creation of safe and supportive online spaces for learners to connect with one another, our action research findings suggest that these values driven, learner-centred pedagogies pay dividends, improving learner attendance, aiding motivation and self-belief, and enabling opportunities for full and active engagement in learning.

We now invite you to read the action research findings shared by post-16 practitioners in this anthology of their 2020-21 project reports. So many of their projects embody the ideas we have shared above.

For example, you can read about the project at **Cambridge Regional College**, where learners who had not been used to writing and who lacked confidence expressing themselves creatively explored the genre of horror and influenced people around the college to take notice of what they were doing. Hereby, learners who had previously not wanted to go to their mandated English classes looked forward to their sessions and improved their English outcomes.

At **Wolverhampton College**, learners were given the chance to expand their thinking using free association diagrams and became more confident in planning their creative writing. In another example, a partnership between **Shipley College** in the North of England and **Waltham Forest College** in the South illustrated the powerful effect of introducing previously unknown learners (from the respective colleges) as peer reviewers and, in addition, the positive influence on writing practices when learners from the two colleges sent letters to one another *'like they did in the old days'* (!).

We can also point to the prison project led by a team from **Weston College** at HMP Maidstone, who improved their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) initial assessment practices or the team from **Manchester Adult Education Service** who explored the extent that their Learning Community app could support low-level English learners to develop their Essential Digital Skills (EDS).

This anthology is a collection of accounts of significant projects such as these few examples. We hope that you enjoy reading about the 2020–21 OTLA 7 project teams' findings, carried out during such a tumultuous, stormy period of our lives. Just like a rainbow, the accounts represent a moment in time. We think that they are especially poignant because they are accounts of a time when post-16 practitioners worked tirelessly to ensure that learners got the best support possible and were enabled and connected through their learning communities.

As so many of the banners and window posters in our neighbourhoods stated at the time; *'without a storm, there cannot be a rainbow'*

PRACTITIONER ACTION RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING
Dr Andy Convery (Research CPD Lead, ccConsultancy Associate)

The reports in this booklet carry a surprisingly uplifting message for these challenging times. Although the practitioners conducting these action research projects were confronted with chaotic conditions which completely changed teaching as we know it, these reports collectively display a powerful sense of professional wellbeing – the participants radiate professional pride and professional purpose through their research activities.

And despite the frustrations when initial plans had to be abandoned, and the revised plans had to be continually refocused at short notice, the practitioner researchers demonstrated a professional resourcefulness that adjusted to new constraints and used them as a stimulus to trigger new thinking and innovative activities.

I became so intrigued by this sense of positive purpose breathing through the reports that I began to look into wellbeing more deeply, and, like many of us over the past eighteen months, I turned to the NHS who provide a valuable framework for understanding – and developing – wellbeing (NHS, 2019). They suggest five steps to mental wellbeing, four of which underpin these projects[1], and these offer a useful framework for understanding the benefits of teachers researching their practices.

1. "Connect with others"

Paradoxically, in a time of lockdown characterised by isolation and separation, teachers adopted a variety of new approaches to make contact with learners, and they regularly built better relationships with those reserved learners who might sometimes slip below the radar in conventional, more demanding group sessions. Time after time, marginalised learners responded enthusiastically to the one-to-one opportunity offered through technology and appreciated this dedicated attention.

Even in the severe constraint of lockdown lock-ups in prison education, moving voices can be read in prison 'diaries', where individuals have the freedom to express their needs freed from peer pressures dominating classroom settings. These fresh connections with learners reciprocally built their sense of wellbeing, and their gratitude is repeatedly recorded in learners' detailed feedback.

The research project activities also enabled new associations with established colleagues and mentors. Even though traditional project team meetings were not usually viable and project participation could not always develop as widely as intended, staff felt liberated to request help to solve emergent online teaching challenges.

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[1] The fifth is "Keeping physically active" – I can't find evidence of this in these reports but possibly the improved sense of purpose may have triggered some extra-curricular physical activities!

These collaborative activities enabled staff to celebrate a revived, shared commitment to helping learners, and new circumstances encouraged teachers to shake off some tired coping strategies and embrace more positive learner-centred activities; to quote one established teacher with twenty years' experience, *"Taking part in this has changed my life"*.

2. "Give to others where possible"

Action research provided a framework to build on teachers' natural altruism in wanting to make a difference for their learners, in tandem with the satisfactions of being able to help and support colleagues. The project reports bear evidence of where unexpected opportunities have arisen to provide individuals with extra help, and the research process has drawn on teachers' natural generosity of spirit by instigating fulfilling new ways that practitioners can 'walk the extra mile' to help both individual learners and colleagues. This fundamental benefit from 'giving to others' often goes unremarked in projects, as the instinctive helpfulness of teachers is a taken-for-granted (though much appreciated) satisfaction of the profession (Nias, 1989).

3. "Learn something new"

All teachers had to learn something new as Covid constraints moved teaching online, but the action research project structure prompted and supported staff to explore how the online potential could be fully exploited. Through the motivating assistance of mentors, practitioners explored what engaged and challenged learners; for example, how to 'chunk' content; how to use activities as preparation or as follow-up; how to solicit and reward learner feedback; and how to persuade reticent individuals to contribute to virtual groupwork.

The 'new' was not just how to use new technologies and applications, nor was it just learning how to transfer traditional content into online packages. This action research-driven professional resourcefulness was not just about using resources, but in discovering how to use them wisely.

The 'new' was often fundamental, as teachers reassessed their understandings of how learners learn, and supportive mentors and responsive learners helped them reconsider what helps learners to make progress.

In response to the question *"How has your view of how students learn changed?"*, multiple participants commented on revising their expectations of learners' capacity to:

- self-manage
- take responsibility for their learning
- support their peers
- contribute purposefully to the research.

Practitioner researchers repeatedly celebrated how working more closely with learners had reinforced their conviction that *"each individual follows a unique journey"*. Teachers testified to changing their assumptions about what learners actually need from teachers, and they began to claim new pedagogical identities as enablers and facilitators of more autonomous learning, rather than being mere deliverers of content.

4. "Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)"

When participants researched their teaching practices and investigated **what** was happening in their encounters with learners, they paused to deliberate on those events, and this provoked and inspired deeper insights into their practices. They found themselves asking **why** their assumptions had been challenged, and as they looked more closely at their activities and they listened more carefully to their learners, they began to understand themselves as teachers, and to consider the effects of their actions on the learners:

"They have a love of learning we assumed they didn't have"

> *"The relationship between the teacher and the student is important – I knew that, but sometimes, who the teacher is, isn't who you may have thought it is!"*
>
> *"I've been given the time and opportunity to think deeply about learning from a learner's point of view. Very precious"*
>
> *"It [our project] has busted a lot of myths that I and colleagues have had"*

Figure 1: Mentimeter responses. Dissemination Event, July 9th 2021

When participants held their learning moments to scrutiny, they became aware of the unique richness of each learners' experience that is too often overlooked. Their action research, like mindfulness, enabled a higher level of conscious deliberation that created the conditions for pedagogical reawakening and professional wellbeing by helping them reflect on the moment and use their new knowledge to plan more rewarding activities for learners.

Final thoughts

In concluding these reflections on the practical and emotional benefits of action research for practitioners' professional identities, it is worth considering the Ofsted (2019a) findings about teacher well-being. The Ofsted research report found that levels of satisfaction with life are higher among the general public than staff in schools and Further Education providers, and overall levels of teachers' occupational well-being are low. The report identified that high workloads, lack of resources, and poor learner behaviour led to stress for teachers, who felt that they do not have

enough control over policy, which changed too quickly. In light of this report, it seems counter-intuitive that those OTLA researchers embracing additional research responsibilities along with the crisis management of the pandemic should actually experience greater professional wellbeing and positive professional purpose.

Perhaps the answer can be found in that Ofsted recommended that staff well-being can be restored by creating a positive working environment *"in which staff have an appropriate level of autonomy"*. Practitioners do not have control over policy, but through researching their practice they do enjoy significant control and agency over their professional responsiveness to how policy impacts learners. The action research projects demonstrate significant improvements in participants' professional pride, professional purpose and professional resourcefulness, and hopefully post-16 leaders will continue to encourage their practitioners to engage in action research.

As an action researcher, I want to end this analysis with a challenging reflection that will hopefully stimulate the next wave of actions. Many of the OTLA projects found that the pandemic disrupted traditional practices that were not proving very effective, and new practices were negotiated as participants established more rewarding forms of communication with individual learners.

With the potential end of lockdowns in sight, will the 'old normal' with its inefficiencies of scale and traditional delivery practices seep back to dominate and disempower? Or can we return to a 'new normal' which has fostered wellbeing in staff and learners, and incorporates individual tutorials, additional online activities, and frequent use of learner voice?

OTLA 7 ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (NORTH)

Research Group Lead: Sue Lownsbrough
Mentors: Sue Lownsbrough
Dr. Catherine McPartland
Sonia Thomas

HELPING LEARNERS FEEL THE RELEVANCE OF ENGLISH

Sue Lownsbrough (Research Group Lead)

The relentless pressure on English teachers in the post-16 sector to raise achievement grades, whether it be grade 4 GCSE or Functional Skills, often narrows the focus of teaching and learning to examinations: 'Paper 1 question 3', 'spelling, punctuation and grammar' and so on.

But does this focus engage or motivate all our learners? For those few who need the qualification for their next steps or those who just missed out, this approach may prove motivating. Some learners know what they need to work on and there is a clear link to their lessons.

However, for those who believe they are "No good at English" and will never achieve the elusive grade 4, or those who cannot see the relevance of GCSE in their lives, this approach fails to inspire confidence and often results in disengagement and slow progress, with some learners even regressing. This point was illustrated on the project by one teacher's commentary, *"many students suggest that they may not have the grade 4, but they can read, write and speak. Therefore, to many students, the 4 becomes irrelevant."*

One common thread from the OTLA 7 Practitioner Action Research projects was how learner engagement, motivation, confidence, and their progress improved significantly when learners could relate to their learning. This manifested itself in several ways:

Building upon existing practices from their everyday lives

- employing technology (Warrington and Vale Royal College)
- using emojis to annotate texts, plan writing and develop vocabulary (Kendal College and South Lakes Community Learning).

Conquering negative beliefs about their ability

- mastering challenging vocabulary and grammar (Reaseheath College and Sheffield Lifelong Learning respectively)
- developing positive features of growth mindset around confidence and success (Sheffield College).

Recognising English as a life skill beyond the GCSE classroom:

- learner directed shared creative writing for predominantly young males (City of Liverpool College and Hopwood Hall College)
- supporting vocational writing (Lakes College).

It seems that English teachers continuously search for the "key" to unlock each learner's potential, often focusing on finding ways to help learners tackle challenging examination questions. However, practitioners conducting action research found that engaging with learners' interests raised self-belief and created a new sense of personal achievement, improving their confidence to face up to the demands of the examination. This can be seen in the following vignettes:

Prioritising learners' needs

At the start of the project, teachers still felt the pressure to focus on examination preparation, as illustrated by this teacher's reflection:

"I found it challenging to consistently include mindset starters at the beginning of lessons. With the current situation, Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGS) and COVID-19 related bubbles, time is very limited. It often felt like I was 'wasting time' if I didn't move straight on to exam preparation. Sometimes, even if I did have time to plan a mindset starter,

I would often skip it as felt like I couldn't go into as much depth with the students as I wanted, or that it wasn't as meaningful or impactful as preparing for the exam questions."

During the project this teacher trialled different teaching approaches to engage with the learners' lives and perspectives. For example, through a systematic use of *"mindset starter activities at the beginning of lessons to encourage students to understand why they were learning about or developing a particular skill, which often linked to the real world".*

By the end of project, the teacher was pleased to report how her teaching approach had changed,

"A huge shift in focus to building confidence in all students that I teach to inspire, motivate and help raise their aspirations … I have better understanding of adult learning needs than this time last year e.g. the need to understand 'why' and that instruction should take into account a wide range of pre-existing background knowledge and experience. This has allowed me to adapt my teaching practice to suit such differing needs."

This has resulted in the teacher's *"increased confidence …in (her)ability to meet their needs."*

Connecting with learners' interests

A GCSE tutor, who had been uncertain at the outset of the project was pleasantly surprised to see how using emojis successfully helped her learners to engage with texts. This tutor had previously modelled underlining and highlighting for text-marking activities, but she had found that learners often struggled to apply these approaches themselves, either highlighting too much or nothing at all.

She discovered learners found emojis to be the most natural tool for text marking, and as she encouraged this approach it really boosted learner confidence:

"They help show emotions through picture and make it easier to see."

"They, help the reader understand characters' emotions and the emotions the writer wants to show".

"I think emojis are helpful as if you go back to a quote that you want to use you can use an emoji of what that quote makes you feel. Everybody has similar emotions and feelings when they see the same emoji".

The teacher concluded, *"There is a playful element to using emojis that lessens the intimidation of getting it right first time."*

Another learner on the project felt,

"The emoji project has helped me to understand English. It helped me to understand how a character is feeling in the text and be able to write a relevant response. It's very natural for me to use emojis in my everyday life when I'm texting people, so I already know what they mean. I have got more ticks in my work than I have ever got in my life…"

Giving space for learners to express their concerns

A GCSE tutor who was looking at approaches to developing learner resilience found that giving her adult learners time in every session for discussion about their concerns, empowered them in their learning journey and had a positive impact. *"Learners need to feel listened to and that the classroom, online or in college, is a safe space for them to explore ideas and opinions."*

As a result, she has adjusted teaching and learning to incorporate what they have learned as part of the action research.

"I find it interesting that often these discussions, particularly in college, have opened up space for students to discuss wider issues, which in a global pandemic have highlighted how vulnerable some students are to things like conspiracy theories. I think that perhaps I am now more open to having these discussions and talking about wider issues with students as I feel a responsibility to raise awareness and not see them as separate and disruptive to student's learning."

Acknowledging learners' concerns about examinations

Whereas the projects above focused on teaching and learning approaches to engage learners, and help to build their resilience generally, by contrast another organisation focused directly on examinations. They aimed to develop vocabulary to use in the examination that had been identified by the awarding body. However, even though they had prioritised the examination requirements, the tutors found that inviting learners' views about their teaching approach towards the examination had a noticeable effect. Involving learners in choosing teaching approaches built the learners' confidence and helped them to make progress.

The changes in approach were welcomed by learners compared to the more traditional approaches they had experienced at school, where they had typically been given ten new words each week with a test on Friday. The key changes were to offer fewer items of vocabulary to learn but spending time with the learners in mastering their use.

Giving learners more agency over their learning had a significant impact on engagement and progress:

"You can get them in your head. It's better to get them in your head instead of changing every week."

When they were asked how they felt about the words, learners reported they might not use them in everyday speech, but they do feel more confident that they now could choose the right words.

The Lancaster Literacies Project (Ivanic et al, 2009) gives many examples where situating learning within learners' experiences and interests, had a significant impact on achievement. They describe learners' existing literacy practices as having certain characteristics:

"multimodal… combining symbols, pictures…" (as in the Kendal College and South Lakes Community Learning project).

"multimedia" (Warrington and Vale Royal).

"generative … involving meaning-making, creativity and getting things done" (City of Liverpool College and Hopwood Hall College, Lakes College, Sheffield Lifelong Learning and Reaseheath College).

"agentic … with the students having control" (Sheffield College).

This sample illustrates the extent to which the OTLA practitioner research projects created a framework in which teachers were able to **evaluate their existing practice with others and assess its impact on learning** (Professional Standard 10, ETF, 2014) which resulted in a shift from a focus away from the end result, the examination, to the approach to learning; an approach which was guided by the learners, their lives and their drivers. Although they refocused from directing all their attention on the examination, their teaching impacted positively on the assessment outcomes.

EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 1
Mentor: Sue Lownsbrough

1. Kendal College
   South Lakes Community Learning
2. Lakes College

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPING WRITING
Sue Lownsbrough (Mentor)

These two projects focused on a simple strategy in an attempt to engage learners with continuing to study English. Both projects were employing strategies that had been researched some time ago in The Lancaster Literacies Project *"Literacies for Learning in Further Education"* (Ivanic et al, 2009).

This research, undertaken by Lancaster and Stirling Universities and four further education colleges: Perth, Anniesland, Preston and Lancaster and Morecambe colleges, was based on the suggestion, *"that students who appear to have low levels of literacy in educational settings can be highly literate in other domains of life: in their work, domestic, community and leisure activities"*. In both cases this suggestion proved correct.

Kendal College and South Lakes Community Learning focused on a learner-led strategy incorporating the universal language of emojis, to ignite learner motivation, engagement and build resilience, by concentrating on persuasive, emotive writing skills. Feedback showed learners and tutors found the approach engaged learners and helped them to make progress in GCSE, Functional Skills, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.

Learners engaged with using emojis from the outset. Comments from them show how much more confident they felt using a communication tool from their everyday lives.

Lakes College aimed to establish a simple planning tool for use in vocational lessons, to help learners complete longer writing tasks, and to build a bridge between English and vocational subjects.

Learners had not realised that skills learned in a GCSE class were not only transferable but were also useful on the vocational courses and in their personal lives.

Tutors in the post-16 sector can gain much by exploring teaching and learning approaches which are based on learners' existing literacy practices and building on these for their GCSE or Functional Skills courses.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-1/**

1. EMOJIS IN ENGLISH AND ESOL
Kendal College and South Lakes Community Learning

This project focused on a learner-led strategy incorporating the universal language of emojis, to ignite learner motivation, engagement and build resilience, by concentrating on persuasive, emotive writing skills. Feedback showed learners and tutors found the approach engaged learners and helped them to make progress in GCSE, Functional Skills, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.

Summary

The strategy aimed to motivate learners by using emojis.

Learners used emojis for reading, writing, and developing vocabulary by linking words and phrases with emojis. This created a strong link between image and meaning. It also engaged the learners with the task. One learner's comment, *"Are we doing the emoji thing again today?'* highlights overall engagement.

The universal language of emojis provided a familiar, fun, relatable platform and it promoted inclusivity. Encouraging learners to use their own bank of emojis motivated them to start reading which built their confidence.

Developing learners' understanding of the text was transferred to their writing and planning. As learners progressed, they found they no longer needed the Emoji in English steppingstone.

Rationale

Many learners come to Further Education without achieving their GCSE grade 4. Often, they are reluctant to engage with reading, writing, and planning. Similarly, ESOL learners can struggle to learn enough vocabulary to communicate. The existing tools learners used did not engage them and we wanted to see if, through using emojis, a universal communication approach, we could re-engage them.

Today learners reading and writing experiences have strong links with social media and the internet. Following the Lancaster Literacies Project *Improving Learning in College: Rethinking literacies across the curriculum. (*Ivanic et al, 2009), which looked at how everyday literacies can be used for educational purposes, we planned this research project to see whether Lancaster's successes could be replicated using emojis for reading, writing, and developing vocabulary.

We also wanted to see if emojis would be a steppingstone, a temporary scaffold, which would allow learners to develop their English skills then see them progress without them.

Approach

- The team planned the approach.
- Learners stated they liked emojis.
- Starting point: initial assessment.
- Tutors supported learners to create an emoji glossary for reference.

Reading

1. Introduce the text – use Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTs).
2. Introduce the lesson's learning topic for example Engage with a text to analyse language.
3. Tutor models.
    i.   Read without annotation.
    ii. Read and annotate the text with emojis where language impacts on reader response.
4. Learner reads text using emojis to identify language that impacts on their emotions – for example a smiley face if it is something they like.
5. Feedback on their response to the text: discussion to develop their interpretation.
6. Introduce an exam question linking emoji learning aim. For example, "Give two examples of where the writer has used emotive language. Give a different effect each one has on the reader."[2]
7. Tutor models how to interpret the emoji in answering a question.
8. Learners then answer the question.

This approach can be utilised for the author's point of view, the impact it has on the reader and a comparison of texts.

Writing

9. Demonstrate to learners how to plan a piece of writing with the use of emojis.
10. Learners develop their planned response to a written task (mind map or bullet points).
11. Learners then add emojis to prompt them to develop additional or expanded sentences.

12. Learners are encouraged to re-read their text, annotating with an emoji to identify emotive persuasive writing to assess their learning. This approach supports their reading skills as well.

Figure 1.1: Reading and annotating text with emojis

Figure 1.2: Writing example

Vocabulary

The learners identify words that relate to a particular emoji.

13. Initial assessment: twelve common emojis were chosen as a starting point to test any prior vocabulary knowledge. Learners say or write words prompted by each emoji.
14. Tutor, and or learner, then models the words in example sentences. Learners repeat.
15. In the following sessions develop learners' vocabulary related to emojis from the initial assessment, beginning with three words linking to each emoji. Activities include:
    - Call and response to drill in pronunciation.
    - Memory games in which the learners turned the emoji flash cards over and matched them with words (Figure 1.3).
    - Speaking activities where learners were taught how to use words in full sentences.
    - Facial and body language activities to develop cultural knowledge of nonverbal communication.

Figure 1.3: Memory game

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The most significant thing the team learned was the impact on learner engagement and motivation and subsequent progress that was made when using an approach that came from learners' lives and experience (emojis).

> *"I draw the emoji or plan my writing to include emojis before I start my work. I found this really helped me engage more in my writing because I already have a much better understanding of the task including gramma (sic) and expressive writing."*
>
> Learner quote

This changed perceptions and subsequent teaching approaches. For example - one tutor noted it was a *"useful method to engage learners and I had not thought it would be so effective within my lessons"* (Professional Standard 02). Similarly, tutors reported they found meeting and collaborating enhanced their teaching experience and professionalism (Professional Standard 06).

We also found that by consulting learners about the approach throughout the project motivated and empowered them and gave them the confidence to decide when they no longer needed emoji scaffolds to complete the tasks set.

> *"The emoji project has helped me to understand English. It helped me to understand how a character is feeling in the text and be able to write a relevant response. It's very natural for me to use emojis in my everyday life when I'm texting people, so I already know what they mean. I have got more ticks in my work than I have ever got in my life…"*.

As the project progressed researching teaching and learning approaches expanded and evolved beyond the initial parameters for both tutors and

learners, partly from the shift to online learning, but also as curiosity and confidence grew.

Here are just some examples:

- Linking words with the visual stimulus of emojis helped learners with vocabulary retention' and then develop subtle changes in meaning relating to a single emoji. Learners also started to create their own.
- One learner independently drew and labelled many emojis. When asked why, they stated *"the pictures help me remember the words"*.
- Learners used emojis to show tutor whether they understood and were confident.
- Learners used online text marking as typing notes and underlining online was difficult. Inserting an emoji to online texts was easier.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

We chose English and ESOL, and different qualifications, to see whether the approach worked across this range. The results would inform future adoption of teaching and learning approaches which had been tested for engagement, motivation, and inclusivity.

We had a Microsoft Teams page which provided a hub of engagement, reflection, and transparency. Meeting informally weekly, and formally monthly, allowed the team to bond, share good practice, air concerns, and identify successes.

None of the tutors working on the project had collaborated in this way previously and all felt they had benefited from it. For example, the ESOL tutors had worked independently and are now sharing good practice and planning the way forward with their learners. This created a strong feeling of professional identity. This was further enhanced when each tutor presented their part of the project at the interim dissemination event.

Hayley Chapman, Cumbria County Council Area and Curriculum manager, commented they had *"… gained knowledge from their peers; our profile in Cumbria, and beyond, has been raised and we have an opportunity to cascade learning to other members of our ESOL team so they too can implement the use of emojis in their teaching.'*

Moving forward, the outcomes of the project, which have been shared more widely within our organisations, will be incorporated into teaching, learning and assessment approaches.

All members of the team have extended their connectivity with the post-16 sector beyond their organisations sharing with, and learning from, colleagues across the country.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention, and progression

Historically learners studying English in Further Education are reluctant readers and this is one of the biggest challenges for GCSE and Functional Skills tutors. Work completed by learners taking part in the project showed they had read and understood the texts. What was surprising, and delighted the team, was the enthusiasm the learners had for reading. Gone was the traditional reluctance. Using a tool that they were familiar with, emojis, had given them the motivation to start reading and the ensuing success built their confidence. One learner commented that, *"They have helped me to understand the text we have been studying,"* and four learners expected their GCSE levels to be one or two levels higher.

Previously, learners often complained *"I just don't know what to write"* which left them feeling deflated. Using emojis to develop their understanding of the text was transferred to their writing. Tutors reported that they were a *"successful starting point for their written responses," and a useful "planning tool for GCSE writing tasks"*. One learner commented that *"It makes the writing and planning easier than at my secondary school."*

ESOL learners embraced the use of emojis to improve their vocabulary. Linking emojis to words was a novel way of helping them to remember, which in turn helped with more effective communication. One learner's

knowledge of words increased from 39 to 64 and another reported more confidence speaking to neighbours and friends, securing employment. Furthermore, as a starting point it was a great way to improve teamwork and sharing their thoughts and ideas. *"Learners were highly motivated and stayed on task throughout the lessons with minimal prompts. It encouraged discussion and reflective thinking amongst them".* By adapting the emoji as tool to build vocabulary, it provided a robust structure to develop communication, fostering a sense of community.

Tutors said, *"The project has helped them achieve their English learning goals and to integrate into the UK more quickly than otherwise would have been the case"* and also *"Learners are motivated by emojis which is evident in the work they have produced and their reaction in class"*.

Learning from this project

KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS – CONFIRMATION OF EFFECTIVE APPROACHES

Situating learning in learners' literacy practices leads to engagement, increased confidence that they can succeed and consequently greater progress in their learning. This was supported by the learners.

One learner stated, *"I felt slightly overwhelmed before I started to use emojis, the emojis really helped me understand the emotions and help me express myself more."* They helped to overcome social, language and cultural barriers as emojis are a universal language. Learners stated that it, *"has widened my vocabulary (I know more words)", "has helped me understand the difference between words with similar meaning"* and it *"has motivated me to learn."*

Using emojis to annotate a text helped learners to understand meaning for example one learner stated, *"I found using emojis in paragraphs helped me to understand the emotions and feelings within the text."* This in turn led to improved progress as we learned that their previous reluctance to engage with reading had been overcome.

Time spent talking to learners about approaches to learning not only empowered the learners, but tutors gained valuable insights into what makes effective teaching and learning for individuals. It may seem there is insufficient time for consultation, but when new knowledge of learner preference, or successful peer approaches, are implemented, learners improved progress more than makes up for it.

Reflection identified *'how use of emojis and symbols might be useful for the person who creates them but not necessarily for (an)other (sic) person … a bit like a mind map'* therefore establishing individual good practice before inviting peers to proofread completed work is crucial.

In a Covid climate where learners nationally experienced 'lost learning' the use of emojis has shown how engaging with learners' literacy practices are an invaluable tool in the classroom. The success is summed up by one learner who discovered their ability to succeed stating, *"This has helped me a lot considering I've never seen this method of teaching before. I never thought using emojis would make this much difference in learning, but I feel this has had a great impact on my learning and understanding during the course. I have now passed my English Level 2 Functional Skills qualification"*.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-1/7-1/**

2. DEVELOPING WRITING

Lakes College

This project aimed to establish a planning tool in vocational areas, to help learners complete longer writing tasks, and to build a bridge between English and vocational subjects.

Summary

Lakes College is a General Further Education College based in West Cumbria, offering a broad range of subjects from Level 1 to Foundation Degree.

This project initially was to liaise with a group of Level 3 Public Services learners, most of whom had achieved a GCSE in English, to help them plan and draft a report. We chose this group because their tutor reported that although they had passed their English qualification (mostly at school) they lacked the skills to do this effectively.

Report writing is also a key component of the new T Levels programme, and it has been added to the new City and Guilds 4748 Functional Skills qualification. Therefore, we felt that it was important to develop planning and writing skills for reports, specifically in recognition of their prominence on current examination specifications.

Rationale

Before starting the project, we identified the key writing skills that a learner should be able to demonstrate if they have achieved a grade 4 or above: *"organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts",* which are from GCSE English Assessment Objective 5. These skills are required across many subjects. However, learners seemed not to make that link, and so when asked to apply those skills under a different context, became confused and as a result were not producing writing that was organised in a logical way. For

example, Pheonix, a Public Services learner, did not realise that she could use the same planning technique and structure that she was practising in GCSE English to plan her vocational coursework, so would not plan it, run out of ideas, and her writing would start to lose focus.

We aimed to help learners to overcome this, by identifying and linking the skills they developed when they were completing their English qualifications and transfer them to their continued development within their chosen vocation. In our identified focus group, we recognised that the learners were not applying the skills they learned in GCSE English, and identified further skills, such as report writing, that they were not taught, because they were not on the syllabus.

Approach

We:
- Identified the cohort to work with and a task to focus on (planning a report)
- Ran a 30-minute session where we first established what the learners knew about report writing and their opinions on planning.
- Worked with the learners to use both planning sheets to plan their report, leaving some time at the end for feedback. First, they completed a mind-map that was split into sections based on the different criteria they needed for the report. Once they were ready, they then used the second planning grid to help them clarify a logical order to write these ideas.

We intended to go back and support the learners further, however, due to remote learning, this did not happen.

Therefore, we changed focus to planning writing in GCSE and Functional Skills classes. We chose these classes as we felt that their writing would

improve if they were taught how to plan and structure effectively. We have maintained contact with a student from the original cohort who agreed to be a case study (Pheonix) while we gathered evidence from our own classes. This has led us to gather a range of evidence from multiple levels, and so has helped us evaluate the impact of the planning tool across a wide range of students. For example, using the planning tool in Functional Skills Level 2 has helped us to engage learners in writing tasks; as one learner remarked: 'I did not like writing before, so I would just give up, because it is hard to think of ideas, [but] once I've planned it is easier.'

We then:

- Chose a GCSE examination creative writing topic, and mind-mapped ideas as a group, using Microsoft Whiteboard.
- The learners then individually chose one of these ideas and planned 5 paragraphs.
- The next lesson, they then used these plans to write their question 5 response.
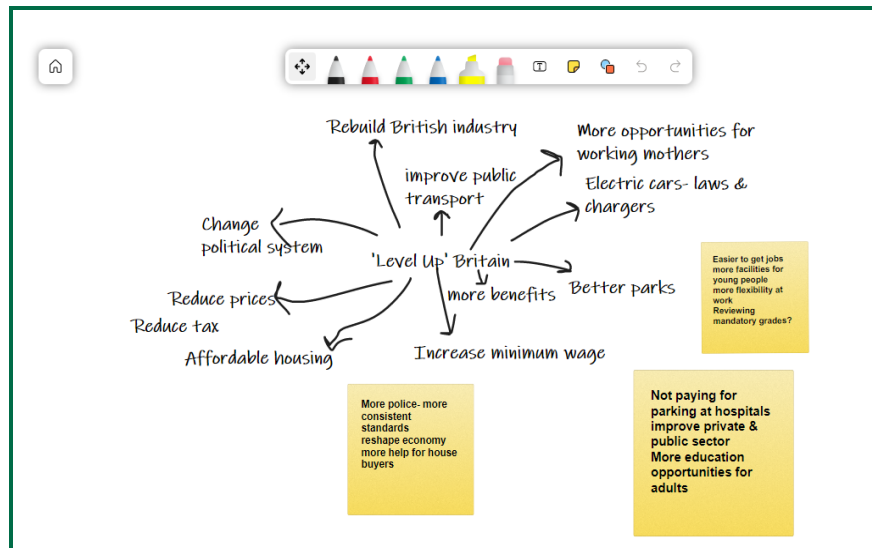
Figure 2.1: Using the mind-map with a different type of writing question - writing a letter to Boris Johnson to advise how he could 'level up' Britain.

INSIDE	OUTSIDE
NAME: Rita AGE: 28 ADJECTIVES: Nimble METAPHOR: 'With magnetic force' HABITS: Crunches sand, hates uncleanliness, WORRIES: Being fired, fear for the creature. Butchering the Mexican language.	PLACE: Her apartment, Oxford TIME: 5:40pm, 23rd May hear – The news blaring. see – her darkening apartment walls. feel – The cold of her kitchen floor, the steam from her cooking. smell – Her cooking taste - Her lingering cooking and candy
ZOOM IN and DIALOGUE **Focus on a character and have a conversation!** "Hmm. A curious and convoluted tongue, yours. To whom do I speak?" "R-Rita, Sir- Uh, friend…" She stuttered.	**FLASHBACK / FORESHADOWING** FLASH TO: First day of the job TIME: 2:17pm, 16th June, six years prior PLACE: Chixulub Crater, Mexico DRAMATIC EVENT: Meeting and reporting the alien.
MAIN EVENT **What happens?** **How are you involved?** I turn up to an archeological dig to find an alien craft and speak to the being inside.	**Ending- RESOLUTION or CLIFFHANGER?** I see the being on the news, feeling horribly guilty of its capture. It escapes.

Figure 2.2: Planning Document completed by a learner

Learners were asked to reflect and give feedback, however this was more successful as a face-to-face conversation than online. Some learners were asked specifically about a link between planning in English and planning in vocational areas and said they would 'think about planning' their vocational coursework, however not all responded or said that they would.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project has emphasised the importance of teaching learners to plan their writing. After they have used the planning tool and they have seen the benefit this has in the quality and length of their writing, and their improved marks, we need to then establish a specific connection between English and their wider vocational qualification or career path by teaching them that they should plan every extended writing response using the same structure.

Not only does planning improve their writing content, in terms of their structure and cohesion, it helps them to generate ideas and make it more likely that they will achieve the target word count in their work. Planning, whether it is written down using a planning tool, diary or completed in a more informal matter (such as through a discussion) is an essential skill, but often one that our learners can put up a lot of resistance to, telling us that they 'never plan.' For learners like Pheonix, who do not see the connection and plan in English lessons but not in their vocational work, I will be making a clearer connection between planning and vocational courses in my lessons and need to liaise with vocational tutors to help them make this connection clear in their course too.

We are also planning to include more report writing in our GCSE and Functional Skills scheme of work from last year, reflecting learning from this project that learners who had achieved a pass in English still struggle to write assignments in their vocational areas. We can use our planning tool to support learners with this and teach them the underpinning skills of writing - paragraphs, structure, cohesion, and coherence while demonstrating that these writing skills are universal, no matter what vocational course they are on or which career path they want to follow.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The intention of the project was to support learners and vocational colleagues to utilise the skills learners had been taught on their GCSE or Functional Skills course and in particular planning writing using a simple tool we devised. The outcomes were far more wide reaching.

We shifted our relationship with vocational tutors to one of cooperation with us supporting them to help learners develop their report writing skills which is a fundamental part of their course. The tool has been amended so vocational tutors can use it without the input of English tutors.

We shared our results with the rest of the English team, and we are now including teaching and implementing planning for all writing activities which has helped learners to develop their writing skills.

Throughout the project, we have collaborated with learners, and this has resulted in an improved dialogue between us about what our English lessons include, why, and how the skills that they learn can be used not only in their vocation, but in their future workplace and life. Taking this forward, next year we plan to revisit the 'get to know you' conversations we have with learners at the start of the year and throughout and use these to adapt how we approach topics and activities.

Moving forward the college is utilising the outcomes of this project to re-ignite the Whole Organisation Approach to developing learners' English skills as part of the strategic plan to introduce the new T Levels.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention, and progression

During the first phase of the project, we received some positive feedback from both the learners and the vocational tutor. A learner, who previously did not plan their writing, emailed after the session, and said: *'I found it really useful, I'm going to be using it a lot.'* The tutor also said that she could see that it was helping them to simplify report writing, however the deadline was a few weeks away at the time of our conversation.

Pheonix, a case study student, reported that she *'finds planning a lot easier now'* and she feels it has *'improved [her] writing.'* One of Pheonix's writing

targets was to choose a simpler idea and describe it in detail, rather than losing focus and writing several different ideas into the same story. The planning grid has helped her to do this by structuring around a central idea and working out how it will all fit together before she begins to write. This has led Pheonix to improve her marks, and work at a grade above her original GCSE grade. Pheonix also reported that she feels less overwhelmed by planning and writing than she did prior to the project.

Prior to this project, I would suggest to learners that they should plan their writing tasks, which some did, but not provide any guidance as to how they did it, working on the assumption that they knew how to plan already. Some learners would then say they 'didn't plan' and I would let them start writing. However, now I use this format with all my classes, more learners are planning, and producing more coherent and logical stories as a result.

For example, our second case study, Robert, prefers to work independently. After being shown the planning tool once, he has used it for creative writing questions and has increased his score from 17 marks (likely to get a grade 3) for writing without a plan, to 25 with a plan (on track for a grade 4 or 5). When asked what made him decide to start planning, after three years on the GCSE resit programme not doing so, he said that he was 'wanting to do anything to get extra marks.' Robert also said that he did not 'really use planning for the structure,' but more so that he could get all his ideas on the page. He, and learners who also feel this way, would benefit from still being encouraged to use the mind-map element, but could number their ideas on that to create an order rather than using further time to organise the ideas into paragraphs on the second planning document.

Learning from this project

The key things we learnt from this project are:

1. Learners do not generalise what they have learned in GCSE or Functional Skills English and use it elsewhere (or even in the English class). For example, learners will have been taught how to plan writing whilst at school but few did, and they do not transfer the skill to their vocational course. We as English teachers must address this if learners are to improve their writing skills needed for learning, work, and life. This has led to us planning an organisational strategy to develop and apply English skills across the college.

2. English tutors must make clear, explicit, and regular links with vocational writing tasks, and subsequently at work, to help learners recognise the transferable skills and how it will support them elsewhere.

3. Collaboration and communication with learners about specific concerns followed up by subsequent chats about how your change has made a difference are so valuable.

4. Learners benefit the most when English and vocational tutors work collaboratively to develop the learners' English skills.

5. Skills can be developed for GCSE and Functional skills writing tasks using a range of genres from vocational areas, for example report writing, to help learners see how the skills can be applied across a range of different contexts. If our planning tool is used in English and Vocational courses in the future, it can help us further bridge the gap between vocational courses and English for the learners, which will help them to transfer their English skills into their assignments.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can read the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-1/7-2/

RESEARCH CLUSTER 2

Mentor: Dr Catherine McPartland

3. Warrington and Vale Royal College
4. The Sheffield College
5. Reaseheath College

ENGAGEMENT, RESILIENCE AND VOCABULARY

Dr Catherine McPartland (Mentor)

Further Education is often described as providing a 'second chance' in education and there can be no doubt these particular projects enabled learners to seize the opportunity. Many vocational learners arrive at Further Education institutions lacking confidence in their abilities, particularly in English and maths. Their motivation and self-belief are often low, and they frequently fail to understand how improving English and maths can help them achieve in their main subject, giving them additional life skills and employment opportunities.

As well as providing learners with tools to improve English and maths it is vital to encourage a 'can do 'attitude, so building the necessary confidence to believe in themselves and that they can be successful.

Using a range of different approaches each project team nurtured their learners, working patiently to enable them to overcome their initial resistance, providing the right level of 'stretch and challenge' to empower learners to engage in learning, recognise their achievements and strive for further success.

Warrington and Vale Royal College focused on the development of specific English and maths skills to promote exam preparation in GCSE resit students. In maths, the focus was to use Kerboodle, an online, interactive textbook resource, to enhance learning, particularly of measure, shape and space. In English, the focus was to improve learning around the creative writing process, using online resources and visualisers.

The Sheffield College addressed the issue of student resilience in the learning and teaching of GCSE English Language and Functional Skills English. Teachers focused on employing and refining a range of techniques to enable students to explore their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of themselves as learners.

Reaseheath College aimed to enrich learners' vocabularies by adopting a deliberate, explicit approach to vocabulary instruction through introducing a short, finite list of high value words which learners were exposed to recurrently and encouraged to use in their own writing.

As a result of the projects, many learners achieved far more than they imagined they would. This is a major achievement for the teaching teams involved in the projects who used their professional skills and knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment to support learners whilst additionally further developing these skills through participation in the projects and professional development activities.

It was an absolute pleasure, and inspiring experience, to work with such dedicated professionals witnessing and contributing to the positive impact their work had on learners and others within their organisations.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-2/**

3. ENGAGEMENT AND EXAM PREPARATION
Warrington and Vale Royal College

This project focused on the development of specific English and maths skills in order to promote exam preparation in a small cohort of GCSE resit students. In maths, the focus was to use Kerboodle, an online, interactive textbook resource, to enhance teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) particularly of measure, shape and space (MSS). In English, the focus was to improve TLA around the creative writing process, using online resources and visualisers.

Summary

Warrington Vale Royal (WVR) is a mid-sized General Further Education College (GFE). The locality is specifically deprived and many students are classed as living in poverty. The college has been successful in previous (non-COVID-19) years, obtaining high achievement outcomes in relation to national Grade Point Average (GPA) data (WVR, 2018, online). The Assistant Director of Curriculum was project lead, with a maths and English teacher contributing to the project with their identified groups. They were supported by the maths curriculum manager and a student teacher.

The project's main focus was to enable students' improvement within specified elements of their resit course, often those subjects where they traditionally underperform. Students brought with them a considerable amount of 'baggage' in terms of prior learning: Mistakes and misunderstandings were prevalent from school or previous study.

The project aim was to increase, via remote and in-class learning, confidence in these study elements, alongside an improvement in grade outcome when utilising these foundational subjects as building blocks for improved understanding and achievement. Ten students were included in the project.

Rationale

Students at the college achieve relatively well on resit GCSE courses, but there was a belief this could be bettered by adapting further the TLA delivery methods and approaches of both the English and maths departments. We proposed to use this project to fundamentally develop and continue the work of previous projects; to 'rethink' the resit classroom. This was mainly aimed at using specific online and technological tools to help develop key areas students struggle with most in both subjects. Specifically, the project focused on achievement gap groups; students who achieve low or below expected targets and are from disadvantaged backgrounds as theirs were the greatest need.

The project focused on the key, fundamental skills which students traditionally found most difficult to overcome, and where TLA had been adapted in previous years with mixed results. In English, many students underachieved in the creative writing question of the exam, despite often finding this the most enjoyable aspect of the course. This disconnect led to the realisation that elements of TLA required a fresh approach. In maths, students experienced the same issues with MSS, often carrying confusion from previous modes of study.

Approach

The project consisted of activities designed to support remote learning in a multimodal fashion. In maths, the project utilised the software package, Kerboodle, a virtual course/ workbook with interactive activities and revision tasks. This software was linked, via the Google classroom, to enable the teacher to direct individual students towards revision activities, either when conducting remote lessons via Zoom or Meets, or as extension activities when in the physical classroom. The main focus was on the MSS

elements of the curriculum, where Kerboodle has a specific package of supporting resources.

In English, the original aim was to use the Kerboodle service for creative writing activities and extensions. However, this did not work effectively as the activities related only to themes, and after some discussion, Kerboodle was considered to have minimal impact. As such, and with lessons remaining remote, the English team introduced the use of visualisers to aid TLA delivery for the annotation of exam questions and exemplar responses. A new member of the project team was introduced at this juncture, to support the facilitation of the project and utilise her existing interest in the use of technology to enhance her practice and student outcomes.

Students took part in an online survey to gauge their starting points with teachers then providing support to address issues arising. To ensure effective evaluation of the project we originally intended to include a student action research team, drawn from the student council, as in previous years. Due to COVID-19, this was not possible, so evaluation was carried out through discussions between teacher and students, student survey, students' and teachers' reflective testimonials and an analysis of students' work.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The main outcome was the adaptation to delivery which was thrust upon all teachers during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Teachers on the project adapted their delivery, becoming far more technologically focused and confident. In the maths strand, the traditional use of technology involved Notebook software and MyMaths as online VLE support. The advent of the project and the changes to the modes of delivery meant this was extended to be inclusive of Kerboodle, adding a virtual element to the traditional workbook in physical classes. In turn, this influenced a change in assessment practices, moving away from the marking of paper-based to

more interactive quizzes linked to Google Classrooms. Kerboodle and its influence on the maths practitioner meant she shared this application professionally with colleagues and its use became embedded into the wider curriculum.

In English, the technological starting points were slightly more advanced, however, the project and the pandemic aligned to facilitate growth in the use of audio/ visual tools to supplement traditional learning. The use of screen capture software led to the initiation of the visualiser to enable distance/ remote learning to improve and create more interactivity, often in real-time, for the teacher and the student.

The reflective skills of the teachers involved in the project improved as they adapted their practice to include more applications and technology to facilitate their sessions. There was a culture of trial and error in terms of some aspects and considering, through reflection, what worked well and could be even better. This contributed to organisational development as findings were shared throughout the English and maths teams and eventually cross-college via our Teaching and Learning Communities.

Teachers became far more aware of the impact of their actions on student motivation, especially in terms of the remote learning periods, where some students struggled with mental health and wellbeing related to lockdowns. They developed a deeper insight into students' needs and how they could be addressed.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project's influence upon organisational practices has been significant. Within the English strand, the use of visualisers to promote student engagement was discussed in Teaching and Learning Communities (TLC) and with the Director of TLA, who then introduced the use of visualisers cross-college to other teams. This provoked a great deal of interest, as has the use of the screencasts and audio feedback, all of which sprung out of the move to remote learning and the project outcomes. These planned

enhancements are currently shaping curriculum intent and have implementation plans for the next academic year.

Within the maths strand of the project, the main changes could be seen in the use of facilitators (part of the English and maths teams) who support online and in-class learning. Facilitators act as teaching assistants but have specialised skills/ qualifications in English and maths. The innovation of the use of the Kerboodle software enabled students to join smaller break-out groups, working on specific targets.

Additionally, the use of more applications within maths as a whole department fed through from the project aims; one of which was the improved and enhanced use of the VLA, Google Classroom, and the integration of the self-marking quizzes for maths GCSE students. Previously this had been held out on MyMaths, but the inspiration to find new applications and tools meant improvements were made to TLA by the enhancement of the provision via software previously thought not to have been available.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

All students within the focus groups were retained, which, in itself, has been an achievement during the pandemic. However, there is justification that the changes to the online delivery, in both subjects, enabled students to work increasingly at their own pace with help and reference points which could be easily accessed and returned to. This was a significant realisation for teachers, allowing them to understand the learning process and experience of students more deeply.

The use of Kerboodle in maths, focused on the MSS element of the curriculum, saw a rise in outcomes for the majority of the group (only 1 out of the 8 students showed no progress). Two individuals, whose progress we were tracking during the course of the research project, saw their overall grades in mocks and quizzes increase across the curriculum content. The students themselves attribute these positive changes to the way their TLA

was adapted within the remote learning periods, and the specific use and access to the Google classroom and Kerboodle site in helping them work at their own pace and access revision or guidance outside of the classroom sessions.

"Tasks were set out well and easy to follow and understand with the support given" (student testimonial).
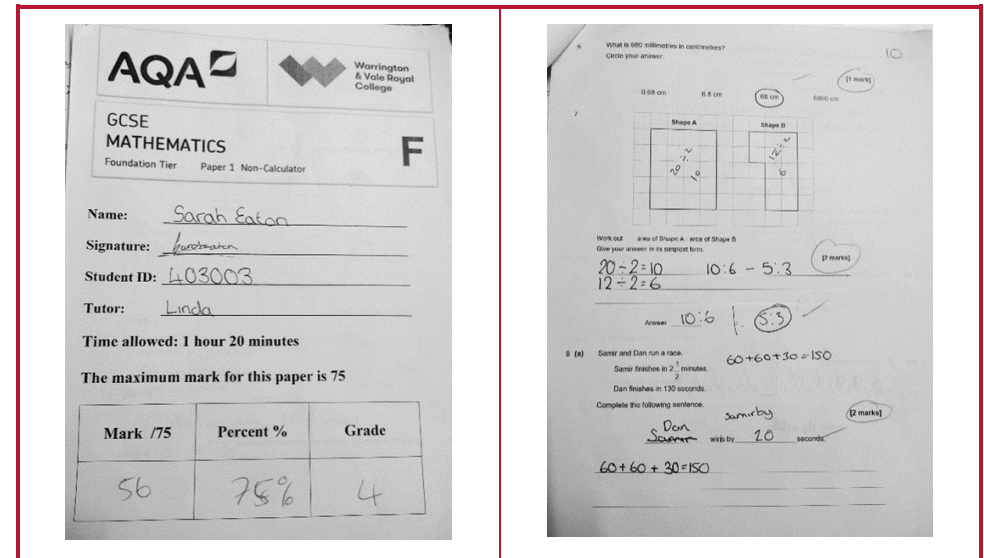
Figure 3.1: A maths learner who was previously working at Grade 3 was able to progress to Grade 4. Their progression was especially linked to the use of the Kerboodle interactive workbook.

However, the students commented they still preferred to be in class with a teacher in front of them.

In English, the students also progressed well. One student in the project group has commented that *'they never knew what they were supposed to be writing on the text before and just used to highlight words'.* The impact of the visualiser on the ability of students to annotate correctly was significant, leading to far more detailed and coherent responses in assessed tasks.

> *"The project group are all on track to be awarded a grade 4 as they have very strong evidence files. One of the students has had work moderated by the English Faculty as Grade 5/6, so it is expected that they will achieve the grade 5 overall. The grade 5 student has ASD and has struggled with education and suffers from mental health issues, so this would be a great achievement for them"* (English teacher).

Learning from this project

The period of the project was challenging, given the upheaval of lockdown periods and changes to modes of delivery and attendance imposed upon teachers and students. Teachers learned a lot from this experience and the influence of the project, in terms of seeking out new ways to engage and interact with students. As is probably the case across the profession, they sought ways to teach remotely and found the Meet option in their existing Google classrooms enabled students to be in-situ with their VLE and on a live lesson, providing continuity and support.

The maths strand of the project was consistently applied and, in most instances, very successful. Students still wanted to have physical sessions, however, and once these returned the Kerboodle software was used less but still applied as extension activities. From a department that was considered slow in the uptake of technology, the project allowed teachers to trial technology and applications and share within their communities. As an outcome, the curriculum in maths is being re-designed to incorporate further technology such as self-marking quizzes, flipped classrooms with video support, and the extension of Kerboodle as a support/ revision resource for all students.

The English strand had to be adapted in December, as the Kerboodle software was not as effective as originally expected due to Creative Writing exercises being embedded within other 'themes' which did not match with the scheme of learning for the GCSE course and led to confusion for our students. Due to this, the project shifted focus with the English strand focusing on the use of visualisers and audio-video technology to assist students in their remote learning. One of the main focuses was the annotation of language tasks, in real-time, with the practice questions conducted on a Zoom/ Meet. This led to the realisation that the applications and technology being used could be procured on a larger scale and used once teaching returned to 'normal' as extension tasks, such as videos to support content or revision, and in-class as live examples, such as visualisers for the annotation of work.

Overall, the use of the technology has greatly assisted in preparing students for their examinations, not only by increasing their knowledge and understanding, but also by increasing their confidence in their ability to improve their grade and successfully meet requirements.

Clearly, the 'even better if' would be related to the physical availability of students in classrooms but that was out of anyone's control. In the maths strand, there could have been more use of Kerboodle once face-to-face teaching returned but the need to complete evidence files for grading superseded this. For English, a consistent pattern throughout the academic year would have been advantageous, however the changes put in place had a greater impact than first expected, especially in terms of being shared departmentally and cross-college once others were aware of what was taking place and their positive impact.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-2/7-3/**

4. RESILIENCE

Sheffield College

This project addressed the issue of student resilience in the learning and teaching of GCSE English Language and Functional Skills English. Teachers focused on employing and refining a range of techniques to enable students to explore their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of themselves as learners.

Summary

The Sheffield College is a General Further Education college serving the socio-economically and ethnically diverse Sheffield City Region. The college has a large student population of over 14,700 studying a range of full and part-time academic, vocational, technical and apprenticeship programmes. The overarching aim of our project was to address the issue of student resilience in the learning and teaching of English at The Sheffield College. Due to an intrinsic lack of self-confidence, many of our students struggle to believe they can achieve in this subject area. For younger students studying GCSE English Language, such perceptions are often reinforced by a repeated 'failure' to achieve a grade 4 in this gateway qualification. The project involved both full-time and part-time students and was facilitated by a large team of English teachers, some of whom were new to the project this academic year.

Rationale

Prior to our involvement in OTLA Phase 6 in 2020 some teachers across our diverse college employed different approaches towards developing resilience in students, whereas others did not address this fundamental and underlying issue explicitly. Our action research project, which involved developing a resilience scheme of work with associated resources, proved to be highly effective in developing many students' confidence in their abilities. Importantly, involvement in the project was beginning to have a

profoundly positive impact on tutors, their relationships with students and their perceptions of themselves as practitioners. This follow-up OTLA Phase 7 project has enabled us to refine and develop our approaches to enhancing student engagement and resilience. Importantly, it provided an opportunity for teachers to explore their individual areas of interest in this key aspect of learning and build on their excellent development work in OTLA Phase 6. Involvement in the project has also enabled us to disseminate our findings to wider audiences, both within and external to our organisation.

Approach

Working to the collective aim of developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning, teachers were encouraged to develop their own action research pathway according to their interests. Before the start of the academic year, teachers discussed, explored and refined their ideas with the Project Lead.

To summarise:

- Most teachers worked with the resilience scheme of work (OTLA, 6, 2020) and activities created at the inception of Phase 6, adjusting them to suit the needs of their students. Some teachers delivered the activities as a session starter, others at the end of the session or before the break. Activities were used to stimulate open discussions regarding attitudes towards learning.
- One teacher focused on enabling journaling within her sessions. She embedded reflective activities which encouraged exploration of the students' changing relationship to learning.
- In addition to enabling resilience activities most teachers focused on experimenting with their use of language when setting up tasks and

giving both written and verbal feedback. They explored its power in developing students' confidence and self-belief.

- Some teachers focused on developing and delivering tasks which tackled the issue of resilience whilst also being closely aligned to the subjects' assessment objectives.
- One teacher focused on her questioning technique in drawing her students' attention to their thought processes regarding learning and self-belief.
- A significant emphasis was placed upon the value and importance of open dialogue and sharing of experience.
- Student voice activities were conducted to evaluate the impact of the work on their attitudes towards themselves and learning.
- Students' classwork, attendance and achievement data, in addition to observations of secondary behaviours, were also used to inform the evaluation of the impact of the project on their learning in English.

Figure 4.1: Teachers adapted the resilience scheme of work (designed as part of the OTLA 6 programme) to suit the needs of their learners.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Engaging in the project has had a significant impact on teachers' practice, most notably in their use of language in the classroom. A continued focus on developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning has encouraged teachers to consider carefully the connotations of their word choices. They have experimented with different language choices whilst setting up tasks and providing verbal and written feedback, observing the impact of their lexical choices on their students.

Teachers have found that adjusting their language to challenge students' negative perceptions of themselves as learners significantly enhances their teaching practice. They have discovered how subtle adjustments to the words and phrases they use when interacting with students both verbally and in writing can enable students to continue to engage in learning when they encounter difficulties and be particularly powerful in encouraging them to stretch themselves in learning.

> *"I have been hugely encouraged, and humbled, by the feedback I have received from my students. It has cemented my commitment to professional development and, in particular, the OTLA project"*
>
> English Teacher.

Involvement in the project raised teachers' self-awareness of habits they had fallen into when interacting with resit students, such as apologising for the potential difficulty within a task or over emphasising the compulsion for 16–19-year-olds to study the subject. They recognised such discourses were reinforcing some students' negative perceptions of learning English and of themselves in relation to it.

Teachers found that making a conscious and deliberate effort to change their idiolect to the language of challenge and motivation to be extremely beneficial to their students. For example, one teacher was sceptical of the

impact of the project upon younger students compelled to re-sit GCSE English; however, involvement in the project has enabled him to recognise the inherent value in routinely using the language of positive instruction. He has discovered that it gives students, who cannot see how the qualification is relevant to them and their future career pathway, 'encouragement' and enables them to 'be confident' in their preparations for assessment. Furthermore, he now perceives such a relentless focus on helping learners develop a tenacious and confident attitude to be an essential part of a teacher's practice.

Involvement in the project has had a significant impact on another experienced teacher's perception of the psychological dimension of learning. Working with students on activities and discussions which explore the attitude towards the self and learning has compelled her to carefully consider the potential impact of her teaching and learning strategies on students' confidence and resilience. For most of the teachers working on the project, engagement in action research has enabled them to engage more purposefully in self-reflection. It has also acted as a catalyst for the updating of educational research knowledge. They have valued the opportunity to develop their skills in evidence-based practice and are likely to develop further action research projects.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Our work on the project has stimulated some change to practices within our organisation. For example:

- Within the Academy of English at The Sheffield College we now ensure that any new members of staff receive discrete training on techniques to foster self-belief in learning. This training has been delivered not only to teachers but to individuals whose role is to support students in catching up on their skills in English and maths due to the impact of COVID-19.

- In the summer months we will be training colleagues in ESOL and Inclusion to embed a similar approach within their curriculum from September 2021.
- We have shared our practice with colleagues who teach maths. English and maths teachers met to discuss key techniques and strategies to develop students' confidence and self-belief. During the session, English teachers shared their approaches and the findings of action research. Whilst we are aware of the importance of not replicating activities in maths, as many students study both subjects, there is a commitment to ongoing sharing of learning from the project and experimentation with approaches.
- The project has enabled a foregrounding of professional discussions relating to the underlying issues of students' lack of confidence and self-belief in learning.

Additionally:

- Learning from the project has been shared with representatives from other colleges who experience similar challenges with their students.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Our focus on developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning continues to have a positive impact upon students' experiences of studying English and their achievements at The Sheffield College.

Students report and demonstrate:

- An increased confidence in themselves in relation to learning, including engaging in stretch and challenge activities.
- A greater ability to learn from mistakes and to overcome challenges.
- Engagement in mindset for learning activities has helped to engage them in the subject matter and better enjoy learning with their peers and teachers.

- Adjustments to teachers' language in the classroom has enabled them to make improvements in their learning, in addition to instilling a greater confidence in themselves as learners.
- A greater investment in their own achievements and progress.
- Whilst we cannot isolate the impact of the above from the other improvements The Sheffield College is implementing in teaching, learning and assessment, it is difficult not to correlate the foregrounding of this approach to an:
- Upturn in attendance. This increase in engagement has been particularly marked for Study Programme students. Since this project began, their attendance is now consistently good in GCSE English Language classes.
- Upturn in retention of our adult students.
- Increase in first time passes for adults studying Functional Skills English at Level 1 and Level 2. Teachers' emphasis on not giving up, on developing strategies to deal with the challenge of examination questions, is encouraging students to see the exams in a more positive light.
- Increase in GCSE English Language high grade predictions for both adult and Study Programme students.

The following quotes are examples of feedback from English students as they reflected on their course and the impact of the embedded mindset activities upon:

- their confidence to participate and engage in learning
- their collective and personal resilience
- their academic progress:

"I would like to mention that the idea of doing GCSE English as an adult was daunting. One thing that really encouraged and motivated me was the introduction of flip mindset by Shelina… It has completely changed my approach to learning and shall forever remain with me. I think [of] myself as a learner in a positive way, I am also inspired to study further

and I believe I can do it. Now that I have a good knowledge of GCSE English, I am also confident my grades would be better if I had to re do GCSE English."

"The continuous support, the real-life relatable examples given during lessons, detailed feedbacks and a sincere desire for us to do better, answering emails promptly all helped me do better and think positively."

"My positive mindset has helped me in my personal life. Now that I have learnt the language techniques/ devices I am able to hold strong decent conversation and not fear of being judged."

Learning from this project

The adoption of a whole team curriculum-based approach to the development of students' self-belief and resilience in learning supports the college's wider improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Importantly, it encourages teachers to:

- Foster better relationships with students and develop a more cohesive learning community earlier in the academic year.
- Focus on the critical importance of the language choices they make when interacting with students. They now consider in a much more consciously and careful way the impact of their language on their students.
- Develop a greater depth of understanding of students' psychological barriers to learning and in turn consider ways to challenge and break down such obstacles.
- Evaluate critically the impact of their Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) choices on students' perceptions of themselves as learners.
- Re-engage with educational theory.

- Engage and become an integral part of a culture of action research and critical reflection.
- Crucially, working in this way, teachers enable students to:
- Gain greater insight and understanding of their relationship to learning and the steps they need to undertake to make progress.
- Acquire a more constructive relationship to learning, understanding that mistakes are a necessary and enabling part of the journey. *One student, for example, reported that she has a 'more positive mindset' than at the beginning of her studies when she believed she 'could not' learn.* Following work on her attitudes towards herself and learning she now feels *'happy and excited'* when engaging in the development of her English skills.

> *"I do believe that learning depends on accepting your mistakes as positive experiences because I feel like I have learnt from my mistakes by looking through feedback and correcting myself which also improved my English skills"* (student)

- Develop confidence and self-belief in their abilities which in turn enables them to develop strategies to face challenges in learning.
- Articulate more fully their needs and wants in relation to life and learning.
- Foster better relationships with their peers and teachers.

We have also learned:

- Teachers need to commit fully to the process, adjusting materials and approaches to suit the needs of their students and their teaching styles. The approach needs to be embedded within all aspects of their TLA, not limited to the delivery of the activities.
- It is not the resilience activities the students engage in that stimulate change; it is the ongoing discussions that arise from them throughout the student's learning journey.
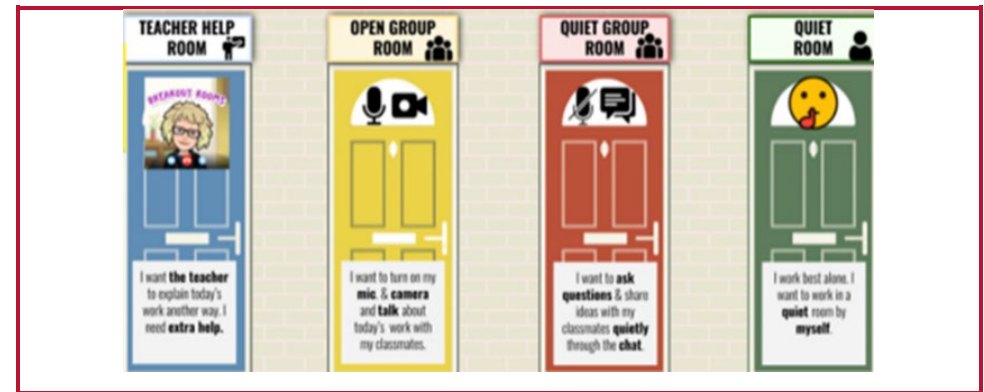
Figure 4.2: Teachers differentiated learning spaces to support students to engage in learning and develop their confidence.

- Of crucial importance to the success of such an approach is the deep critical reflection of teachers upon their practice, with a particular focus upon their use of language. To positively encourage and enable changes in students' attitudes, teachers need to scrutinise the language they use in all learning contexts, making subtle and ongoing adjustments where appropriate.
- Adopting such an approach is not a 'silver bullet' for all students. Students need to be emotionally ready to relate discussions and debates on resilience to their life and learning.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-2/7-4/**

5. DEVELOPING HIGH LEVEL VOCABULARY

Reaseheath College

This project aimed to enrich learners' vocabularies by adopting a deliberate, explicit approach to vocabulary instruction through introducing a short, finite list of high value words which learners were exposed to recurrently and encouraged to use in their own writing.

Summary

Reaseheath College is a specialist land-based Further Education college offering programmes including Agriculture, Animal Management, Motor Vehicle and Equine studies. The English team developed a strategy for enriching learners' vocabularies and worked predominantly with GCSE resit learners whose main programme of study was Motor Vehicle Technology. We wanted to design a strategy focused on enriching learners' active vocabularies, thus promoting and facilitating the use of rich vocabulary in their writing.

The strategy involved the English team researching a range of high-value words that could be used in different contexts. This was then refined by staff and subsequently, collaboratively with learners, to produce an initial list of ten high value words. Learners were exposed to the words through a miscellany of bite-size activities during each lesson and encouraged to use the vocabulary. We wanted to discover whether this approach would help to establish the vocabulary to be **there** implicitly as part of their active lexicon.

Rationale

In a largely vocationally orientated learning environment, motivation is low for many GCSE resit learners. In-house data and figures from the Department for Education show that 77.3% of students in England do not attain a grade 4 in English when they re-sit the exam post-16 (Belgutay,

2019) and remain stuck in a cycle of non-attainment and ever diminishing self-confidence. Our learners are word poor and as such, struggle to cope with the demands of GCSE English Language. It is an accepted premise that extensive reading helps develop a wide vocabulary (Quigley, 2018), however, our learners are predominantly reluctant readers; often the only reading they encounter is in the English classroom. Given the characteristics of a typical cohort and the inevitable time constraints, it is challenging to convert reluctant into avid readers, so, in our department, we have previously sought to redress the issue of limited vocabularies by exposing learners to as many unseen texts as possible. Words we perceived to be difficult were highlighted, and everyone encouraged to record the new vocabulary in a glossary. Once recorded, however, the words are seldom revisited and consequently forgotten. At best, some learners acquired a wider passive vocabulary; at worst, they were overwhelmed by the myriad vocabulary which only served to hinder their learning. Subsequently, their limited lexicons remained virtually unchanged, which may have an adverse effect on performance in main subject areas.

Approach

Stage 1: Finalising the project outline and selecting the test groups

Three groups took part in the research, a total of 50 learners, whose main programme of study was Level 2 Diploma in Light Vehicle Maintenance and Repair. Two of these groups had achieved GCSE English Language Grade 3 and the other Grade 2. We decided to focus on a single curriculum area for ease of communication with vocational teachers and also to facilitate direct comparisons between the different classes. Once the groups were established, we proceeded to create an actionable timeline and design materials.

Stage 2: Formulating the word list

Our priority was to compile a list of multi-functional sophisticated vocabulary. We did this by trawling GCSE past papers, marks schemes and exemplar responses. This initial list comprised 50 words, which were presented to the wider English team for discussion and refinement. The resultant reduced list was presented to our learners for further screening; familiar words were removed leaving us with the final '*Word Up'* list to use with our learners.

Figure 5.1: Key words were collated and shared with learners via a 'Word Up' bookmark.

We also interviewed a number of learners about their understanding of sophisticated vocabulary, encouraging them to express their views in relation to GCSE English. Some of these are included in a video designed to publicise the project (Reaseheath College, 2020). We also conducted a vocabulary survey to ascertain learners' starting points.

Stage 3: Planning & implementing the assessment & learning activities

We developed an initial set of activities suitable for remote and face-to-face delivery using student engagement platforms such as Nearpod and Wordwall - the thinking behind the rapid introduction activities being regular exposure to the words and their meanings. We also implemented consolidation tasks focused on embedding the vocabulary which required more complex understanding.

Throughout the project, learners were presented with printed bookmarks - a portable, discreet, visual aid without an overtly educational feel. A *Word Up* slide was presented at the start of each lesson and copied into the chat feature (in remote lessons) serving as a prompt to encourage learners to use the vocabulary in their writing.

Stage 4: Parental engagement

We recognised that parental/carer involvement was likely to play a crucial role in supporting our learners and we sought to encourage their participation by inviting them to become involved by taking part in weekly fun activities and receiving regular progress reports.

Stage 5: Reflection & Evaluation

Throughout the project, the leads have held regular meetings to evaluate and reflect on the success of the project and its implementation. Learner feedback has been a priority and focus groups have been conducted to give learners the opportunity to respond and reflect on their progress.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Activities we initially planned for the classroom had to be adapted for online delivery. As a result, our expertise in digital pedagogy has improved significantly, so much so that we continue to use the new technology in our face-to-face teaching, recognising the considerable value it brings to learning and engagement.

The project has highlighted the texts chosen by AQA (our current Awarding Body) are mostly inaccessible to Further Education learners and we intend to trial a new, alternative specification in the autumn term. This new specification reflects the diversity of the learners and texts have been chosen with an awareness of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background.

We did not anticipate such overwhelming and consistent evidence of poor vocabulary within our trial groups. We usually focus on teaching exam technique but have recognised limited vocabulary is key barrier to success in GCSE. This project sought to redress this by incorporating an initial vocabulary survey and using vocabulary building activities to improve learning.

Fundamentally, the project has led us to recognise the power of courage and collaboration, both internally and externally. We have created an FE chat room to foster a collegial way of working and have been speaking to practitioners from other colleges about their scheme of work and action research with a view to continuing with our project next year with an external partner.

We would like to extend the project to other curriculum areas in college making it possible for as many learners as possible to be empowered by developing a richer vocabulary.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Unfortunately, effective collaboration between Motor Vehicle and English teachers was restricted by the second lockdown. Conversely, with the transition to digital teaching in January, collaboration between Inclusive Learning Practitioners (ILPs) (who provide learning support in our classes) and teachers was strengthened. Digital teaching and learning provided opportunities to communicate discreetly with one another during lessons which benefited many learners. ILPs reported they have felt more valued during online lessons, and as teachers we are more aware of their potential contributions. We intend to embrace the opportunities for internal networking more fully in 2021/22.

> "*I have been able to chat to students that are falling behind and use the bookmark to help them discreetly with their writing*"
>
> (ILP comment).

Historically, communication between learners' parents/carers and English teachers has been ad hoc and reactive, as it generally falls within the remit of learners' Curriculum Course Managers. However, the project presented us with an opportunity to proactively engage with parents/carers, and we did so by inviting them to participate by signing up to receive weekly fun language teasers. The response rate was low (7%), so there are lessons to be learned. However, those who responded and engaged did so unreservedly and we were able to build positive two-way relationships.

The learners, whose parents/carers engaged in the project, have benefited the most and demonstrated greater depth of knowledge of the new vocabulary.

Parents have reported positively, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> "*As a parent, the bookmark was a fantastic tool that my child and I used in day-to-day conversations. I was able to focus on using these words*

more in my vocabulary which I believe has encouraged my child to use them more openly, frequently and understand them and the context in which they can be used."

"I found the bookmark to be a great way for the teacher to let me know what kind of vocabulary would be helpful. It was a very easy way of keeping the words close by, but not an intrusive form of revision like a bulky textbook which can be off putting to the child and parent."

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners have been extremely positive about *Word Up* and reported that using the words in their writing has improved and boosted their overall confidence in English. Learners who fully engaged with *Word Up* understood that including the words in their writing helped to boost their levels in both 'Content and Organisation' and 'Technical Accuracy' specifications. There was a clear correlation between learners using the vocabulary in their written responses and their rate of progress.

A focus group and individual interviews were held in May where learners were invited to discuss the impact of *Word Up*. Learners spoke positively about being presented with a lexical set of words which they all found helpful rather than limitative.

Feedback and written responses from our learners validated our thinking that 'less is more' when it comes to enriching our active vocabulary. It takes a lot of practice and a long time to fully know a word, so by focusing on a few, rather than many new words, consolidation took place.

The new words are retained and committed to long-term memory which builds confidence quickly. Learners reported having the bookmarks to hand encouraged them to experiment with the words which they found empowering. Conversely, there were some negative comments about

turning off and shutting down when faced with unfamiliar and overwhelming word lists. They want clear, simple and effective tools to help them pass the exam which we will take forward into our whole teaching practice.
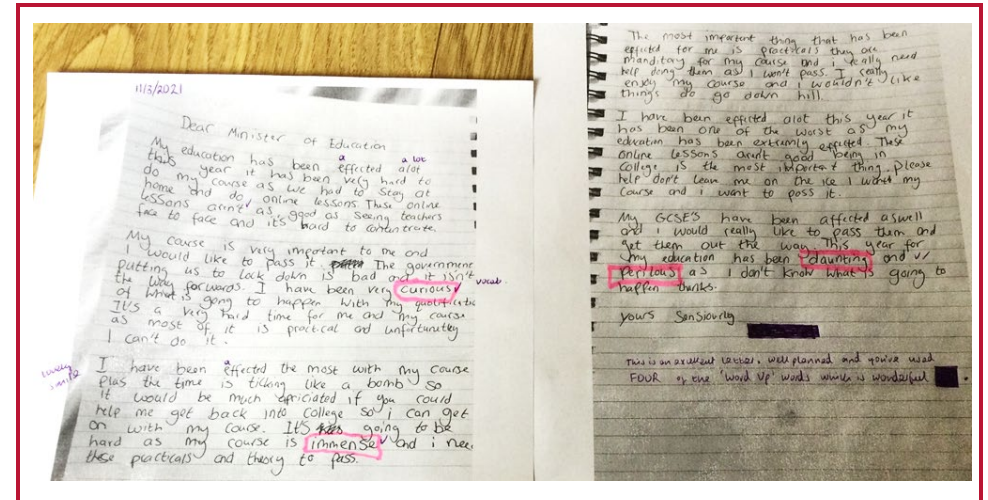
Figure 5.2: Over the course of the project, learners began to use more 'Word Up' vocabulary in their written work

Learners' comments:

"They boost your grade up because they are more nicer words than standard words."

"The more you get, the more you fret and you won't remember it."

"It builds up time and makes you memorize it more."

"It makes you feel more confident like you're using words right."

Learning from this project

It was a challenge to convey the underlying principle and our aims however the success of the project justified our approach that 'less could be more' and that we were stretching and challenging learners. We have actively and successfully created a culture which is about creating an ethos of ambition and aspiration, and all learners have been encouraged to move beyond their comfort zones which is completely in keeping with 'stretch and challenge'.

We were surprised by the results of initial activities to test learners' prior knowledge of the ten words we selected: We had seriously underestimated how word poor our learners were, whereas in all three participating groups, learners overestimated their knowledge of the words. When they were presented with activities requiring them to use the words in context, they were unable to do so with any degree of accuracy. We have learned that we must never make assumptions about our learners.

Our results indicate continually inundating learners with new, challenging vocabulary has no positive impact and in fact only serves to maintain the deficit. Although exposure to the *Word Up* vocabulary has been less than we would have liked, we have seen clear evidence that reducing the number of words, whilst simultaneously increasing their exposure to learners, has a positive impact on vocabulary retention, usage and confidence.

This is further supported by comments made during focus groups with learners: They enjoyed the fact the words were fit for purpose and manageable, and found active repetition and usage increased their confidence. Many verbalised the buzz they felt when they mastered the words.

When motivation is low, 'quick wins' are valuable. Learners have been able to experience success and see the clear link between using the *Word Up*

vocabulary and higher scores. Small gains have resulted in larger gains in confidence.

We have learned that, whilst we clearly recognise the needs of the learners in our setting and try to adapt, we find it hard to move away from textbook principles around reading for meaning and improving writing and have become increasingly aware the hurdle to both these issues and therefore the GCSE, is poor vocabulary. Primacy must be given to vocabulary and it should not simply be an add-on.

Historically, contact with parents has been limited within the English department, but we have learned parental engagement has a positive effect on learners, regardless of age. We have learned that parents want to know exactly how they can support their children and welcome input from practitioners. We will continue building connections with parents/carers and exploring how to do so more effectively.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-2/7-5/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 3

Mentor: Sonia Thomas

6a. City of Liverpool College

Hopwood Hall College

6b. Sheffield Lifelong Learning

EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION

DEVELOPING WRITING
Sonia Thomas (Mentor)

These two projects explored ways in which learners could develop their confidence in English through expressive writing. Both projects found that creative and autobiographical writing provided powerful vehicles for learners to develop their writing skills, their confidence, their independence, and to communicate their personal experience.

Although the projects took very different approaches, learner reflection and peer feedback were key aspects of both, leading both project teams to consider the role of the teacher, teacher feedback and intervention in teaching and learning.

Both project teams were keen to create an environment in which learners could become active agents in their learning and it was my great pleasure to work with both teams developing such inspiring practice.

City of Liverpool College and Hopwood Hall College aimed to challenge the stereotype of male learners not engaging in the process of creative writing, by removing the constraints of the old exam style pedagogy and instead introducing an alternative and encouraging environment to express thought, feelings and build confidence through the written word. We learned that creative writing which is not teacher assessed can break down barriers to young males' expression.

Sheffield Lifelong Learning aimed to address the disconnect between the speaking and writing skills of many of our adult learners, particularly those from an ESOL background. The project enabled them to use innate grammar instincts, gained from their everyday use and experience of spoken English, to build stronger, clearer sentences on the page.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-3/**
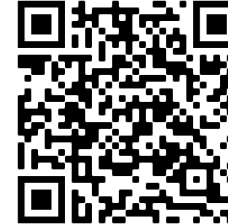
6a. DEVELOPING WRITING
City of Liverpool College and Hopwood Hall College

This project aimed to challenge the stereotype of male learners not engaging in the process of creative writing, by removing the constraints of the old exam style pedagogy and instead introducing an alternative and encouraging environment to express thought, feelings and build confidence through the written word. We learned that creative writing which is not teacher assessed can break down barriers to young males' expression.

Summary

Two English tutors from the City of Liverpool College and Hopwood Hall College (both providers of further education with predominantly vocational courses) collaborated to develop a new approach to creative writing, where the process was entirely led by the learners. The project was rolled out to groups of largely male GCSE English resit learners, aged 16-19, studying typically male dominated vocational courses at college (for example: motor vehicle, construction trades and gaming).

Traditionally, these learners were reluctant to express their creativity, both verbally and in writing, and learners saw this as an area of study from which they could disengage, given that these skills were not conventionally something that boys could, would or should excel at. In many cases, this belief is carried from childhood, throughout schooldays and into the workplace and adulthood. In his research, 'Gender and Literacy: Improving Boys' Writing', Robin Lane (2005) refers to an HMI Ofsted report, where good practice has been identified in schools where 'pupils are often given choice as to the content of their writing, even when the form or genre is prescribed… efforts are made to make writing tasks purposeful, through seeking 'real' audiences, through publication and display, and through the use of writing to support throughout'.

In the same report, he states that the impact of 'opportunities to write frequently' resulted in the following impact:

- Increased stamina for writing and also improved transcription
- Boys who wrote very little began to take risks and write more.
- Boys who were unenthusiastic about writing became engaged in their writing.
- Boys who had "loads of ideas" began to control their writing.

We wanted to unlock the learners' potential using a completely different approach, and we were committed to de-bunking the myth of working-class low aspiration and the deficit model of male achievement.

Rationale

Historically, this group of predominantly teenage boys from diverse cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds struggled to engage in creative writing of any sort. The learners have, generally, a limited vocabulary, poor spelling and grammar, sometimes gaps in education, learning disabilities and difficulties, as well as, in some cases English as an additional language. This all leads to a lack in confidence in putting pen to paper and a feeling of disenfranchisement and that writing is not seen as relevant to their lives and futures. These young men feel they have nothing of value to say and that they have no tools or ability to say anything even if they could, making the task of writing overwhelming.

The challenges already identified within this group have significant consequences, both in terms of oracy, literacy and confidence, which will impact inevitably on behaviour, progress, mental health and wellbeing. We wanted to establish an atmosphere where creative thought could be safely explored and developed.

The introduction of the study programme and compulsory studies in English and maths has been and still is problematic in the sector, given that few learners see the relevance or importance of these subjects, especially when they do not plan to access higher education. In Jo Ireland's research paper (Ireland, 2019), both teacher and peer support are found to support learner motivation: 'They suggested that both peer cooperation and group interaction can increase positive perceptions of learning and educational achievement'. She further states that learners feel they benefit from smaller group sizes as this gives them easier access to support.

Approach

In order to push the boundaries of the stereotypes referred to above, we planned the project within the following framework:

- Learners to create writing prompts on any subject of their choice which would be shared with the partner college.
- The tutors to share the prompts with learners and the partner college learners to write creative responses – with no scaffolding but only the prompt supplied.
- The tutors to scan the writing produced back to the partner college and the reciprocating learners to review it, giving feedback without referring to traditional spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) or exam board grades and mark schemes.
- Learners to then either continue with the piece of writing started by a peer at a different college, or to start afresh with a new prompt.

As the project developed, we were faced with the following challenges:

- Heavily disrupted, or lost learning because of the impact of COVID-19, including a second lockdown from January 2021
- Digital poverty, which affected engagement
- Poor engagement from learners who had taken a resit in November and were waiting for the publication of their results.
- Issues around the content of what was written: there was some inappropriacy of content in football related matters and a distinct level

of animosity in some cases. To prevent this from becoming an issue for safeguarding teams and to reduce a potential build-up of animosity we adapted our approach and respective tutors held discussions with the groups to remind them of the aims of the project and ask them to reframe their expectations. This presented an opportunity to discuss tolerance and respect as a life skill.

Tutors from both colleges were in regular contact and the framework for the project was revisited and adapted with the guidance of the project mentor. Adaptations included onboarding another English tutor at Hopwood Hall College from January 2021. We also integrated the use of other prompts for learners, including visual prompts such as artwork and paintings, as well as audio prompts such as pieces of music.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The writing sessions were delivered at the end of a 90-minute GCSE session which was already timetabled.

In line with the ETF's Professional Standards (2014), the project tutors embraced the following approaches:

- Motivating and inspiring learners to develop their skills, many of which were already there. Through a coaching and mentoring approach, (particularly using Hawkins' (2007) CLEAR model: a clear understanding, listening, exploring, action and review) tutors were able to support the learners to make explicit what in many cases they already knew implicitly, but had been disinclined to reveal previously
- Offering learners the choice to select the pace and style of their learning with creative writing in order to enable the learners to build on the skills they already had.
- Valuing equality of opportunity to all learners in the groups, which meant expanding the project to two female learners for a period of time.

- Tutors critically reflecting together and evaluating the impact of the creative writing activities on the dynamics of the classroom and the changes in the way the learners worked.
- Feedback was peer to peer with no written teacher feedback and stimulus prompts often produced by learners for other learners.

Further research materials were accessed to support the project, namely through the issues raised in the book 'Boys Don't Try' (Pinkett and Roberts, 2019) and the statistically shocking evidence that boys in schools in the UK are struggling because of a range of issues including anxiety, low achievement (or low self-belief in the ability to achieve), behaviour, bullying, increasing mental health issues, sexist attitudes and an inability to express emotions. Inevitably, this problem spills over into the experience they have in further education.

Additionally, an increased awareness of the connection between the vulnerability created in the process of creative writing exposed a real need to reduce the stigma male learners feel when faced with an activity which may reveal, or lay bare, their emotions. On this basis, the Hopwood tutor signed up for a mental health first aid qualification to be able to better support learners.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

It is no secret that that the multi-faceted process of creative writing can lead to deep revelations and disclosures about the writer. As detailed above, some of the work produced by learners was of a very personal nature and therefore close attention was paid to pastoral, safeguarding and welfare issues raised. Swift and effective referrals were made in such cases as these.

In some cases, writing showed signs of aggression, hostility and acrimony. Tutors at both colleges responded appropriately to this and engaged with each other and the relevant support networks at the respective colleges. This again reflected the negative connections some learners associated

with the process of writing and needed to be handled in an understanding, sensitive and trauma-informed way, with the intention of 'repairing' rather than 'punishing' learners' choices and practices. In discussions with learners about tolerance and acceptance of others, we found that young males appeared to feel that they needed to conform to a stereotype, where aggression based on perceived rivalries between their home-towns or cities or allegiance to football teams. In discussions with them about their choice of tone and language in their writing, we started to explore the possible reasons why. In most cases, they had not considered or reflected on this previously and once they had, they changed their approach. Tutors spoke about celebrating equality and diversity rather than seeing it as a threat.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Eliminating the process of correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar in learners' written work removed the immediate barrier of learners believing that their work was of a poor quality and released inhibitions caused by this. Almost all learners involved in the project expressed negative connotations of receiving marked work from their schooldays which was heavily corrected on technical skills and lacked encouragement for, and development of, creative skills.

The announcement of the cancellation of summer 2021 GCSE exams in January left many learners assuming that a notional grade would be submitted by the college (as in 2020). However, when it was communicated that there would be a series of assessments, including one with an option of creative writing, engagement and attendance increased significantly. At Hopwood Hall College, out of fifteen learners who attended the final GCSE assessments which took place instead of exams, seven took the creative writing option. Of these, all have achieved a percentage which, if upheld by the awarding body, will represent a grade four or above. This is very encouraging when we consider that the percentage of learners

achieving a grade four or above for this vocational area in the last exam series in 2019 was 34%.

At the City of Liverpool college,16 learners in a group of twenty-one achieved a grade 4 or above in the Creative Writing assessment in May 2021. This assessment has been used towards the final Teacher Assessed Grades this year. Comparing this result to an assessment in December on Creative Writing over 60% of learners have improved their overall marks in a creative writing assessment. This has been very encouraging for us as a college, as we have seen as vast improvement within this group of writing skills. We have also seen an improvement of overall confidence with regards to Creative writing.

Learning from this project

Boys do try.

Understanding prior barriers to writing or experiences and breaking them down by staging an approach to the process helps to release the often hesitant, sometimes unenthusiastic and reluctant response from teenage male learners with creative writing.

They know much more than they often admit to.

Once these barriers are addressed and the process of removing them begins, the tutor can see the skills learners often keep hidden.

Ditch the SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) focus

Removing an English tutor's automatic response to identifying technical errors allows learners to see the value in their creativity and develop this separately. The process feels less punitive and critical. Assessment of technical accuracy can be reintegrated later.

Online learning can hinder open and free self-expression

Many learners were much more willing to continue to develop their reading skills rather than their creative writing skills in the period of online learning.

The reasons for this have not been explored due to time constraints. However, it is felt that learners have more courage to 'make mistakes' where they can receive regular feedback from peers and tutors in class, which is the model that had worked well until the period of lockdown. A writing task might take longer to complete than a reading analysis task and there is often a lack of self-discipline in teenage learners when being expected to complete independent study remotely.

Modelling emotional openness encourages creativity

Many young males find it challenging to express themselves openly because of established ideas of masculinity or deeply engrained attitudes to, and responses to, emotional openness and honesty. An important step to reducing this damage is to normalise the process of speaking and writing about emotions.

> *"I feel like I have made progress with my writing skills, due to the efforts of my teacher. I enjoyed writing stories based on music. I had never done this before. It really helped me become more confident in my ability"* (Jack, GCSE English student, aged 17).

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-3/7-6a/**

6b. DEVELOPING WRITING
Sheffield Lifelong Learning

This project aimed to address the disconnect between the speaking and writing skills of many of our adult learners, particularly those from an ESOL background. The project enabled them to use innate grammar instincts, gained from their everyday use and experience of spoken English, to build stronger, clearer sentences on the page.

Summary

As a community learning provider seeking to furnish adults with full Functional Skills qualifications, we have recognised a pattern of learners achieving success in the speaking and listening and reading elements of a course, who struggle to reach the equivalent level in writing. This has led learners to lose confidence in themselves and in the exam process and has, on occasion, threatened to derail their progress altogether. This pattern has also been recognised within our organisation's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. This project offered an opportunity to target specific issues with sentence construction that frequently frustrated Level 1 and Level 2 learners. It was further anticipated that the principles could then be adapted for learners in different contexts, including 16-18 study programmes (including Special Educational Needs (SEND)), family and community learning, adult programmes and apprenticeships.

Rationale

Adult learners are often expert jugglers, balancing the demands of study with the responsibilities associated with families, jobs and being part of their communities. During a typical week they may often converse in English, they will sometimes read, but they rarely write. This, inevitably, leads to a 'spiky profile', which in turn creates difficulties for learners and teachers alike, particularly when they join an accredited course. Too often teachers see confidence wane and impetus disappear as the familiar

refrain of "I'm just no good at writing!" echoes around the classroom. In an effort to tackle this, the project aimed to develop a 'back-to-basics' approach to grammar, that would enable a deeper understanding of the grammatical tools used to build a strong sentence. The idea was for learners to take sentences apart, in order to better understand how they work grammatically, and then to create their own clauses, sentences and paragraphs in a free writing context, where they could begin to enjoy writing creatively, skilfully and with greater confidence. This concept quickly evolved into an approach that could harness the fact that many learners express themselves more accurately vocally than on paper. This innate grammar resource, developed from years of everyday linguistic exchange in a variety of contexts, needed to be formally acknowledged and ruthlessly exploited to help learners more confidently recognise and correct mistakes in their writing by reading out loud. Those areas that remained uncorrected could then be targeted with specific, pedagogical support. This approach became known as using 'grammar ears'.

Approach

We first designed an online course that would explore this approach with a group of learners in a writing for employability and study skills context. Although these learners had passed Level 2, their writing skill and confidence was somewhat shaky, due to a learning experience that was disrupted by the pandemic. Based on discussion with the learners, we agreed that the writing would have a broadly autobiographical theme and would encompass a range of different text types. The course was delivered on Zoom and designed with two phases.

In the **first phase**, early tasks were collaborative and learners produced a written text which was then read out to the rest of the group. Learners were encouraged to focus on listening for grammar mistakes in each other's

work, emphasising the idea that learners hear more mistakes than they see. Written work was assessed for grammar alone and mistakes were highlighted in pink, but not corrected (see figure 6b.1 below). This reinforced the focus on self-correction and grammatical self-reliance. The teacher began to build a profile of the needs of individual learners, noting those mistakes that some learners simply couldn't hear or see. These were then addressed in Phase Two.

Figure 6b.1: Example of learner work before using 'grammar ears'. Grammatical errors are highlighted in pink

Phase Two employed online delivery we dubbed 'bending', rather than flipping the classroom. Once vocalisation had determined individual grammar issues - for instance subject-verb agreement or use of the definite article - learners were expected to independently re-visit their learning and understanding of grammar rules through homework exercises, using self-marking, online resources. Following this, learners completed creative writing tasks designed to use the particular grammar rule studied. Work was drafted at home then posted on Google Classroom, so it could be 'brought to class' on Zoom, where it was shared and discussed. Learners were then expected to respond by producing a final, corrected version for marking.

The practices from this course were also embedded in Functional Skills learning at Level 1 and Level 2 and used with individuals in online tutorials.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

George Bernard Shaw said "Progress is impossible without change", but this year has been one in which changes in teaching, learning and assessment have been an educational necessity, as well as a choice. However, our learners quickly adapted to the Zoom classroom and engaged enthusiastically with lockdown lessons on screen. We were reminded of the important sense of community that is created by learning together.

The initial premise had been to find a 'system' that would help 'fix' the stubborn grammar issues that so frustrated our learners and tutors alike. However, we soon learnt that there was no instant solution, or quick fix that could be imposed, rather a more organic process was required, that grew and developed to meet the needs of the learners. Good, active listening was key to this from the outset. The approach was informed and guided by listening to the learners, but also focused on them listening closely to each other's writing and, ultimately, listening to their own sentences. It was good to be reminded that true listening creates focus and encourages thought and reflection, which in turn builds academic confidence.

It was also good to be reminded of the joy of writing without so many of the constraints we so frequently experience in accredited learning. Giving

learners the liberty to tell their own stories, to use language freely, not to worry about spelling and punctuation, unleashed unexpected creativity and depth in their writing. Asking learners to trust their aural memories, their innate grammar knowledge and instincts and asking them to look to themselves, rather than the teacher, felt counter-intuitive. So too, did highlighting any written errors and then returning work ungraded and uncorrected, but it was revolutionary in giving them ownership of the improvement of their writing. They were released from being focused on a test and could concentrate on what it really means to be 'good' at English – to be a clear, confident, yet empathetic communicator.

Figure 6b.2: Learners used their 'grammar ears' as a way to build better sentences and develop their confidence with written tasks.

The learners' response has been extremely positive overall. The auto-biographical nature of the writing tasks has proved surprisingly powerful and created a wonderful bond amongst the initial course members, who were drawn into a writing community, through sharing common human experiences that span social and cultural divides. As they read their work aloud, everyone found a voice. The whole group listened with respect and empathy and, with time, sensitively critiqued and refined each other's work, with an eye for detail that was truly exciting.

By the end of the course, the group dynamic had proved so motivating and inspiring that a final Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) session demonstrated a tangible boost to learner aspiration.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This project sparked the interest of several colleagues, who were keen to find new and innovative ways of developing writing. The approach was adopted within three Functional Skills classes at Levels 1 and 2 and proved sufficiently flexible to support learners in different ways, in group and individual contexts, with encouraging results. It was particularly good to see learners with a variety of first language backgrounds feel more supported and develop more confidence in recognising and addressing elements of cultural interference in their writing.

> *"In our final session she [ESOL learner] talked about the challenges of first language interference and how her Indonesian dialect poses certain difficulties in terms of 'translating' grammar. This gave rise to a fascinating conversation between learners about having a 'brain' for each language and having the confidence to eventually stop translating from one language into the other and, instead, think in both"* English Teacher.

Our ESOL department were very keen to explore this approach with some of their more advanced learners and, although plans have been delayed by a variety of COVID-19 related factors, it will be taken up next year. The lead tutor for Functional Skills has been particularly supportive of the project and has recently initiated a ten week, non-accredited 'bridging course', drawing directly from the project's work, that will help learners transitioning from Level 1 ESOL to Functional Skills, or from Functional Skills Level 1 to Level 2, to fill the gaps in their grammar and improve writing confidence.

The success of remote learning means that we propose offering learners the option of both blended and online only courses next year.

> *"The 'bridging course' idea, which is already being developed from this project for learners moving from Level 1 to Level 2 in Functional English, is one we are keen to adopt and adapt. Our department has been inspired to see that, sometimes, focus on content means learners do not have sufficient time to fully absorb grammar and take ownership of it. If they are to be successful communicators, grammar must be given specific time, focus and attention"* Functional Skills Lead Tutor.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Using Google Classroom as a 'hub' for learners proved to be an excellent means of clearly recording achievements and progress. Work can be easily annotated in its electronic form, immediately returned and improved, producing a bank of learner progress data over time. A particular joy has been collating an anthology of the different texts that the learners on the Christmas term course produced, week by week, which will be published in book form as a memento for learners, but also as a resource for future delivery. The anthology provides a record of progress; there is a clear difference in the ambition and complexity of the sentences written at the beginning of the course and those they produced at the end. Although the grammar was still far from perfect, the frequency of flawless sentences was appreciably higher, as learners gained confidence and targeted recurring mistakes over time.

All learners who have taken part have wholeheartedly engaged and persevered with the approach and many have commented on its benefits. One learner from the Christmas course related in her summative blog, that, having managed to secure her 'dream job' as a teaching assistant:

> *"Now I am fluent in my speaking and much better at writing and doing my daily work with full confidence."*
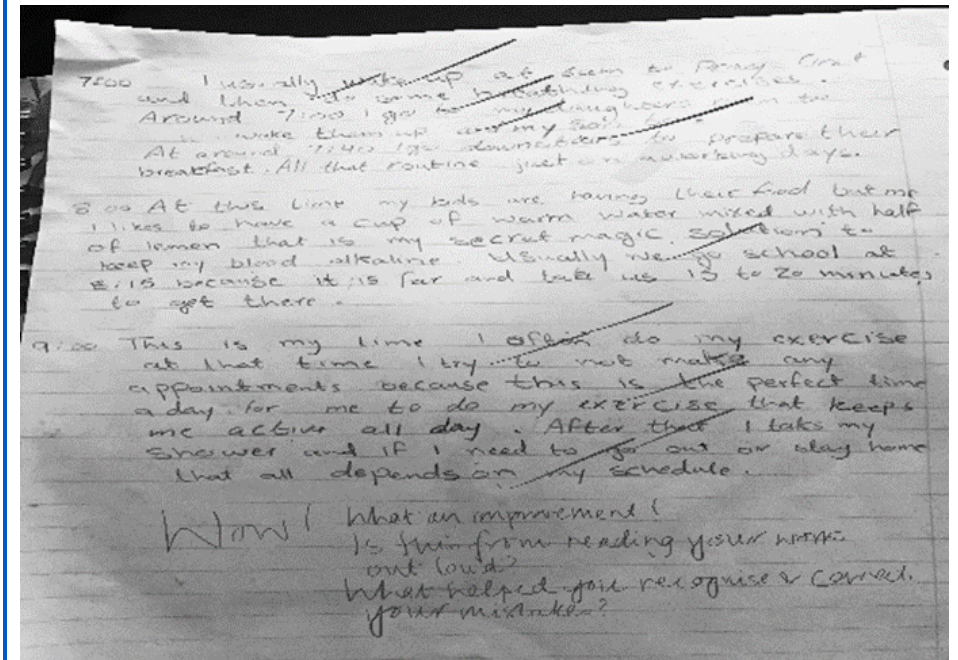
Figure 6b.3: Example of learner work after using 'grammar ears'.

Another recounted:

> *"Focusing on grammar gaps and correcting the mistakes, all these strategies helped me and improved my English, especially writing. I can say now I am in better control of how I am able to correct my work grammatically with confidence and my writing skills…changed significantly for the better."*

Learning from this project

WHAT WENT WELL

- Our learners were adaptable and flexible, quickly engaging with a new approach in an online context.
- In the Christmas term course, sharing work aloud not only engaged the innate grammar sense of the group, but helped to build a supportive, vibrant community of writers who cared about improving their own work and that of others. It was a delightful experience.
- Learners became more self-evaluative, confident and accurate writers.
- In recent one-to-one sessions, where this approach has been used to support those with particularly strong cultural interference, there has been a transformation in learners' attitude towards English grammar. As difficulties are singled out and recognised, sentence writing feels more manageable and learners start to trust their 'grammar ears', but, furthermore, are keen to immerse themselves in spoken English on a daily basis in order to soak up standard grammar and apply it to their own written communication; very exciting!
- Managers have been incredibly supportive and keen to turn this action research project into an integral part of our English offer. The approach is currently being used in a new 'bridging course' for learners transitioning from Level 1 to Level 2 Functional Skills.

EVEN BETTER IF

- It would have been preferable if all learners had seen through the process of revising pieces several times for ultimate accuracy and training of those grammar ears.
- It would have been valuable to test how the approach could be integrated more effectively within Functional Skills courses, as well as working as a standalone course.
- More opportunities to collaborate with colleagues would have allowed us to find out if, and how, elements of the approach work in different contexts and with different cohorts.

> *"I think sessions one by one helps me with my grammar. I am more confident in what I write. When I write, I now know how to focus on the words which I write. In the beginning, I think it was more helpful when you read to me than when I read to myself because I didn't hear my mistakes. Now I think when I read independently, I can quickly spot the error. I think without those extra lessons, I would not make any effort with my writing"* Learner receiving 1:1 tuition.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-3/7-6b/

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

OTLA 7 ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (MIDLANDS)

Research Group Lead: Bob Read

Mentors: Catriona Mowat

Dianne Robinson

Helen Hewlett

A SENSE OF BELONGING – SOME REFLECTIONS ON LITERACY, IDENTITY AND GCSE RESIT PROGRAMMES
Bob Read (Research Group Lead)

Has there been a book that completely transformed your views on English teaching? For me as a literacy teacher, it was Gee's Situated Language and Learning (2004) which prompted me to consider for the first time that language and literacy practices serve not only to communicate information but, and perhaps more importantly, are also expressions of identity. As English teachers in the FE sector our working lives and session plans tend to be shaped by the rigorous, atomistic detail of the Functional Skills Standards or the GCSE English Language Assessment Objectives which constantly emphasise the effectiveness of written and spoken language in terms of its effectiveness in communicating 'information'. But the way we talk, read, and write serves also to express who we are - our social identity, our status, our values, etc., and this simple but powerful insight was explored in great depth both in Gee's work and in New Literacy Studies generally (Gee, 2015). However, this social practice approach to literacy can easily remain as a focus for academic debate only and is not often seen as a source of inspiration for hard-pressed English teachers working with challenging resit students. In contrast, this article explores how an understanding of the relationship between literacy and identity can be central to some engaging and effective teaching.

The theme for this article first suggested itself when I was reading Kirsty Powell's fascinating report on her research project at **Moulton College** entitled *'Bringing Writing to Life'*. In it she explains how she and her team set out to explore the value of encouraging learners to write about their 'lived experience'. Her research findings included an interesting observation that her GCSE English resit learners seemed to be much more interested in analysing a text when it was in the author's handwriting and especially in

peer assessment tasks when the writing was by another learner at a similar ability level:

> *"When an example piece was handed out, learners who were previously visibly distracted, for example by using their mobile phone, were seen to put their phones down without being asked and started looking at the examples and taking part in class discussions. The pieces seemed to support better engagement because learners could see that the pieces had been written by somebody who was, at some point, 'just like them'"*

In the diffident handwriting and imperfect spelling Kirsty feels that student recognised immediately that the novice writer faced similar challenges. He had a 'voice' that was familiar and there was a sense of shared background, aspiration and identity. I would suggest that the learner probably felt at that moment a 'sense of belonging' in Kirsty's classroom that, according to a DfE report (Hume et al, 2018), is vital if GCSE resit teachers are to be successful in engaging poorly motivated learners who are easily alienated by the range of unfamiliar texts and technical terminology that can characterise much GCSE English Language teaching.

A GCSE English resit teacher's role is to help learners feel confident in using Standard English correctly when the context requires it and to develop their stamina in reading extended texts with challenging vocabulary but, and at the start of their programme especially, they need to feel that their interests, their informal literacy practices and their support needs are understood and validated by their teacher as a starting point for their programmes.

The DfE report mentioned above, *'Retention and Success in Maths and English',* recommends a range of practical interventions and support strategies that organisations and teachers can use to cultivate this 'sense of belonging' and many of those strategies, I would argue, reflect a social practice view of literacy which recognises that for many students learning to speak, read and write in Standard English requires a significant challenge to a learner's sense of identity and cultural background. It involves changes in the way they talk in class, the vocabulary they use and how they express themselves on the page and this is so much more than just the mastery of a set of cognitive skills or the retrieval of knowledge. This challenge was addressed on several other OTLA projects this year which demonstrated how teachers can enable learners in feeling a 'sense of belonging' in their classroom.

At **Develop**, for example, an independent training provider, staff undertook an action research project *'New Support Models'* which explored how they could use learning support assistants more effectively on GCSE maths programmes and their findings highlight the benefits of involving successful resit students not only in peer support activities but also of providing them with progression routes to a recognised learning support role. When new learners discovered that some of the support staff were ex-students, they said they felt reassured because they knew that the LSAs had a similar background and so could identify with their support needs and anxieties which they felt could be discussed openly.

In Tina Pringle's report of her research project at **Grantham College** we read about a performing arts student, *'a colourful character … (and) a natural performer'* who was resitting his GCSE English qualification for the second time at his college, having been completely disengaged in his first year of study:

'He did very little written work in 2019/20 and the lockdown affected his studies greatly. He was impossible to motivate online and although he

knew the importance of reading for his lines, he would not read for GCSE. It was very difficult for him to do any work at home. His written work suffered greatly, and he was unable to provide the evidence for a CAG grade for GCSE English.'

Through Tina's project this learner was invited to become actively involved in the filming of some videos of dramatized readings of extracts from 19th century texts that were required to be covered in the syllabus. He was 'excited' by the prospect of this new role and he has enjoyed his involvement in the filming, feeling that he could contribute his skills to the class activities and began to see the relevance of his GCSE English studies for the first time. As a result, his behaviour and English skills have improved greatly.

Similarly, Cass Webb at **Cambridge Regional College** reports how in her project *'Toolbox of Horrors'* she encouraged learners to share their interest in the horror film genre and used it as basis for a series of reading and writing activities over two terms that built on their 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzales et al, 2005) and enabled Cass to make links with elements of effective storytelling and writing that could be then be explored in other genres:

'Exploiting their existing knowledge of atmosphere and setting provided us with the ideal route into exploring and creating their own examples of the use of simple stylistic techniques e.g., similes and metaphors… Learners didn't mind greeting us in corridors and were keen to drop us messages on Teams to say what horror film they watched at the weekend… They haven't been shy about letting us know about their favourite horror movie or sharing with us a new word they have learnt for their horror vocabulary.'

Some readers may object that these examples serve only to confirm a rather hackneyed encouragement to make a programme of study 'relevant', which in many ways they do, but they also remind us that the process of literacy teaching is so much more than just a transmission of knowledge and that the learners' interests, their 'funds of knowledge' and their informal literacy and language practices need to be valued and incorporated into a programme if learners are to feel 'a sense of belonging' in their GCSE resit classroom.

Given the time constraints of most resit programmes it is easy for teachers to dismiss this social practice perspective on literacy development as an irrelevant academic distraction and that their focus should instead be on the 'delivery' of a knowledge-rich English curriculum based on the requirements of high mark exam questions. However, I would argue that as shown in these action research projects, an insight into the links between literacy and identity can help teachers explore new approaches to effective classroom practice that can accelerate learners' progress by anticipating and minimising the affective and attitudinal barriers to learning that many of our learners face. As a result, learners will be more easily engaged and better prepared to access the knowledge-rich curriculum that they are offered.

Finally, I would like to mention that often in working with teachers on OTLA research projects this year and last year I have regularly discussed with

project leads the challenge of supporting learners in understanding and practising the use of technical terminology to describe word classes, language features, writing techniques, etc. Often this has involved discussing the range of different strategies they can use in actively modelling the use of terminology in the classroom and in scaffolding discussion activities in sensitive ways so that learners can begin to use the vocabulary and sentence structures that characterise effective text analysis (Didau, 2014). These strategies only work well when teachers understand that they are socialising learners into the academic language practices that underpin a particular subject area and its discourse, and that such strategies therefore present both challenges and valuable opportunities for learners in terms of their 'identity'. (Gee, 2008).

I would argue that the practitioners featured in the action research projects above tend to view themselves not so much as a teacher of a subject but as a teacher of a group of learners, learners whose backgrounds, interests, literacy practices and 'funds of knowledge' were of real interest to them as a valuable starting point for their course planning. Exploring issues of literacy and identity as a way to create 'a sense of belonging' in the classroom can then be seen not just as the focus for academic discussion in articles like this but as an essential element in the teaching of effective GCSE resit programmes in the real world.

RESEARCH CLUSTER 4

Mentor: Catriona Mowat

7a. Cambridge Regional College

7b. City of Wolverhampton College

8.   Moulton College

ENGAGING LEARNERS IN IMAGINATIVE WRITING
Catriona Mowat (Mentor)

The energy and commitment of the teachers leading these projects inspired me all the way through.

Cambridge Regional College's use of a genre that already interests learners as a key to unlocking their writing, means that horror came emphatically into lessons and formed a firm footing for development to other genres too. Teaching English and in particular, writing, on a construction programme in an FE college, with teenage boys predominantly, could be seen as some people's worst nightmare. Not them. Writing in a specific genre that suited the majority of their learners was the key to escaping the stereotype of a tedious English lesson and humdrum writing tasks, along with building stamina and 'writing fitness'. The project acknowledges that, like a gym workout, writing has to be built on and practised, to build up skills and 'stickability'.

City of Wolverhampton College took the title of their project (*'Beneath the Trees: From acorns of imagination to a forest of creativity'*) from Chuck Berry's famous song, "Johnny B. Goode", which featured as a resource in their project. The enthusiastic use of song, art and real (though online) objects, leads teachers to be more creative about engaging learners in the culture that excites us. The expression "Beneath the Trees" is both a homely image of security and safety and a metaphor for growth and aspiration. Similarly, this project aimed at taking their learners further along their journeys towards realising their potential with regard to creative writing skills. Their report is thoroughly backed up, linking practice to theory, with background reading for those who'd like to take this further.

Moulton College aimed to examine the role of individual lived experience for teaching writing. They trialled a range of methods, including dialogic

questioning and tailored learning resources such as alternative peer assessment, in both Functional Skills and GCSE English lessons. They observed that when they used certain methods that encouraged learners to draw on their individual lived experience and existing knowledge, their writing improved. They found that using exemplary pieces that were highly graded doesn't really work well with their learners. Instead, they used real learner writing as models to critique. These peer pieces helped learners see what was just within reach, and that they could indeed 'tweak' their own writing to gain those extra vital marks.

Working with these colleges was a joy! The teachers loved what they were doing so much that it brightened up my day talking to them. Add to that the fact that Wolverhampton's early reports kept me on schedule, and my mentor life was a treat.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-4/**

7a. A TOOLBOX OF HORROR
Cambridge Regional College

Teaching English and in particular, writing, on a construction programme in an FE college, with teenage boys predominantly, could be seen as some people's worst nightmare. Not us! Writing in a specific genre that suited the majority of our learners was the key to escaping the stereotype of a tedious English lesson and humdrum writing tasks, along with building stamina and 'writing fitness'.

Summary

We are a large FE College in Cambridge with a majority cohort of 16–19-year-old learners on Study Programmes. We also have a growing number of courses for adults, for 14–16-year-olds in alternative provision and for apprentices.

This project was based in the construction department at our college. It was our goal to improve the engagement, attendance and writing skills of our learners. Our attendance at English lessons, whilst good, still needed improving.

We identified a specific group of L1 Plumbing learners to focus on for the project. We chose this group predominantly because of the enthusiasm of the plumbing course tutor and the fact that the OTLA Project Lead taught this group for all 3 weekly lessons of a GCSE English Language resit programme.

It was clear that engagement in lessons was a major challenge and a creative and flexible approach would be required.

Rationale

It was our goal for our learners to see writing for what it is – a 'diverse social and professional practice that we all need to learn and use through life' (Ivanic, R et al, 2008) – and not just a mandatory requirement for English exams. We planned to explore a range of strategies and resources to develop and extend writing skills to meet the needs of all levels of vocational learners.

Our learners tend to perceive writing skills to be only a part of their English lessons and literacy as predominantly assessed within their English exams. They are therefore, unsurprisingly, reluctant to engage in writing. Unfortunately, this is a view which we as educators may inadvertently reinforce through our lack of collaboration with vocational tutors to encourage writing within the core programme.

Vocational lessons do require a great deal of writing, not only in practical work-related tasks but to evidence that learning through assessment, e.g., writing step by step professional guides. Unfortunately, at present, those tasks and assessments are all done on computers, which do not offer learners the focussed support and practice they need to develop their handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar skills.

We wanted to use this project as a positive opportunity to work with our plumbing tutors to continue to build solid, supportive and collaborative professional relationships whilst also preparing learners for the demands of their GCSE English exams.

Approach

Our first approach was to research our learners' anxieties and blocks about writing. We designed a questionnaire and distributed it amongst a variety of learners in order to gain a better understanding of their mindset.

The results clearly confirmed our thoughts and we were able to identify that our learners had a variety of struggles including:

- poor stamina in coping with the physical effort of writing by hand
- low self-esteem/fear of yet another failure
- poor pen grip due to lack of practice

Upon the basis of these results, we first looked at a variety of what we thought could be 'quick fixes' e.g., using a Stabilo pen, designing a writing board with a slant on it and purchasing pen grips. A few learners warmed to the pen grips but others dismissed them very quickly. The Stabilo pen looked 'different' and the learners did not want to appear to be 'different'. There was a similar response to the writing board and learners also said that they didn't want to have to carry it around all day. Although these resources were not welcomed by this group of learners, we are interested in trying them again with other groups from the start of the next academic year.

Not for the faint hearted!

We were slowly approaching the November exams when we changed our approach. We identified that the learners could do very well in imaginative writing tasks if they were equipped with a focus on one specific genre. It was quickly identified that the majority of our learners loved the 'horror' genre so we focused on that. We looked at various film trailers, talked about the structure and features of a 'Horror' movie/script but without using the technical language. The learners soon relaxed into informal discussions about specific movies they liked and what it was about them that they liked. Again, this prompted various discussions but we avoided using too much technical language about language techniques at this stage.

We then looked at key vocabulary, still using the horror genre. We introduced a variety of texts for us to read as a group, identifying key words that you would probably only use in this genre. Learners recorded this vocabulary in their exercise books and we referred to it throughout our lessons/discussions.

Exploiting their existing knowledge of atmosphere and setting provided us with the ideal route into exploring and creating their own examples of the use of simple stylistic techniques e.g. similes and metaphors.

Another approach that supported their writing in lessons was when we did short burst writing tasks with them. This gave us the opportunity to extend the time that they wrote in every lesson incrementally in order to build up their stamina to prepare them for the exam.

Then we discovered 'slow writing' – a complete game changer!

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

'Slow writing' is a technique that we discovered by accident upon researching the internet for some resources to support poor writing skills (Didau, 2021).

You use this technique by giving the learners explicit instructions on how to write a text, sentence by sentence. It then supports them to not just think about what they write but how they construct each sentence.

Example:

- Your first sentence must start with a verb
- Your second sentence must contain a simile
- Your third sentence must be 3 words only

Once we introduced this technique into our teaching, it was a complete eye opener. We literally started off 'slow' (no pun intended). We used the above format and asked them to write 5 sentences. There was no time limit initially as we wanted to see the results. That first session was a revelation for the learners and us! When we gave them feedback, they couldn't believe the difference and even that small amount of writing and feedback boosted their self-esteem and confidence with writing. We then began to differentiate and personalise the slow writing directions to reflect the learners' individual support needs in sentence construction.

For one student who tended to act out the role of 'class clown' the use of 'slow writing' scaffolding technique provided exactly the support he needed to engage in writing. It enabled him to feel that he was working collaboratively with the tutor and so the daunting challenge of writing was effectively shared in a way he found encouraging and motivating.

Moving forward, the use of 'slow writing' technique is one that we will be looking to introduce to all groups within the construction and motor vehicle departments. For our taster days this year, we are going to design a one-paragraph writing task with explicit instructions on what should be included to see how the learners respond. It would also give us an opportunity to identify any learners that could potentially go to a GCSE class instead of a FS class.

Next academic year, we are also planning to have a dedicated 'Power Up' room set up for learners to utilise 3 days a week in order to have support with writing any assessments, homework, or to improve on English skills. This will be supervised by an English tutor with support from a Construction learning support mentor.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

To support collaboration, we designed a training session for our construction tutors on how to mark learners' written work. We wanted them to be involved more in supporting our learners with their SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) skills so that the learners would see a more collaborative approach between English and vocational tutors and also to reinforce the importance of these skills.

In order to support our learners with their writing and plumbing course work, we discovered a set of writing challenges that we were able to adapt in order to include some contextualised writing so that they could see the relevance of writing skills for workplace and vocational tasks.

We focused on one particular L1 Plumbing group as a case study. There were approximately 18 learners in this group and whilst their Initial Assessments indicated that they were working at a Grade 1 or 2, their Centre Assessed Grades (CAG) were a 2 or 3.

These learners had 1 hour a week on their timetable called Independent Study and it was led by their course tutor. The course tutor, who was dyslexic himself, was fully committed to the OTLA project and it was decided that we would use this opportunity for them to complete a writing challenge. The learners could choose which writing challenge they wanted to complete each session, and this then helped them with their handwriting stamina.

Our explicitly collaborative approach involving the plumbing and English teams, served to highlight the importance of attendance and participation. The support and involvement of the plumbing tutor also gave a strong message that having barriers to learning e.g., dyslexia, does not mean you cannot have professional aspirations and achieve your dreams.

We also held a writing competition at Christmas to encourage our learners to write. Some of the entries were amazing. The English team chose two winners from each group and the winners weren't always necessarily the 'best' stories. Many were chosen on the basis of the learners' progress in their writing skills. We created posters of the winners with their entries and displayed them in the Construction Dept.

The reflection below from the project lead shares how the writing competition captured the imagination of learners of all abilities and supported them to develop their writing skills.

His final submission was extremely good for someone of his ability and definitely worthy of a prize. Whilst he just about passed his Entry Level 2, we discovered he had a knack for storytelling and had a huge imagination but just needed to be able to follow some form of structure. He continually pesters me to create more competitions so that he has something to aim for!

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Our learners' stamina in handwriting has improved vastly over the past academic year. We struggled during the national lockdown imposed by COVID-19 as it was natural for our learners to type any writing tasks that we set them online. However, their attendance was consistent even during lockdown and once back on site we managed to get them back into handwriting again. Bearing in mind that each GCSE English Language paper is 1 hour and 45 mins long, this will always be an important challenge for our vocational learners.

We have had some encouraging emails from parents who have noticed the change in their son/daughter's approach to, and enthusiasm for, English. Some parents have said:

"Thanks so much, he enjoys English a lot more now"

"Thank you for all the encouragement and energy you have given …to lift both his confidence and academic achievement."

"What a difference this year has made to [learner's name] in his English, thanks so much!"

Students have also shared how they felt about the difference in their learning and ability this year. They haven't been shy about letting us know about their favourite horror movie or sharing with us a new word they have learnt for their horror vocabulary.
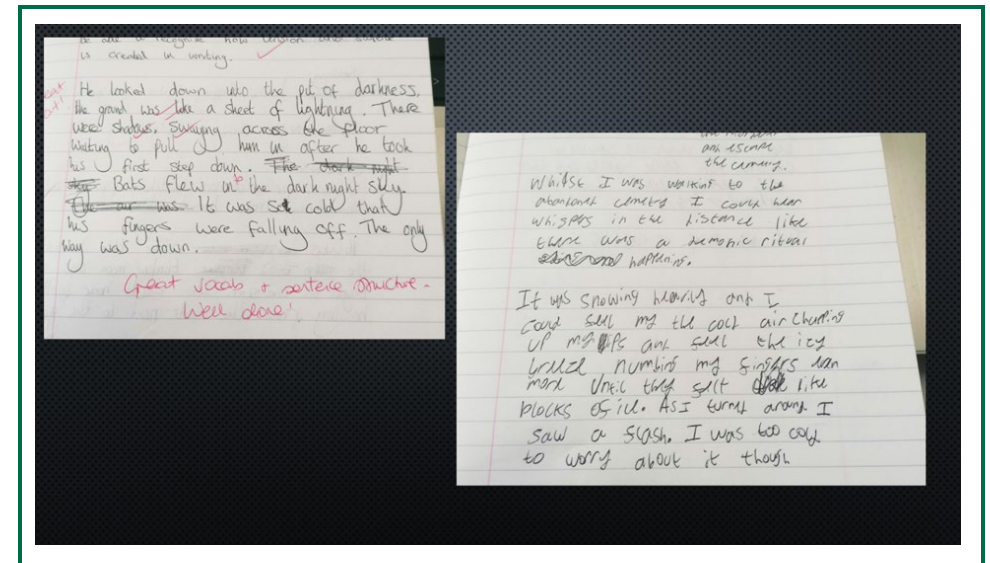
Figure 7a.1: Using horror as a genre to encourage learners to develop their handwriting skills and stamina in preparation for the GCSE English exams.

Learning from this project

As with our previous project (ETF, 2020c, Project 6), our research programme this year has again awakened the creative drive in us as a team and we were very surprised by how quickly tutors and learners became engaged in the range of strategies we explored

What went well for us was definitely the adoption of 'slow writing' as a teaching technique. It would have been even better if we had had time at
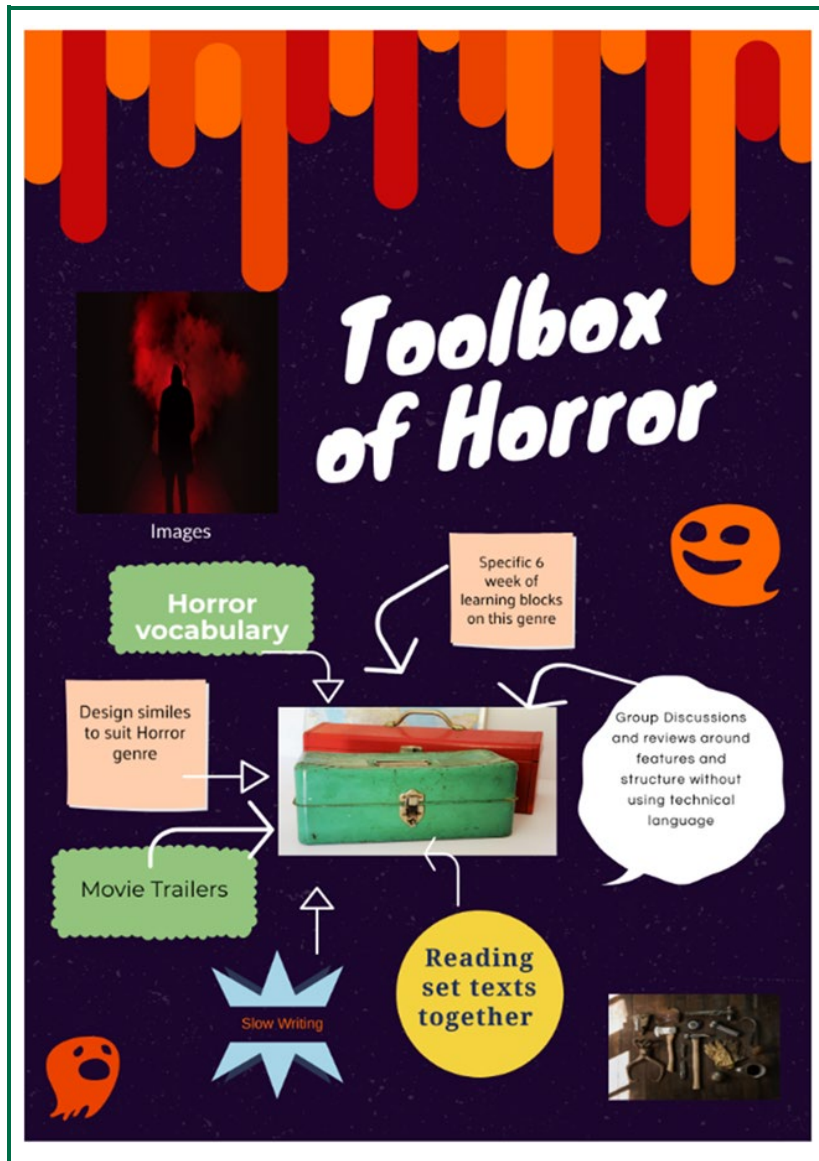
Figure 7a.2: Infographic describing the Toolbox of Horror writing intervention.

the end of this academic year to investigate this technique and train more staff in using it in their lessons. We will continue to explore a 'slow writing' approach next year and I feel it is definitely a scaffolding technique that works with low level learners and which can support them in developing higher level writing skills. Introducing this technique across the whole department offers all our learners the opportunity to develop and improve their performance within a tight and supportive framework.

Working with the plumbing team in particular was a fantastic experience as we got the opportunity to witness the learners in their workshop completing work that they enjoy and do well. It also gave us a wider insight into the plumbing industry and how we could contextualise resources and writing tasks to show their relevance. We got to see learners in practical lessons where their practical talents would shine and this improved our relationships with them. Learners didn't mind greeting us in corridors and were keen to drop us messages on Teams to say what horror film they watched at the weekend.

Finally, it was good for the learners to see us all working together as 'one team'! Overall, the Toolbox of Horror project was a success and will continue to grow even more next year.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-4/7-7a/**

7b. BENEATH THE TREES: FROM ACORNS OF IMAGINATION TO A FOREST OF CREATIVITY

City of Wolverhampton College

The title of this report is taken from Chuck Berry's famous song, "Johnny B. Goode", which featured as a resource in our project. The expression "Beneath the Trees" is both a homely image of security and safety and a metaphor for growth and aspiration. Similarly, this project aimed at taking our learners further along their journeys towards realising their potential with regard to creative writing skills [N.B. henceforth we will be using the term 'Imaginative Writing' instead of the more generic expression, 'creative writing', as it conforms to Edexcel's GCSE specifications].

Summary

At the City of Wolverhampton College, the GCSE English Language provision is delivered across three sites: Metro Campus, Paget Road Campus and Wellington Road Campus. Each site serves the needs of different vocational areas. Learners had three hours of English lessons per week in 2020/21. However, the format of the lessons and their mode of delivery had to be modified as the year unfolded in accordance with COVID restrictions.

The Imaginative Writing task accounts for around a quarter of the marks in the GCSE English Language exam. Due to the abstract and open-ended nature of 'imagining', students often find these tasks daunting and inhibiting, resulting in a difficulty 'getting started' on this task, especially under exam conditions. Our project was designed to overcome this apparent 'writer's block'. We aimed to develop strategies for making the 'abstract' process of imagining more 'concrete' and accessible for our learners.

At any given stage in the project there were least four members of staff actively involved, including teachers from the English Department and various 'Learning Innovators' from the Quality Team. Some staff participated by way of suggesting alternative approaches or by adapting resources. The Learning Innovators contributed primarily in an advisory capacity on matters such as Growth Mindset, strategies for giving feedback and using online tools. Most importantly, this project helped to nurture innovation with respect to teaching imaginative writing and more generally on useful classroom techniques. Approximately 200 learners were intermittently involved.

> *"Imaginative writing is a highly underrated, yet key, transferable writing skill. In employment, it influences, for example, customer service: vocabulary choice befitting purpose. It is this aspect in our curriculum that enables students not only to expand their vocabulary but also offers the chance for them to express themselves; a lifelong skill that enriches lives"* Tutor Reflection

Rationale

Ultimately, the rationale behind our project was to address the very real issue that the Imaginative Writing task can be a real stumbling block for many learners retaking GCSE English Language in FE. It is a problematic area for many reasons. However, since exams operate under strictly timed conditions, our main area of concern is getting learners to be imaginative and to write creatively against the clock. The exam expects learners to be spontaneous in their Imaginative Writing task. This throws up a potential paradoxical issue - is it possible to practise spontaneity? Our project sought to do just that. We set out to devise a set of tasks that would initially be heavily scaffolded in the form of stimulus materials, but as we got nearer to the exam, the scaffolding would gradually be removed, so that by the time

the learners sat the end-of-course exam, they would have developed habits to enable them to approach typical Imaginative Writing tasks.

In order to make the abstract procedure of imagining more concrete for our learners, our strategy involved using cultural artefacts as stimuli for planning their imaginative writing. In the first stage of the project [in November], we used Chuck Berry's well-known rock 'n' roll ballad "Johnny B. Goode" to stimulate ideas to help the learners respond to an imaginative writing task based around 'an unexpected visitor'. In the second stage (in February) we used Carel Weight's portrait, "Miss Orovida Pissarro" from the Ashmolean's collection of online zoomable portraits to help the learners respond to a piece of Imaginative Writing based around the theme of 'forgetting something'. The tasks which the learners were responding to were both Edexcel-style Imaginative Writing tasks.

Approach

Our project consisted of two distinct stages, each of which resulted in a piece of writing for the Imaginative Writing task. The lessons relating to the first Imaginative Writing task (in November) consisted of one classroom-based input session and one asynchronous online session for drafting (and redrafting). The lessons relating to the second Imaginative Writing task (in February) consisted of one online synchronous input session and one asynchronous drafting session.

In short, both pieces were taught and completed under significantly different circumstances, using qualitatively different stimuli. The earlier 'blended' approach in November fortunately eased the learners into the habit of accessing the online tools, such as Google Classroom. Therefore, by the time we did the second stage of the research, the learners were used to working with these tools.

At the drafting stage, learners used their 'toolbox' of strategies to help them get started. Below is an example of the use of the 'toolbox' of strategies. Learners chose three language and three structure techniques that they felt

would be useful in their written work. Then they thought of examples of each technique that could be used in their draft. This example is of a learner's 'toolbox' from the second piece of writing, based on forgetting something.
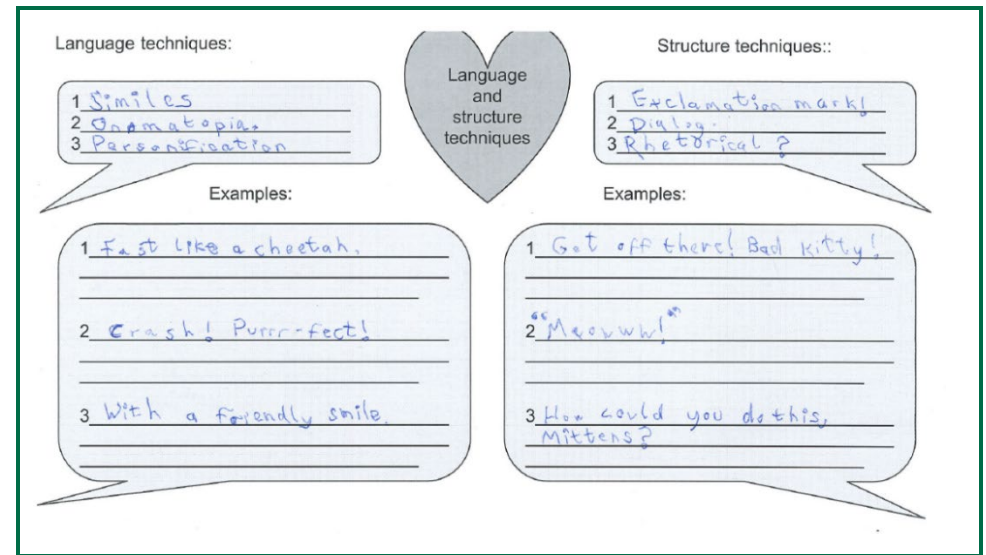
Figure 7b.1: Learners used the toolbox to support and develop their imaginative writing

In the February stage of the project, a lot of the earlier scaffolding was removed. For example, the stimulus material was an image, which contained a range of objects of significance in the life of the subject of the portrait. There was no explicit narrative structure to the portrait. However, there were implicit back stories to all the objects in the portrait. The learners had to choose one object and infer a back story, which could eventually be used in their draft. Also, at the planning stage, learners used a blank piece of paper for their plans. They were asked to write down whatever came into their heads regarding the set creative writing task. This strategy was in line with the free association 'clustering' approach. Below is an example of a learner's 'clustering' in action. As we can see from the example, the learner wrote down ideas, some of which were retained and some were eliminated. The learner used the very loose plan as a prop for

talking the teacher through the initial ideas for the piece of imaginative writing.

In the example below, the learner said that he wanted to write about forgetting his grandad's birthday and that he had wanted to buy his grandad a watch. This formed the basis of his imaginative writing. We were able to use the plan as a springboard for discussing feelings and mood which the characters might exhibit in the story.

Figure 7b.2: Using planning techniques with learners to help explore feelings and mood.

Although these 'clusters' can give the appearance of being a little jumbled or messy, they are a great way of getting conversations started with learners about their ideas for stories.

The learners did these 'clusters' on paper at home whilst on Teams. They were given the opportunity to talk through their ideas in 'break-out' rooms before starting their first drafts on Google Classroom.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

As a consequence of taking part in this project, we have been reflecting on what is meant by creativity, both in terms of our specific project and in terms of the learner journey. Creative activities seem to be a quick-win way of generating a sense of 'ownership' among learners of their achievements - and with a greater sense of ownership comes a greater sense of fulfilment and pride, which in turn raises the level of engagement. This is certainly something that we noticed with participating learners. It is, however, important to follow up this raised level of engagement with tasks that keep the learners on board. This is why we introduced an element of interleaving and spacing between the two stages of our project, so that learners could revisit skills and build on them.

As so much of our project hinged on the learners' imagination(s), we read around different ways of interpreting what could be meant by 'imagination' and consequently how learners might 'imagine' differently. We were particularly drawn to Liam Hudson's ideas concerning the classification of 'convergent' and 'divergent' thinkers (Hudson, 1968). 'Convergers' are particularly good at putting ideas together, whereas 'divergent' thinkers are particularly good at exploring new and interesting avenues of enquiry.

We have also recently been reflecting on possible cognitive processes involved throughout the whole process of the Imaginative Writing task. The cognitive aspects of learning have been given extra prominence in the last few years, especially in the form of Cognitive Load Theory (Paas, Renkl and Sweller, 2003; Chen, Castro-Alonso, Paas and Sweller, 2018) and our institution's 'Composite Learning Model', which seeks to break down the curriculum into constituent elements, which are analogous to the gradations of skills within Bloom's Taxonomy. (Bloom, 1956).

This project has highlighted the fact that more time, attention and scaffolding is needed when presenting learning with tasks in the early

months of an academic year. When tasks are revisited scaffolding can be removed to varying degrees, depending on individual learners' abilities. We also found that leaving a few months between each imaginative writing task helped us to gauge progress in that particular skill area.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The college has recently appointed a team of Learning Innovators. We felt it was important to involve as many of them as possible, as this would help us to ensure that our research gelled with cross-college approaches. We consulted the Learning Innovators regarding how the project fitted in with Cognitive Load Theory; the use of online tools; the incorporation of feed-forward strategies; and the application of 'Growth Mindset' (Dweck, 2006).

> *"The learning innovators at the College work across a variety of different vocational areas, both in teaching and supporting staff, so to see the implementation of ideas across the project has been fantastic. It is positive that we can see so many departments benefiting from this excellent practice"* Learning Innovator.

'Creativity' is sometimes seen as one of a range of '21st Century [transferable] Skills'. In this respect, there seems to be some potential for raising the profile of imaginative writing across the college, possibly in the form of cross-college competitions or interdepartmental collaboration on project-based learning.

The underlying idea of our project was to use sensory stimuli, such as music, pictures, realia and artefacts to generate ideas for the Imaginative Writing task. This generated some discussion and innovative practices within the English Department regarding the application of this general idea. Additional differentiated resources were created for the Imaginative Writing task. There were also innovative approaches regarding using music and images to enhance reading skills.

> *"I use a lot of stimuli for engaging students in creative writing. I have found using quirky objects (old photos, a music box, a gas mask, an old case, opera glasses, just to name a few!) extremely good at sparking interest and discussion"* English Teacher.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

We can see discernible patterns of progress across participating classes, especially related to planning. It would be fair to say that learners are now generally much more confident about the prospect of engaging with an imaginative writing task. The approaches to planning their writing, which they have gleaned from the research tasks, have given them coping strategies for 'getting started'. After all, 'getting started' is often cited by learners themselves as the main issue. In this sense, our approaches fit within a wider framework of a 'Growth Mindset' approach.

Another 'pattern of progress' is the level of complexity of their writing, especially with regard to language and structure techniques. The 'toolbox' of strategies had a positive impact on learners' progress. Participating learners are generally more aware of what constitutes a good piece of writing, and more importantly they know what a writer needs to do to improve a piece of writing – this is largely attributed to the 'toolbox' and the implementation of a 'feedforward' approach.

The learners expressed a greater sense of ownership over their work, which had a positive motivational impact on their future learning. This was particularly the case in the second stage of the project when they were working via Teams during lockdown. Student A summed up her experiences of completing this task: *'The story felt very personal. It meant something special to me.'* Both stages of the project helped to widen the learners' horizons in terms of imparting cultural capital, as our stimulus materials were borrowed from cultural spheres which were beyond their immediate experience.

The ultimate test of success was whether our interventions had any meaningful and lasting impact on performance under exam conditions. This came in May when the learners did their final assessments and was an opportunity to assess the impact of our interventions. As stated earlier, Student A interpreted the task almost as a piece of speculative commentary about the future, which restricted her performance, as she wasn't able to use the full range of techniques that we had practised in the project. Student B, however, interpreted the task in terms of writing a story, so he was able to incorporate more of the techniques from the project. This flagged up a very real issue that exam-style questions can often be open to a wide range of interpretations, which lend themselves to a variety of possible responses. In terms of passing the exam, learners need to interpret tasks which optimise their chances of showcasing their best written work.

Learning from this project

In the second stage of the project, we encouraged learners to use 'clustering' for planning their work. Some learners, however, still needed a more structured approach at the planning stage.

We found that once learners had planned their work, they were increasingly proficient in vocalising their ideas. This involved talking us through 'settings', 'characters', 'back stories', 'plot lines' and so on. The persistent difficulty of getting ideas onto paper still prevailed. We navigated this obstacle by encouraging the learners to focus their writing on a moment in time rather than to try to tell the whole story. This helped a lot, especially in terms of 'getting started'.

This brings us neatly to 'code switching' from the spoken word to the written word, especially within the context of the Imaginative Writing task. For example, in the process of 'code switching' from the spoken word to the written word some naturalistic language patterns were lost, which often resulted in less complexity.

When learners are in the early stages of learning the craft of imaginative writing, we found that there is a real need to have support structures in place such as scaffolding and bespoke feedback. Learners also benefit from redrafting their work, as it gives them the opportunity to improve. As we approached the final assessment, we found that it was better to loosen or remove the scaffolding, as we wanted learners to work more independently. However, we still retained redrafting and feed-forward, as they helped to support revision and keep skills fresh in the learners' memories.

Finally, this project made us reflect on exactly what is meant by 'progress' both as an abstract idea and in terms of how it is constituted. It seems that there are various 'patterns of progress' when it comes to written work. These patterns are exemplified in learners' ability to manipulate language and structure techniques as a way of drafting a piece of engaging writing which considers audience, purpose and form. In this respect, the 'toolbox' of ideas has had a positive impact on the general trajectory of the learners' progress with regard to the actual composition of their written work over the course of the academic year.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-4/7-7b/**

8. BRINGING WRITING TO LIFE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LIFE EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING WRITING
Moulton College

This project aimed to examine the role of individual lived experience for teaching writing. We trialled a range of methods, including dialogic questioning and tailored learning resources such as alternative peer assessment, in both Functional Skills and GCSE English lessons. We observed that when we used certain methods that encouraged learners to draw on their individual lived experience and existing knowledge, their writing improved.

Summary

Moulton College is a specialist land-based FE college in the East Midlands offering programmes including animal management, equine studies, construction, food and drink, sport, business and agriculture. A team of five English teachers took part in the project, as well as learning support assistants and the Head of English and maths (who also teaches English at the college).

Through the project, we were hoping to achieve a greater understanding of strategies that help FE learners to respond to writing tasks (both descriptive and transactional writing). We were particularly curious about strategies that could support learners to feel more motivated to write, to be able to generate ideas and to expand on their points to improve the quality of their writing. These aspects of writing were of particular concern, as our learners reported finding them challenging.

Rationale

Analysis of learners' GCSE exam transcripts in June and November 2019 indicated that the majority of learners achieve higher marks in the reading section than the writing section. English teachers commonly set targets in response to learners' written work, both in class and in formative assessments, around particular aspects of their writing. Examples include

improving the authenticity of their creative writing through the use of more vivid descriptions and improving their transactional writing by adapting more effectively to the required type of text, intended audience and purpose, as indicated in the question. Through attending network meetings, we discovered that many colleagues at other colleges report the same finding. A similar finding is also true for learners studying Functional Skills English. Learners typically require more attempts to pass the writing exam than the reading exam and often voice concerns around not knowing what to write, or how to structure their responses. This issue inspired our project.

Approach

We trialled a range of resources and methods in our English lessons, which all foregrounded the belief that an appreciation of individual lived experiences is important when teaching writing. English teachers and learning support assistants trialled the following activities:

- Dialogic questioning, particularly around the planning process during transactional writing tasks and when facilitating group analysis of the work of their peers.
- Live modelling, including class questioning to support live modelling.
- Using excerpts from the book 'Orangeboy' by Patrice Lawrence (Lawrence, 2016) to inspire learners to write creatively, while drawing on their own lived experience.
- Alternative peer assessment. In order to reduce barriers caused by learners' insecurities about showing their own writing, we asked them to examine the work of other learners (not present in the class at the time). We used hand-written exemplars from a range of sources, including the work of learners from a different class at Moulton College this academic year; the work of learners from previous years at the

college, and exemplars provided by Eduqas (the exam board we use for GCSE English).

- Regular conversations with learners with a particular focus on getting to know the learners' interests, past experiences and motivators.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The teachers involved in the project have a renewed understanding of the benefit of taking an action research stance to improve the experience for their learners. Teachers report that they have found the regular meetings beneficial, as talking to colleagues about how learners have responded to the new methods and approaches has helped them to understand what they need to do next in the classroom. One of the teachers who took part in the project recently moved to teaching in the FE sector, after years of teaching in secondary schools. She said:

> *"I love this form of CPD. It's been brilliant and I feel like my thinking has shifted from talking about what learners* **should** *do, to thinking about what they could do, with the right approach".*

Some of the teachers involved report that, since taking part in the project, they now attend regular English Practitioners Network meetings to ensure that they also benefit from working collaboratively with colleagues in other organisations. They report feeling more receptive to trialling new ideas in the classroom.

Learning support assistants report that they have a better understanding of methods and approaches that they can use to support learners in both English lessons and vocational lessons.

The project findings have useful implications for teaching writing, both in English lessons and vocational lessons. The project lead has already delivered some CPD to the vocational teachers at the college this year and has plans to deliver more, in light of the project findings, to ensure learners are able to benefit across all areas of their study programme.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project has encouraged better collaboration between the English teachers at the college. It has been a brilliant talking point in our regular meetings, as the learners have been at the forefront of conversations. All teachers involved have enjoyed trialling the strategies with their learners and taking time to carefully reflect on their influence in the classroom. The project has facilitated more open conversations between teachers and learning support assistants about the different ways that we support learners and there are plans being put in place to ensure that these continue. There is a renewed understanding of the vital nature of collaboration and reflection as a team and, as a result, managers are now more conscious of the importance of dedicated time each week where teachers can come together. Going forward, this has implications for timetabling and scheduling of team meetings, to ensure accessibility for all team members.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners were seen to be more engaged in the lessons when hand-written examples of learner work were shown. When an example piece was handed out, learners who were previously visibly distracted, for example, using their mobile phone, were seen to put their phones down without being asked, and started looking at the examples and taking part in class discussions. The pieces seemed to support better engagement because learners could see that the pieces had been written by somebody who was, at some point, 'just like them'. Learners re-sitting English at college often struggle to believe that they can succeed and, therefore, this exposure to the work of their peers who had improved their skills, helped them to believe they could too. This improvement in their motivation and

self-belief was key, as these are often two of the greatest barriers to progress that we see in the re-sit classroom.

Good morning everyone, My name IS ████ and I am near here to talk to you about boxing.

Boxing IS great in many different ways People do it for fitness, self defence or Stress relief.

I Started boxing when I was 14 because I've always had a dream to become a Proffesional boxer and fight in the Olympics. I have had fights Won two by decision and one by TKO So I'm on the right track.

I go to ████ boxing club, Its an amazing enviroment everyone IS nice and we have a good laugh but we all work very hard until the last second of the bell

Boxing IS not all about technique, Speed and Power Its also about heart and having a Strong mindset. you have to be dedicated and give (100%) One hundred Percent even on your bad days.

Being in the gym helps me and many others I'm sure to relax and take their mind of things.

Many people believe that boxing IS Simple and to them people I say your wrong. Its not Just beating eachother up. you got to have good hand - eye coordination, footwork, keeping your hands up and controlled breathing.

You might be thinking breathing? but when Someone IS leathering you with ten Ounce (10 oz) gloves in your belly your breath gets Swept away right from your throat.

Boxing IS well known worldwide and IS not a Sport that can be taken lightly, It IS a dangerous Sport. Why do you think they get Paid so much?

All I want to you guys to do IS give It a try. If you don't like It fine but Its worth a go and you never know you may be Suprised by your talent.

Thank you and be safe everyone

Figure 8.1: A hand-written example responding to the following task: 'You have been asked to give a talk to your class about your hobby or special interest to try to encourage others to get involved. Write what you would say in your talk.'

In one lesson, a construction student studying Level 1 Maintenance Operations was overheard quietly saying to a friend *"this feels much easier, doesn't it?"* When the teacher asked him if he would mind repeating this out loud and saying a bit more about what he meant, he was happy to and added further explanation saying that he *"liked seeing a full example that didn't seem too hard to do [himself]"*. Seeing a hand-written response from one of their peers seemed to help things to feel real and doable.

The vast majority of learners were seen to be writing more over time, as the project progressed, and the quality of their work improved.

In their creative writing, learners' descriptions improved when they wrote about something that they could relate to and had personally experienced. We found that learners who previously found it challenging to structure their creative writing, did better when they were encouraged to write about an experience with a very clear, tangible structure in real life, for example, running a race or going for a short walk. Learners were seen to do better when they were given a specific title, set by the teacher, and a hand-written example piece to evaluate first. Teachers reported that it was great to see the different ways that learners took the title and made it their own. One teacher was particularly heartened to see how energised and enthused learners were in a lesson where she asked them to use the title 'The Chase' to inspire a piece of creative writing. The teacher chose this title because the class had been listening to the audiobook of 'Orangeboy' by Patrice Lawrence (Lawrence, 2016) at the start of every lesson and, in the part they listened to that day, the main character and his best friend were being chased as they tried to escape from their enemies. The teacher was fascinated to see how well the learners naturally built tension and suspense in their own writing, after listening to that part of the story. A general observation from teachers involved in the project was that learners did better when encouraged to write naturally, rather than being directed to consciously include any particular language techniques. When reflecting on Professor Brian Cox's 1991 report (1991, cited in Bleiman, 2018) on English teaching in schools, Bleiman (2018) says that 'If English in schools

becomes 'exam English' or 'school English', with no real connection to the 'real English' or 'full English' that can be found in other contexts, then students will engage in ways of thinking and writing that will neither fulfil any of Cox's roles for the subject, nor get them the best possible grades in exams.' Our project findings certainly seem to support this notion. Authenticity was a key theme underpinning the approaches in our project. Learners made better progress when they were supported to make links between English and their lived experiences.
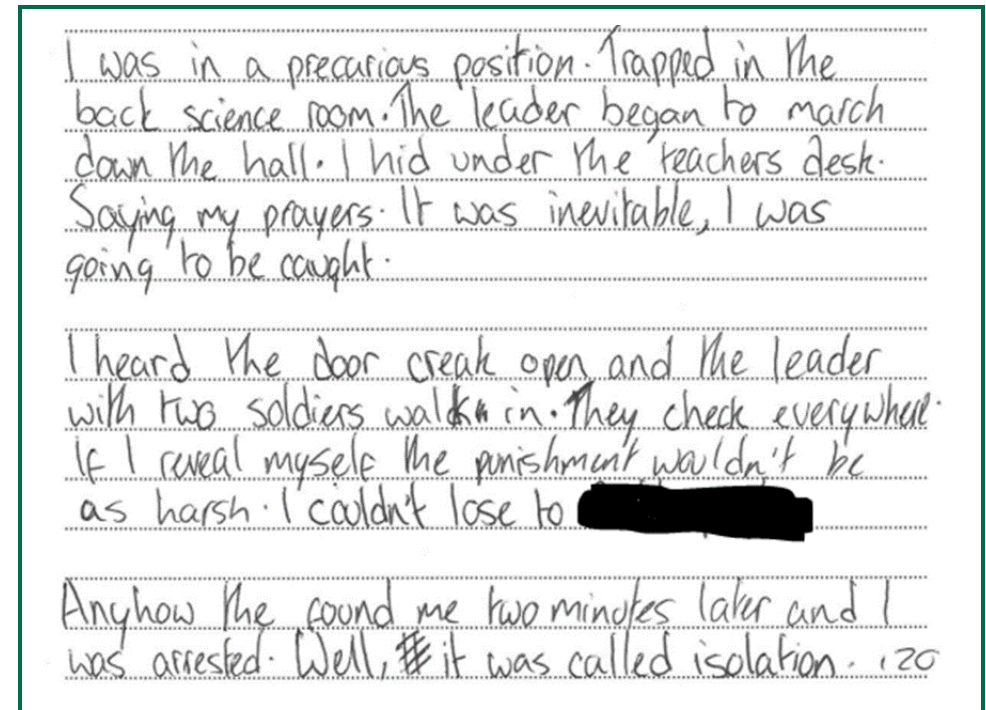
Figure 8.2: A learner draws on their lived experience to develop a vivid and authentic description in response to the heading 'caught'.

The same finding was true for transactional writing, in GCSE and Functional Skills lessons. Teachers also noticed that learners seemed more generally inquisitive as a result of some of the dialogic questioning. For example, in one lesson on transactional writing, the teacher spent some time asking

the learners questions about a piece written by a learner from a previous year, where they shared their views on pets. The questions were designed to encourage critical evaluation of the piece, so that the learners would be able to learn from it and use the insights they'd gained when they wrote their own piece in the second half of the lesson. The learners all took an active part in the task and were seen to make excellent observations about the piece. Afterwards, the teacher asked if anybody had any other points they wanted to make or discuss. One learner asked what the teacher thought about pets. The task seemed to facilitate an open dialogue where the learners felt comfortable to express their opinions and ask questions. The learners all then went on to write their own piece, where they confidently expressed their own views on pets. Similarly, in a Functional Skills lesson, the teacher reported that, when the learner was prompted to use his own experience of eating in a canteen, it really helped him to get started and he could think of what to write.

> *"We avoided directing learners to use any specific language features, as we found that learners did better when they just spent longer thinking about the task and considering what they would really say, if they were responding verbally and, as a result, they adapted their language more effectively"*
>
> Functional Skills Teacher.

Learning from this project

Through the project, we have learned that:

Learners' writing improves when they can draw on their own lived experience and, therefore, teachers should embrace methods that facilitate this process.

Learners benefit from seeing hand-written example pieces, written by their peers. Learners seem to be even more interested in reading and learning from the piece if they perceive the author as similar to them, for example, pieces written by learners who had moved from a grade 3 to a grade 4 or above; learners who studied the same vocational course as them and learners who studied at the same college as them. We noticed that learners were far more interested in looking at examples that were hand-written, rather than typed, perhaps because of the added 'believablilty factor'. Our learners often feel insecure about their writing ability, especially if they are not confident in the accuracy of their spelling or use of grammar. Seeing the hand-written examples was powerful because learners could appreciate for themselves that there are many others who struggle with similar things, and that writing doesn't have to be perfect to still be brilliant in lots of ways. We would stress how important it was for our learners to be given the right time and space to notice the areas for improvement, as well as the positives in the example pieces. Example pieces should be chosen carefully, to ensure maximum benefit for the learners.

Learners benefit from planning their writing, particularly transactional writing tasks, and they do better when they have taken time to ensure they fully understand and appreciate the purpose, audience and type of task required. However, we noticed that the majority of learners found it unhelpful for teachers to use the words 'purpose, audience and type', as they were confused by what these terms meant in the context of planning writing tasks. Bleiman (2018) talks about negative symptoms of the widespread shift to a very narrow focus on exams in the English classroom and states that '[o]ne answer to this, for us, has been to try to encourage the teachers we meet to step back from the assessment and to encourage their students, at the start of the course, to do the same. Just as a Year 7 doesn't need to see a GCSE question, so a GCSE or A Level student doesn't need to know that 30% of a component goes on context, right from day one. Rather, they need to start applying contextual knowledge in well-judged ways and learn what it means to do that.' Our learners *were* able to show excellent understanding and appreciation of the 'purpose, audience and type' required, but this was best achieved when teachers asked learners to "highlight the important parts of the question", for example.

Teachers then asked the learners specific questions, to ensure that they had a thorough understanding of the implications of the task in their writing. For example, if learners had highlighted the words 'write a talk' and 'to deliver to your class', the teacher might say "I see that you have highlighted the words 'talk' and 'to deliver to your class'. How might you start your piece of writing to show you have really thought about these things?" Learners' writing improved when they made highlighting and annotating the question a regular part of their planning process and were seen to be taking time to draw on their 'real world' experiences.
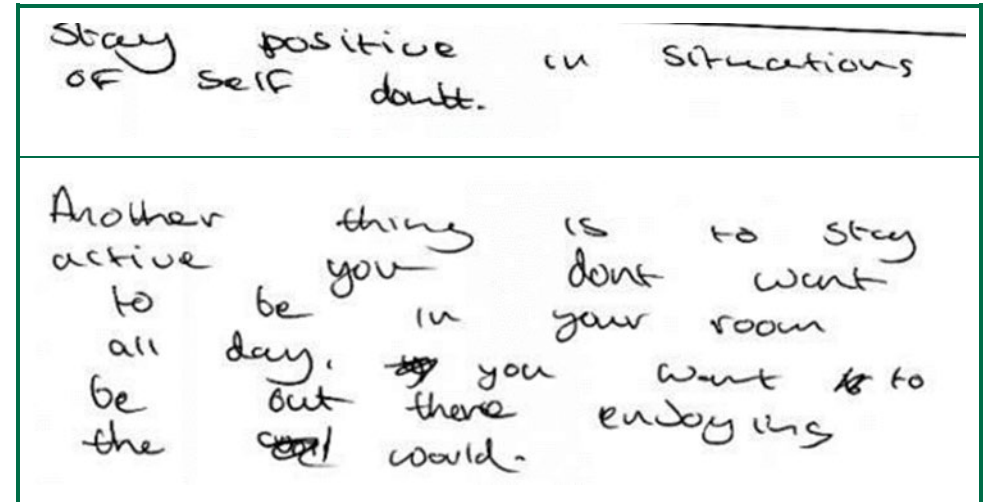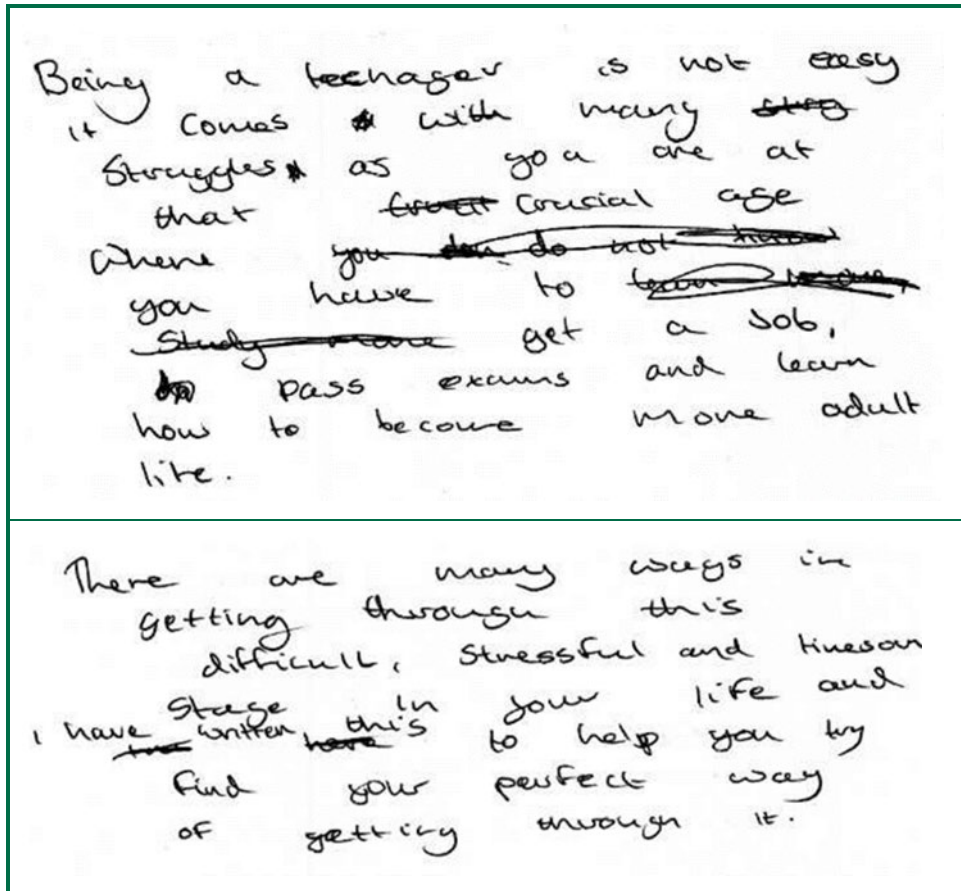

Figure 8.3: Learners responded with creativity and flair to writing tasks that asked them to consider, and draw upon, their lived experiences (this is an abridged version of the full text a learner produced on 'how to survive being a teenager').

As teachers, we feel that this project has reminded us how important it is to come together regularly to reflect on what we are seeing in the classroom and to share effective teaching strategies. We look forward to continuing our journey, working collaboratively as we discover more strategies that help our learners.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-4/7-8/**

EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 5
Mentor: Dianne Robinson

9a. Grantham College
9b. Leicester College
9c. Northampton College

USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE LEARNERS

Dianne Robinson (Mentor)

I have been extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work on such exciting action research projects. Although sharing a similar common theme, that of "Exploring new approaches to engage learners" they have differing target audiences, activities and contexts. Their findings proved to be both enlightening and invaluable to the post-16 sector.

Teaching in 2020/21 saw unprecedented challenges with the pandemic, lockdown, TAGS and remote learning - any hurdles were met with a positive attitude and a readiness to re-think plans if needed,

All three Project Leads commented on how much they valued the opportunity to review their practices and share their findings both within and beyond their organisation. They participated in disseminating not only during the OTLA events but more widely at Regional Networks in addition to publications in local and national newspapers such as Times Educational Supplement.

I valued the time I spent with all three Project Leads who demonstrated boundless enthusiasm, a high degree of professionalism and most importantly of all a deep commitment to help their learners to improve.

Grantham College explored the benefits of providing GCSE English resit learners with video recordings of dramatised readings of extracts taken from 19th century literature and provided insights into how such recorded performances could improve learners' understanding and enjoyment of written texts.

Leicester College embraced flipped learning in GCSE English to make their students more independent learners and to improve the learning experience.

Northampton College's project was a collaboration between English teachers, academic coaches and vocational staff to boost the reading confidence of GCSE English Language students using audio extracts. It enhanced English teaching methodology, had a proven impact on student reading ages, highlighted a focus on reading and brought together college staff from a number of disciplines.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-5/**

9a. INTERPRETATION OF PERFORMED TEXT

Grantham College

The aim of this project was to explore the benefits of providing GCSE English resit learners with video recordings of dramatised readings of extracts taken from 19th century literature and to provide insights into how such recorded performances could improve learners' understanding and enjoyment of written texts.

Summary

Grantham is a small college in a rural/market town. The learners are from the local area, surrounding villages and other local towns. The college analysed the impact that lockdown had had on learner engagement, overall, to ascertain what mitigations could be implemented across the English and maths departments with a view to improving learner satisfaction. One key finding was in relation to the barriers and attitudes that prevent learners from engaging in reading. Learners seemed to have become increasingly demotivated when asked to read extracts, especially 19th century literature. We wondered whether we had underestimated the value of the support that teachers provided when they dramatised and interpreted texts in face-to-face class teaching and which had been missing during lockdown.

We decided therefore to explore the possible benefits of providing dramatized versions of texts in terms of improving learner engagement, focus and reading comprehension. We involved teachers and learners in creating video recordings of extracts and then monitored their impact on learners' understanding of the texts and their levels of motivation and enjoyment.

Rationale

We considered that one of the reasons why learners seemed to struggle to find joy in reading was the extent to which the practices of reading and being read to at home seem to have dramatically diminished and that this was probably in direct correlation with the increase of technology-based play and the rise of the social media community. When our survey was completed only 27.2% said that they were often read to as a child and very few enjoyed reading a book. The survey suggested that only 16.3 % enjoyed reading for pleasure but double that number really disliked reading and tried to avoid it where possible.

Understanding of the extracts was also an issue with 60% of learners stating that they had to read a text more than once to gain any understanding of the extracts. They were also asked if they would prefer stories and extracts to be read to them. 13.6% said 'no' and wanted to be completely independent with this area of their studies. However, 7% stated that they hated reading so much that they wanted it read to them, 42.7% said they would sometimes like extracts read to them and 36.3% stated that they wanted this all the time as it helped them to understand the extracts better.

Approach

The findings above suggested another approach was necessary to engage GCSE English learners and we decided that we would involve staff and students in the activity of performing specific 19th century extracts. The extracts were chosen because they were previous exam extracts, texts that we knew had been popular in sessions and were part of the Pearson Edexcel Anthology. It was felt that these extracts were the most appropriate as it would help to prepare the learners for the exam. The extracts were then performed by a member of staff first and if this was deemed to be successful the Performing Arts learners were also given the opportunity to take part.

We would then see if this helped the comprehension of texts by asking the learners to watch the video and then complete a recall activity of 25 questions. Finally, the learner would be given exam style questions to answer in class to see if they had greater understanding and to ascertain if the activity had helped with the analysis and the evaluation of extracts.

The learners were asked questions along the way informally about their enjoyment and engagement and eventually they were asked formally as part of interview / open questions to get a deeper understanding of the effect of the project.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The findings of the study and the insights into the reasons why learners find it so difficult to comprehend texts have prompted the GCSE English Language team at the college to re-evaluate their methods in teaching. They plan to continue to use dramatised texts, show film clips where possible and encourage reading in sessions where appropriate and possible. Learners are often very reluctant to read aloud and suggest that this is down to anxiety regarding looking foolish in front of peers. Only around 8% suggested that they would read in class when given a survey but in practice this may be fewer. There are also very few adult learners who are confident enough to read in class and perhaps only 1 in 10 will offer. This is encouraged by tutors but it is often the tutors who read aloud and explain the text for meaning.

The learners were very complimentary about the recording of the videos and saw them as a really useful resource. 73% of the learners interviewed enjoyed having the extract performed for them. If the learner does not want to access the video resource or finds listening to the recorded performance difficult (especially when delivered remotely) due to specific needs like hearing impairments, then they still have the option to read the extract to themselves quietly or with a learning support assistant (if available). When they were asked if it helped them understand better 72.7% felt that it helped

them remember the extract. One learner suggested that they did not enjoy the video but suggested 'it helped me remember.' Interestingly, of those asked if they would like this to continue going forward, 84.8% suggested that they would like to have these videos continued, which is a huge proportion. It is important to note, however, that the videos should not be overused as it is important to offer a range of resources and independent reading without audio support is still encouraged.
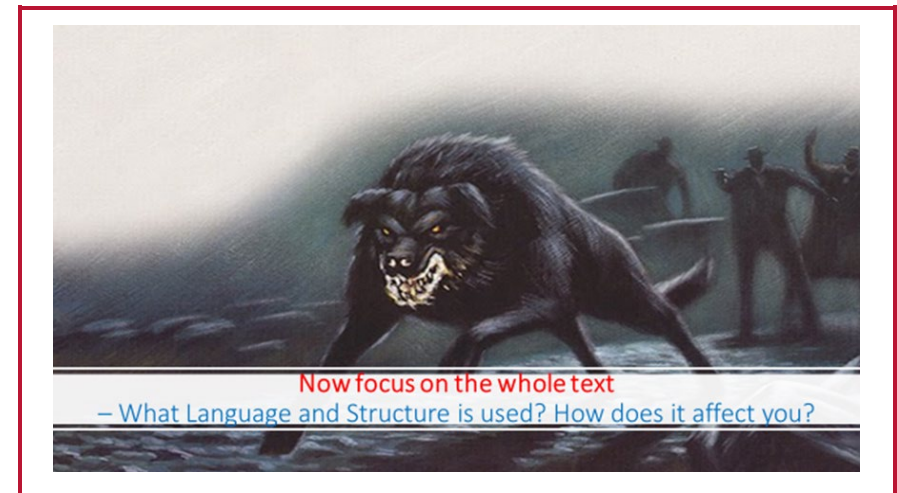

Figure 9a.1: After listening to dramatised readings of key texts, learners felt better equipped to notice, reflect upon, and write about various language devices.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There was very much a sense of cross college collaboration which we hope to continue as the project develops. The English and Maths department worked with the Media and the Performing Arts departments and it is hoped that more cross college projects can be undertaken as the departments all face common challenges. The reader of the first two extracts was from the Media department and was very keen to be involved. We were also able to use their technology for filming and editing to produce a more professional look. The media learners would have been much more involved if the COVID-19 pandemic had not caused so many issues.

The Performing Arts department were extremely keen to be involved and every learner produced something towards the project. Some read aloud and had their voices recorded if they were concerned about being on camera, but others created background effects and performed the extracts on stage. The Media Technician is still working on all the recordings of the extracts, so we are hopeful that we will receive finished products before the end of the year.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The learners we followed over the course of the project helped us understand the benefits of our new approaches. The following examples share some of the changes we noticed and that learners shared with us as the project progressed:

AB was in his second year of a two year Performing Arts course. He did not enjoy GCSE English and failed to see the link between GCSE English and Performing Arts. He did very little written work in 2019/20 and the lockdown affected his studies greatly. Although he knew the importance of reading for his lines, he would not read for GCSE. AB had struggled to hand in any GCSE English work in his first year and did not provide the evidence required for a CAG grade. However, during the project, AB has enjoyed being involved in video recording process. Participation in the research project has motivated him and his behaviour has become much more positive.

EF is studying Animal Care and has dyslexia. Originally from Italy she also has some language comprehension difficulties and the recordings helped her to understand 'the correct tones' and that this helped 'entertain and give emotion'.

CD has a difficult home life. She found the videos extremely helpful as they brought the 'text to life' and 'helped her to understand how it should sound in her head when she is reading it.' when she is reading it.' Her exam analysis and evaluation answers have improved greatly and she feels much less anxious about completing work in sessions. She is set to pass GCSE English with a TAG grade as her work is so much improved.

GH is currently in her first year at college studying Childcare Level 3. She says she really enjoyed watching the recordings of the extracts as they really helped her to 'understand' all the 'words that are different to the ones we use now', putting them into context for her and helping her analyse them better.

Learning from this project

The project has really brought life into the GCSE English department and will be the basis for improvements going forward. The pandemic has challenged the college to use technology in ways we never had explored before. The development and the use of extracts were an essential part of these changes and we realised high quality video recording needed to be prioritised to engage learners who would otherwise see through something that did not look professional.

This focus on quality needs to be continued and carefully planned to ensure the resource is fit for purpose. We also learned early on that it is not a mode of delivery that suits all learners. The learners need to be fully prepared for the session with a paper copy to hand so that they can follow along with their own extract.

This was especially important for those learners who have a hearing impairment. We had not anticipated this in our planning and it was an oversight as some learners reported being stressed and anxious when they

could not hear the video. This was soon resolved. The learners in question were asked if they would prefer not to have the video at all, but they enjoyed the drama of it and as long as they had their extract to follow through as it was being read, they wanted to keep the videos.

To encourage and motivate GCSE resit learners to read, creative and active approaches are needed in the classroom and this only doubles in importance when they are learning remotely. The texts do, we found, need to be read by a variety of voices and some learners complained about the man's voice in the first 2 videos. They suggested that he had a monotone delivery and they wanted more intonation. They wanted a range of readers to keep them engaged and inspired to read. Nevertheless, when surveyed, 93% of learners stated that they would like to see texts performed. Student survey results also indicated that the majority of learners (75% of those surveyed) feel that the dramatisation of key texts will support them in the future.
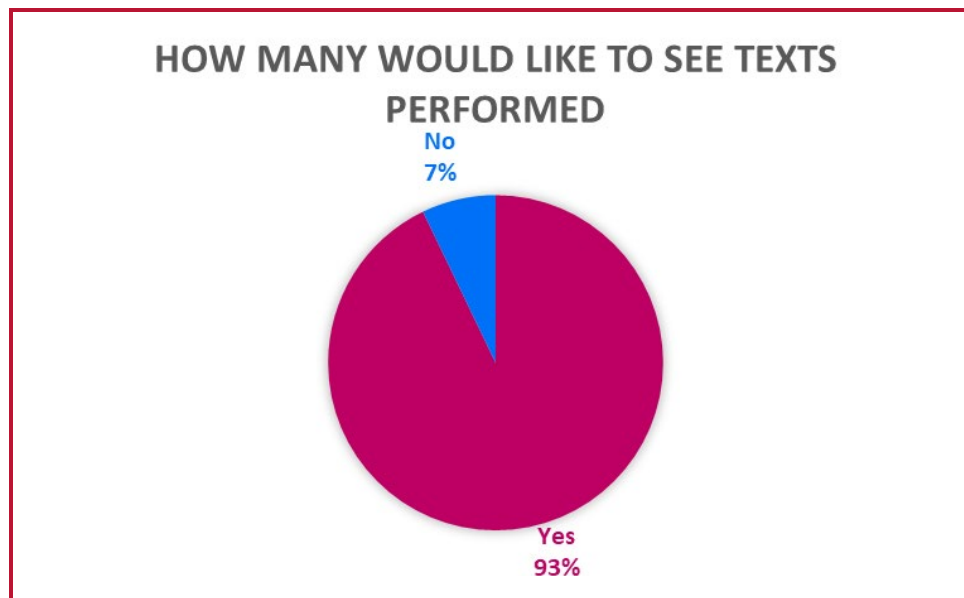
We found that when a text is dramatised the recall of the events is far greater as the extracts are brought to life for the learner. In the recall activities with the text alone learners would on average give the correct answers for about a third of the questions but this increased to 100% for most learners when the text was dramatised; this subsequently made answering exam style questions easier as they became more familiar with the text. As the extract was read, they were also able to hear when the tension or action was building which made analysis and evaluation better.

As a result of what we've learned on the project, we will:

- continue to work collaboratively with our Media and Performing Arts colleagues to produce high quality dramatised recordings
- engage as many learners as possible in making recordings so that they are actively processing the language in use
- use the recordings to engage and motivate students in preparation for the ongoing challenge of analysing 19th century texts
- continue to explore recall activities as the start of a phased and graded approach to tackling exam questions
- look for more opportunities for cross college collaboration as they reveal the common challenges that we all encounter

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-5/7-9a/**

Figure 9a.2: Student survey results indicated that 93% of learners would like to see texts performed.

9b. FLIPPED LEARNING
Leicester College

This project aimed to embrace flipped learning in GCSE English to make our students more independent learners and to improve the learning experience.

Summary

Leicester College is a Post-16 College with three large campuses based in the centre of Leicester. Due to the circumstances of COVID-19, we had to rapidly rethink the way we delivered GCSE English Language. We were only going to see the students for one lesson a week and they would work remotely another lesson. Prior to the pandemic, we had seen students for two 1.75-hour sessions.

Due to social distancing, we were now only able to have 12 students per class. We wanted to use a flipped learning model to encourage learners to come to the session prepared in order to make the face-to-face sessions as effective as possible. We also wanted to achieve several other objectives:

- increase students' motivation by completing self-led tasks
- help students to gain confidence in their skills
- prepare the students better for their GCSE exams
- develop other skills that could be transferred to support other subjects and the skills needed for the workplace.

> By the term "flipped learning" we refer to learning completed prior to the class to prepare for material covered in the session.

Rationale

The largest challenge we have with mandated GCSE resit students is their lack of involvement in the learning process; they tend to be passive learners. Coming from school, a typical grade 3 learner has been very much 'spoon-fed' and they have often lost faith in their own skills. Resit students often display signs of disengagement and lack motivation, often with no interest in pursuing the subject. They frequently feel entrenched in failure. Our job is to give them hope, self-belief and encourage them to engage, whilst taking the next step of assuming responsibility for their own learning.

Clear communication is the key to success with flipped learning and all tasks must intricately link to direct teaching activities, so students can see the benefit in completing the tasks.

We also wanted to match the pedagogy to the technology and new environment that we found ourselves operating in. We aimed to find an approach that would be effective if we were teaching remotely; seeing students in class; or using a blended model. Due to the uncertainty of working during a pandemic, we needed a flexible model that could be adapted quickly and effectively during these challenging times.

Approach

We planned to use a single digital platform which would also be used within their vocational studies. This would mean students were confident in knowing where to find material, how to engage in classroom tasks and upload collaborative tasks and assignments and generally, communicate electronically. By using the Microsoft Teams' package, we set up a Class Notebook for each class, so it had its own collaboration area and

assignments. We also used Teams Assessments (linked to Microsoft Forms) to check that flipped learning had been completed.

To start *Phase One***, we surveyed a small sample of students to establish their attitude to flipped learning.** We then asked the students to read a text prior to each reading lesson that was sent as an assignment in Teams. They would then answer a short MS Forms-based quiz which would check their understanding. By doing this, all students would be starting the class at the same point, whilst students who found reading more challenging could read the text as many times as they liked, to gain a clearer understanding. The students had the opportunity to research unknown vocabulary and for more difficult 19th century texts, could gain an understanding of the context. They also had total control over the pace of the flipped learning work.

In *Phase Two***, the project was expanded to include the writing lesson.** We sent learners an assignment in Teams with a short video to watch relating to the upcoming writing lesson and, again there was a short MS Forms-based quiz to confirm understanding. We then completed a second survey referring to both reading and writing flipped learning. Adaptations were then made, or will be made, based on these results.

Research showed that schools that had been successful with delivering flipped learning had good parental support, (Moore, 2014). We decided to address this, and help parents understand what we were trying to achieve from the outset. Therefore, we sent out a letter early in Phase 1, informing parents that the student was required to read the text before each class in order to be prepared for the lesson.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

We have changed our delivery model for 2021-21 based on the success of this project. We have realised that smaller groups are the only way to achieve the results that we desire. By embedding flipped learning into our model, we can keep the class sizes at the desired number of 12, for face-to-face sessions.

At the start of the year, we had three teachers who were following the flipped model. As the year progressed all of the team embraced the model with ten teachers across three sites working hard to help students adapt to this this style of learning. We have also supported the Functional Skills team to see how we can help them switch to using flipped learning next academic year.

The model has increased the interaction between students and teaching staff. Students feel comfortable messaging the teacher via Teams if they have questions, so there is far more communication and support being given between classes.

Teachers have reported a much greater level of student confidence, earlier on in the academic year, as the students tackle the texts and have become more engaged learners.

The obvious barrier was that some students would not read the text and not engage with the process. These students would then be asked to read it quickly at the start of the lesson, while the teacher moved ahead with the cohort that had read it, preferably with something more interesting such as a YouTube clip or a Kahoot quiz which helped to conclude that completing the pre-reading task had its benefits.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

In terms of equality and diversity, the opportunity to see the text before the class is particularly beneficial for students with dyslexia or other support needs. Next year, we are planning to support this further by making the recording of the text available at the start of the year, while learners find their feet and settle.

By developing a routine where we were asking students to use the same skills and essentially complete the same task each week, but with a

different text, we helped to build students' confidence. They understood what to do and how it then helped them in class.

Constantly sharing our outcomes as a team, adapting what we were doing and supporting each other with more challenging classes meant that we were able to work together to tackle any potential issues.

Microsoft Teams has proved an excellent platform, with useful upgrades being released regularly. We have had learners working on a variety of devices so the advantage of Teams being available as an app, has enabled nearly all students to engage. The chat facility has proved invaluable in establishing a relationship based on trust.

Class Notebook has worked well for most, but some students have not got the technology to access this so we have adapted, using Teams' messaging or email instead to accept remotely completed work. We have plans to extend the use of Class Notebook in the next academic year, as this year we feel that we have not used it to its full potential because staff have had to deal with so many other changes during a pandemic.

We completed a survey of the GCSE English teaching team to understand how they found flipped learning, the positives and the negatives and to share any challenges they had encountered.

We had support from Gateshead College, who had successfully used flipped learning in their maths department. Their passion and belief in this model helped some of our more cynical staff to start to see that this was a viable option. We had a training session with Gateshead, where our staff had time to discuss their concerns and ask questions of teachers who had made this work.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Some students did struggle to engage. It is hard to say if this was due to the sections of remote teaching and the impact of a pandemic in general,

or if this was because of the flipped learning. However, the students that we specifically followed during the course of the project have shown improvement.

Overall, teachers have found flipped learning invaluable in reducing student anxiety levels, preparing students for what they will learn in class and improving their independence, thus preparing them for work. It has also helped in terms of behaviour, as anxiety is often expressed as poor behaviour. The newer writing quizzes included answers so that students know where they went wrong, and this is something that we aim to do for the reading quizzes next year.

The reduction in anxiety levels was an unintended bonus of the project. Being in a pandemic meant that an even higher number of students than normal were stating to their vocational department that they were experiencing anxiety.

The quotations below are typical responses from learners who struggle with anxiety:

> *'I feel less anxious because I understand what will come into the lesson and to not have to worry about it.'*
>
> *'I feel less anxious in lesson if I do pre-learning.'*

Other positive comments made by students were:

> *'Yes. 100%. It's made me a much better writer and reader.'*
>
> *'Yes. I felt I have improved on my reading and writing skills compared to beginning of this year.'*
>
> *'Yes. because I don't like getting given a text and then getting questions asked face to face because it puts me on the spot and I never used to do it before so since I started doing it it's made me feel like I understand the work/writing.'*

Most teachers confirm that in the session where the students have completed the flipped learning then more progress is made in class and students frequently complete the planned work.

Learning from this project

What went well:

- Seeing the students face-to-face until Christmas, allowed the teacher to build a relationship with them so when the lockdown was imposed, we understood the students and how to get the best out of them. This really worked in our favour when we wanted them to continue coming to class prepared.
- Less confident students could access the work as many times as they wanted prior to the session.
- Students gained in confidence and came to lessons better prepared. This confidence also started much earlier in the year than usual.
- Students developed transferable skills for the future.
- Surprisingly, in some classes, attendance was better than in previous years.

> *"I love it. Sending reminders works; this needs to happen routinely next year"* Teacher Reflection.

> *"Take the positives from COVID-19 and build on them"* Teacher Reflection.

Even better if:

- If you start all groups with the flipped learning approach from the beginning of the academic year, it is easier to get the students in the habit and embed it in. We started some groups and then added others,

as we could see results. Next year it will be part of our culture from the first day we meet the students. All our materials will be adapted to incorporate the flipped approach.

- All teachers need to be firm from the outset with students who do not complete the work prior to class. The teachers who took a firm line got the students responding well. We need to work on supporting teachers to take this firm line. Next year, staff will be competent and confident with the digital platform and flipped learning, which should positively impact the flipped learning process.
- The main reasons we found for non-engagement were that students could not get past seeing this as 'homework' so did not want to do it. They are completing full-time courses in addition to English (and sometimes maths) and are therefore under pressure from their curriculum area. Many do not have the time management skills to manage their studies: or do not see the value of achieving a GCSE. We believe all of these can be addressed by working on their mind-set and supporting students with overcoming these issues.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-5/7-9b/**

9c. READING INFLUENCER

Northampton College

This project was a collaboration between English teachers, academic coaches and vocational staff to boost the reading confidence of GCSE English Language students using audio extracts. It enhanced English teaching methodology, had a proven impact on student reading ages, highlighted a focus on reading and brought together college staff from a number of disciplines.

Summary

Northampton College is the leading further education provider in the South East Midlands with approximately 1200 students enrolled to GCSE English Language. In 2021 the college decided to move its provision for 16-19-year-old study programme students, with no GCSE or a grade 1 to 2, from Functional Skills to GCSE English Language. Some of these students are doing GCSE for the first time but the majority are resitting the qualification. The groups are split into GCSE (with a qualification on entry of grade 3) and GCSE + (with a qualification on entry of a grade 2 or below).

The project was run with the cohort of students who had primarily achieved a grade 2 or below in GCSE English (approximately 400). The initial idea was for vocational tutors to read extracts and to use those with the relevant vocational students.

Stakeholders involved in the project included an Assistant Principal, a governor, vocational teachers, English teachers and students.

Rationale

For those students with a grade 2 and below who would now be studying GCSE English Language an alternative approach to delivering the curriculum needed to be developed, one that was engaging and accessible to all, building confidence in the basics, enabling students to improve by at least one grade. This cohort is already demotivated by not achieving the government-approved 'pass' of a grade 4 and often have additional support needs not addressed in previous educational settings.

The Project Lead has a background in Specific Learning Difficulties and after teaching the GCSE specification since its introduction, it was clear that reading confidence was an area that needed addressing using a variety of methods. The project narrowed its focus to encouraging reading and understanding by using audio recordings of texts.

According to a study conducted by audiopub.org: 'Reading while listening improves comprehension by 76%' (Audio Pub, 2016) which can significantly help students with SpLD and those with recognised differences in learning.

'Listening to an audio … while following along with the text can actually help bridge the gap between decoding words and assigning meaning …. Receiving information both visually and audibly reinforces word recognition, improves fluency, builds vocabulary and supports the development of higher-level comprehension skills.' (Learningally, 2004).

To gain even further engagement from the students it was thought that the audios should be delivered by familiar voices, from vocational areas, demonstrating that it is not only English teachers who read but also people who have a background in music, catering, science, etc.

Approach

There were three main phases with activities scheduled to take place throughout the life span of the project. The three phases were coincided to start at the beginning of each half term in September 2021, October 2020 and January 2021; every six weeks.

An email was sent to all staff at Northampton College on 1st July 2020 asking for volunteers to record an audio extract. Suitable extracts, together with comprehension, vocabulary and extension writing tasks were sourced.

After posting a tweet on Twitter, the Project Lead was approached by the editor of Times Educational Supplement (FE) and asked to write an article about the project. The article was published in TES outlining the project on the 18th September 2020.

Phase 1
Sept - Oct 2020 → General Reading Influencers from across the college community → Based on fiction extracts and shared with students via Google Classroom

A Google form was created for each of the extracts/audios from the sourced booklet and posted onto a Google Classroom page for teachers to then post as an assignment to their own classroom pages.
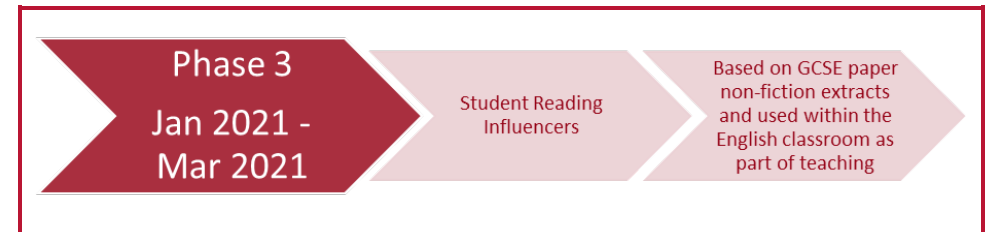
A small group of L1 IT students was identified to use as a study group for the project.

Phase 2
Oct - Dec 2020 → Vocational teacher Reading Influencers → Based on GCSE paper fiction extracts and used within the English classroom as part of teaching

Two vocational teachers (a drama teacher and a music teacher) were recruited from the original list of volunteers to record two fiction extracts from previous AQA GCSE papers. These extracts were: AQA GCSE English Language 8700 Specimen paper from 2016 City of the Beasts by Isabel Allende and AQA GCSE English Language 8700 paper from June 2018 Jigs

and Reels by Joanne Harris. The audios created from these extracts were used in the classroom as part of English lessons. Additional vocational teachers were approached but all declined due to time constraints or uncertainty about reading out loud.

A Baseline Toe by Toe Reading Age Test was undertaken by an Academic Coach with a small group of IT Level 1 students on the 16th November 2020.

Phase 3
Jan 2021 - Mar 2021 → Student Reading Influencers → Based on GCSE paper non-fiction extracts and used within the English classroom as part of teaching

Students were to be recruited to read non-fiction extracts from previous GCSE English papers and used as part of English lessons. Only 1 student volunteered so volunteers were sourced from the English department and a teacher who also ran a Guide group, volunteered two teenagers to record an audio.

This period was during national lockdown three and so the audios were used remotely by playing through Google Classroom with students reading the extracts online while listening.

Information about the research project was shared in the following ways:
- A discussion took place with the pilot group of students on the 18th March 2020.
- With other English and maths teachers at an ETF Collaborative Practice event on the 5th February 2021.
- At a Practice Development Group event on the 3rd March 2021.
- A podcast interview with FE Research Meet on 26th May 2021.
- Via OTLA mentor cluster meetings and dissemination events.
- The second Toe by Toe Reading Age Test undertaken by an Academic Coach on 22nd of March 2021.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The project encouraged the Project Lead to undertake academic reading in the area of reading development which deepened her understanding of the internal processes involved in reading and how teachers can develop them in reluctant readers. It helped the team to reflect on what would work for the diverse needs of the students.

When asked whether the audios helped, one student stated:

> *"Yes they did help a little more because if I got lost reading it would help me pick up where I might have left off."*
>
> Student Reflection on the Reading Influencers Project.

English teachers involved in the project have said they will be using audios in class in the coming year as it has helped bring a lively pace to the lesson and allows for all students to participate equally. The following quotes are from English teachers who were participating in the project:

> *"Less confident students feel that they are not left behind and are more equal to their peers in this setting"*
>
> English Teacher.

> *"I have asked almost all of my classes and there hasn't been any negative feedback!"*
>
> English Teacher.

Alongside The Reading Influencers Project there has been an improved focus on reading for meaning by using the fiction extracts, including the audios, in funded intervention sessions run by Academic Coaches within the maths and English department as well as in the School of Additional

Learning Support department after the project was shared by a Vice Principal.

After presenting a Literacy and Dyslexia session to students on the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course at Northampton College in February the Project Lead held discussions with the ITT course leader about teaching and leading on the action research unit from May 2021and will be sharing knowledge gained from the ETF OTLA project.

As a result of the positive feedback from students and teachers, audios of extracts were used with all GCSE students for the Paper 2 Reading assessments that were completed in early May 2020 as part of the teacher assessed grades assessments.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project has encouraged discussion with vocational teachers about GCSE English. Vocational teachers are still volunteering to read for the next academic year. New extracts will be sourced and sent out to new volunteers for recording.

Reading Influencers enjoyed taking part in the project. One vocational teacher said:

> *"I think I've found my new vocation …"*

whilst it encouraged another to read more:

> *"It's broadened my horizons, too; I found a cut-price copy of '100 years of Solitude' and I'm halfway through."*

The project will continue to be used as part of a skills lesson that will be run in parallel to GCSE English in 2021/22.

Additional Learning Support have adopted elements of the project which have been, and will continue to be, used in funded intervention sessions.

Being part of the project has allowed the Project Lead to encourage other English teachers to take part in other ETF activity such as teach meets, digital collaboration programmes and to start thinking about how they can develop their own action research projects.

Following an external review of the maths and English provision, where the project and the TES article were shared with the reviewer, the Vice Principal is now keen to encourage teachers to take part in action research projects.

An idea for CPD for vocational staff was emailed to the Curriculum Manager for English and the Assistant Principal for maths and English. The CPD included an idea for a fun voice coaching lesson leading to further confidence for teachers to read out loud which may, again, lead to more vocational teachers volunteering for the Reading Influencer Project in 2021/22.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The Toe by Toe Reading Age tests that were undertaken with the small study group showed an increase of at least one reading age year in all students and, in some cases, two years.

Student	Nov 2020	Mar 2021
JC	12.3 years	13.7 years
MA	8.1 years	10.1 years
TH	11.0 years	13.6 years
MP	11.9 years	12.9 years

Table 9c.1. Toe by Toe reading age assessments in November 2020 and March 2021.

The GCSE starting points and predicted end points of the student study group has shown that each student's results should increase by at least 1 grade.

Student	Qualification on entry: English Grade	Predicted End: English Grade
JC	2	3
MA	2	2
TH	2	4
MP	1	3

Table 9c.2. Reading Influencers project pilot group start and end grading data.

Students with SpLD and those with dyslexic traits could keep up with the extract and it also helped ESOL students with understanding words that they may heard before but did not know how to read as one student stated:

> "They helped me a lot so that I can learn the pronunciation."

Another student explained:

> "… they did help a little more because if I got lost reading it would help me pick up where I might have left off."

Some students did not realise that they could access audios for texts and may use them in the future with one saying:

> "I think it will be eas[ier] to listen to some audios, that will make me more focused."

Learning from this project

The main constraint on the project was the impact of lockdown three in January 2021. Reading Paper 2 was meant to be taught during this period which involves a lot of reading alongside the lessons. After trialling the reading at home during the first week of remote learning, it was found to be too overwhelming for many students, so extracts were cut down into shorter paragraphs.

Student involvement in recording extracts at an earlier stage would have helped with recruitment of volunteers.

It was difficult to recruit vocational teachers after August as their commitments were focused on their own teaching. It was interesting to note that a few of the vocational teachers who were approached to take part in the project disclosed that they did not feel confident about reading out loud. These disclosures spurred on the idea for the cross college CPD session mentioned in the *'Improved Collaboration'* section above.

Students really enjoyed being read to and find it immensely helpful to aid understanding. One student said:

> *"When I had to highlight the text I could find the answers easier because we had listened to the text first."*

Another student commented:

> *"I love his [vocational tutor's] natural style of reading. He reads like us."*

Teachers also loved the idea of audios as it allowed all students to work at the same pace.

The project has encouraged discussions with the Additional Supported Learning department and has really brought reading, and reading for meaning, to the forefront of the English agenda.

Discussions are ongoing with the manager of the college library to see if students can access more audio books as the ones currently in the library are on CD and the range is limited.

The Project Lead has done extensive wider reading on how reading can be encouraged in an educational setting. This has led to professional discussions on Twitter and to a podcast review of *Closing the Reading Gap* by Alex Quigley.

A podcast interview took place on the 26th May with FE Research Podcast (Lenton, 2021) to discuss the project. The interview inspired reflection on how the impact of the project could have been demonstrated further with more focused student feedback and how students could have been encouraged to play more of a collaborative part in the process.

Next year the teaching in English will focus on reading for meaning and it is envisaged that The Reading Influencer Project will be extended to include audios of extracts used in weekly 'Skills Focus' lessons together with complimentary audio reviews of some of the books to entice students to read further. Students will also be encouraged to do audio reviews of books they have read and pick their favourite section to share on a centralised easily accessible system.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-5/7-9c/**

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 6

Mentor: Helen Hewlett

EXPLORING NEW SUPPORT MODELS

Helen Hewlett (Mentor)

We set out as a cluster to explore a variety of alternative models for supporting learners. This task became even more pertinent once the pandemic hit and we were forced nationally to move our teaching online.

Suffolk New College decided to build on their successful OTLA 6 action research project which explored the use of visualisers in English. For OTLA 7 they extended this to enhance the learning experience of learners studying Functional Skills Maths, GCSE Maths and ESOL.

Leeds City College also set out to explore a similar tool for feedback in GCSE English with the aim of improving learners' engagement with their teacher's comments. As the project evolved, they focused their investigation on the provision of verbal feedback during periods of remote learning and discovered that for them, the remote tool 'Mote' was far more beneficial for their learners.

Develop aimed to explore ways of improving the effectiveness of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when working with learners to improve their confidence levels in maths. Their staff largely maintained face to face teaching during the pandemic. Their research activities, together with the challenges presented by the pandemic, have highlighted more clearly than ever before the critical role of the LSA in providing essential pastoral and academic support and how they can be used more effectively within their organisation. Their investigation proved to be absolutely invaluable and relatable to almost all.

West Suffolk College focused on finding ways to enable learners to connect with each other whilst studying online which proved to be very

timely indeed. Opportunities for collaborative working in small groups and a whole department approach to induction led to learners getting to know each other better, increased confidence and improved learning outcomes. I'm sure that the impact of this and the strategies discovered will have long lasting effects as many providers move to a blended model of teaching from now on.

I hope that you find this cluster of reports both interesting and stimulating; the providers were an absolute joy to work with and remained focused and positive throughout what was a difficult time both professionally and personally for us all. I certainly learned a lot as their mentor!

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-6/**

10a. USING VISUALISERS

Suffolk New College

This project aimed to explore the use of visualisers to enhance the learning experience of learners studying Functional Skills Maths, GCSE Maths and ESOL.

Summary

Suffolk New College is a large, mixed, further education college with its main campus located in central Ipswich. There are also smaller campuses located in Otley, Leiston and Halesworth.

The maths team consists of 16 teaching staff, an Instructor, Skills Facilitator, a Curriculum Coordinator and Head of Maths. The ESOL team consists of three full time, two part-time teachers and a Head of ESOL.

The project set out to build on the success of a similar research programme undertaken at the College by the English team as part of OTLA 6 (Hubbard, 2020) which demonstrated how visualisers can be effective in modelling the writing process on GCSE English resit programmes. We were keen to explore whether similar benefits could be experienced by teachers and learners on maths and ESOL programmes.

Rationale

Our initial focus for the maths strand of our project was to explore the use of visualisers in providing effective demonstrations for learners of how to approach multi-step questions. Many learners seem to tend to lack stamina when answering this common exam question type and would frequently give up. This had been identified in the previous academic year as an area of weakness, with our current cohort also displaying a very similar trend. This weakness in problem solving could of course be attributed to the fact that exams across Functional Skills and GCSE maths had not taken place

in the academic year of 2019 -2020 and teaching time had been heavily curtailed.

Within our ESOL team there was a recognition that learners often come to the college with no knowledge of the English alphabet, and some are unable to even write in their native language. Getting used to writing the English alphabet can present a huge challenge, and we were keen to see if the modelling of some of the basic skills of writing and letter formation could be demonstrated effectively using a visualiser.

Approach

After an initial joint planning meeting we worked collaboratively throughout the project, meeting regularly in a three-way dialogue involving English, Maths and ESOL teams, using Padlet and Google Drive to share our findings and resources. Each team also held half termly reflection and evaluation sessions.

At the start of the project, we arranged for ESOL tutors to have training sessions in using a visualiser and set up peer observation opportunities with those members of the English team who had become confident in using visualisers so that we could build on their expertise.

In the maths department, we decided to run a CPD session at the start of the project which was led by our co-ordinator and aimed to upskill staff in teaching the problematic multi-step questions. To measure the success of this training and to monitor the impact of the use of the visualisers in maths we decided to record question-by-question tracking to measure improvement in the learners' ability to improve their approach to these questions.

However, whilst we set out to evaluate the use of visualisers in face-to-face teaching in the classroom, as the year progressed, we realised that our plans would be affected by the various levels of lockdown and by the decision to move our maths and ESOL teaching programmes to online delivery.

In the maths department we reconfigured our classrooms with dual monitors and cameras to aid in online delivery which meant that there was much less of a need to use visualisers as many of the online learning platforms contained applications such as Jamboard, Google Docs for live marking, and PowerPoint which could be annotated at the point of exemplification. We found using these platforms covered the scope of what a visualiser could be used for and therefore it added unnecessary technology to the online lesson. One teacher commented:

> *"They add another piece of technology to the lesson that becomes clunky as switching between cameras can be tricky".*

In light of the move to online delivery our Skills Facilitator and Head of Maths began to utilise visualisers to create a bank of video resources that students could use to revise key calculations. These video resources featured demonstrations of how to tackle multi-step exam questions and were made available in a resource bank on Google Classroom.

In contrast, for a period in the autumn term our ESOL lessons continued to be offered in the classroom under social distancing restrictions and we were able continue to trial the use of visualisers. We found that one of the benefits of using visualisers was that they enabled teachers to provide detailed demonstrations of basic writing skills such as how to hold a pen and construct letters but without the need for teachers to work closely with a learner at a desk.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Before we embarked on this project the use of technology to enhance learning was limited. In some ways the pandemic lockdown has meant that the use of technology to enhance learning generally has become a necessity rather than just a desired outcome and our use of visualisers has been an integral element of a process which has seen us also explore never-before utilised applications such as Google Classroom, Google Meet and Hangouts.

We have been sharing good practice using Padlet and Google Drive, through regular team meetings and via individual discussions between the project members. We have also acquired new skills in the creation of revision videos using a visualiser that capture handwritten calculation strategies and can be more engaging to learners (see below). The use of visualisers for this purpose enables those who struggle the most to see step-by-step breakdowns of multi-step questions using a familiar handwritten process and at a flexible pace.
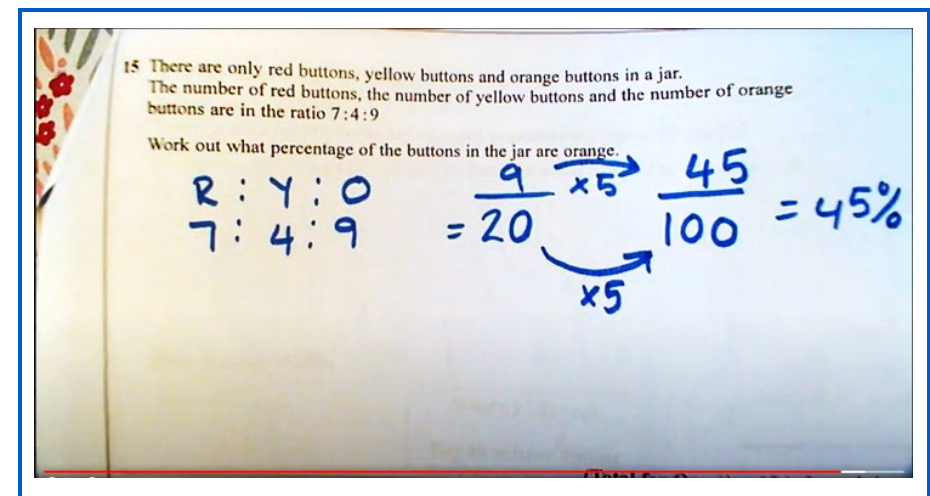

Figure 10a.1: Using a visualiser to model the step-by-step breakdown of multi-step questions.
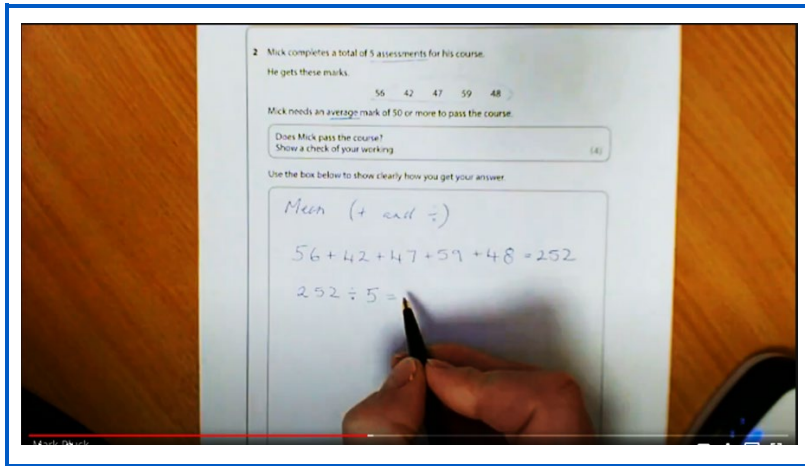
Figure 10a.2: A video recording of how to break down multi-step questions can act as a useful scaffold for learners.

This type of video resource can be especially beneficial for learners who have additional support needs as it provides them with a flexible level of scaffolding.

Our Skills Facilitator and Instructor have also been using the visualisers to enhance the experience of learners who have opted for extra support in their maths studies:

'I am able to share workings and guidance with learners at their own pace' Skills Facilitator/ Instructor.

Teachers also valued the opportunity to create and share handwritten notes for future reference, ensuring that individuals can reflect and revisit topics independently.

Using visualisers in our ESOL and Pre-Entry ESOL lessons has allowed staff to model where students need to add information to forms, and additionally, how to exemplify good handwriting, letter formation and holding a pen. One of our Pre-Entry ESOL teachers has used it to display handwriting on the interactive whiteboard (IWB) and then add extra information such as where to use full stops and capital letters, how to form

capital letters and how to write left to right forming letters from the left. Having the handwriting displayed on the IWB with the visualisers means that it can be annotated and underlined to highlight key points. They were also useful in maths classes for ESOL learners.
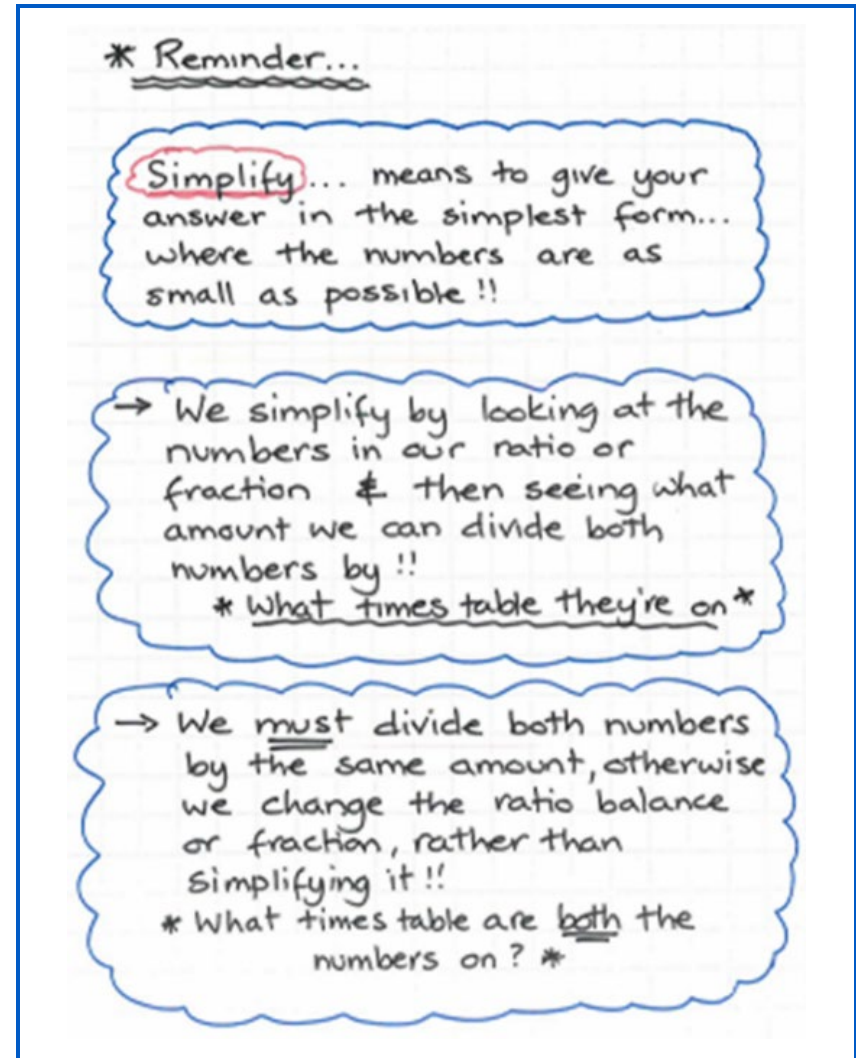

Figure 10a.3: Teachers used the visualiser to create and share handwritten notes with learners.
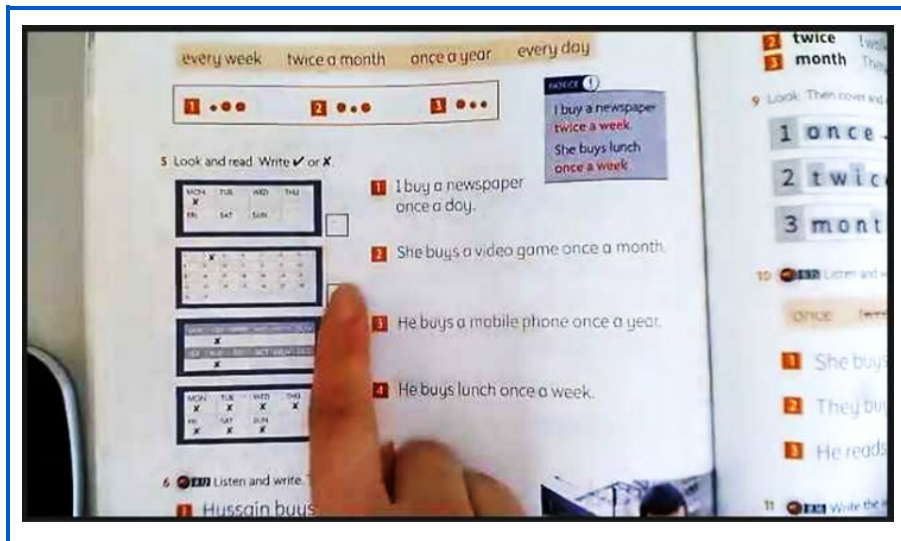
Figure 10a.4: Displaying handwriting conventions through the visualiser was especially helpful for ESOL learners.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There has been a notable increase in the use and expansion of modelling using a visualiser since the project's inception, and this is now a key feature of our ESOL and Pre-Entry ESOL lessons which are delivered both remotely and in person. The Head of ESOL has also been talking to colleagues in the SEND department as there are similarities in the range of basic writing skills that sometimes need to be modelled and developed in additional learning support provision. We intend to collaborate with the SEND department in the near future and share what we have learned during the project.

We learned a great deal from the English department's involvement in the original OTLA 6 project and have been able to build on their expertise, and the three-way collaboration between teachers in the maths, English and ESOL departments has been invaluable in sharing good practice and exploring different ways in which visualisers and digital technology can be used.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Maths teachers involved in the project used a tracking spreadsheet to measure progress between assessment points and allowed teachers to log marks per question on assessments, which then break down the skills into individual area for feedback.

Data captured as part of the initial assessment (assessment point 1) indicated that only 19% of learners had gained marks on multi-step questions. In comparison, assessment point 2 (October half term) indicated that 84% of learners had gained marks on multi-step questions. This increased further at assessment point 3 (December) which indicated that 97% of learners had gained marks on multi-step questions. It should also be noted that as the assessment points progressed, the complexity of the multi-step questions increased.

Assessment Point	What the data showed
1 – Initial Assessment	19% of learners attempted multi-step questions
2 – October Assessment	84% of learners attempted multi-step questions
3 – December Assessment	97% of learners attempted multi-step questions

Table 10a.1: Percentage of learners attempting multi-step questions at each assessment point.

Learner feedback was also useful in measuring and gauging the effectiveness of the visualiser use in classes. Such comments as *'It is so much easier to follow the stages of a question when you show us with the visualiser'* and *'I find it so helpful with the diagram questions on area and perimeter'* reinforce this. Within ESOL the learners quoted *'I like to see the teacher write'* and *'All the class see my work and I was happy'*.

Learning from this project

Our use of visualisers this year has enabled us to adapt to the various changes in delivery models that we have had to introduce in response to the different levels of lockdown during the pandemic:

- When used in face-to-face classes, visualisers have been invaluable in providing live practical demonstrations that have an engaging informal appeal and which can be recorded to provide valuable bespoke revision resources for learners to use in exam preparation.

- During the period of online delivery of maths lessons other online platforms such as Jamboard and Google Meet provided whiteboard features and functions like those offered by visualisers and so our visualisers were used mainly to record a bank of revision videos that have proven to be very useful for learners in exam preparation.

- When maths teachers returned to the classroom, they were able to resume their use of visualisers to give live practical demonstrations and these were found to be particularly useful, especially in exploring tasks with a strong visual aspect such as those involving diagrams, area, perimeter, nets of shapes.

- In ESOL teaching visualisers have been particularly useful with pre-Entry ESOL learners who need support with early writing skills such as letter formation, form filling and handwriting generally. They have also enabled teachers to quickly share pages from a textbook or a piece of realia with a group which has meant that teachers can be more flexible in their lesson delivery and more effective when they cover for other teachers at short notice.

- During the period of classroom based ESOL delivery under social distancing restrictions visualisers also enabled teacher to give close up demonstrations without approaching learners at their desks.

- The use of visualisers within the maths and ESOL lessons to support learning has brought about a fundamental change in the departments. Prior to this project there was limited use of learning technology. Most often PowerPoint was the only tool we used. Now, given that these visualisers have proven their worth, they will be utilised in lessons throughout the year for a wide range of purposes and in varied contexts.
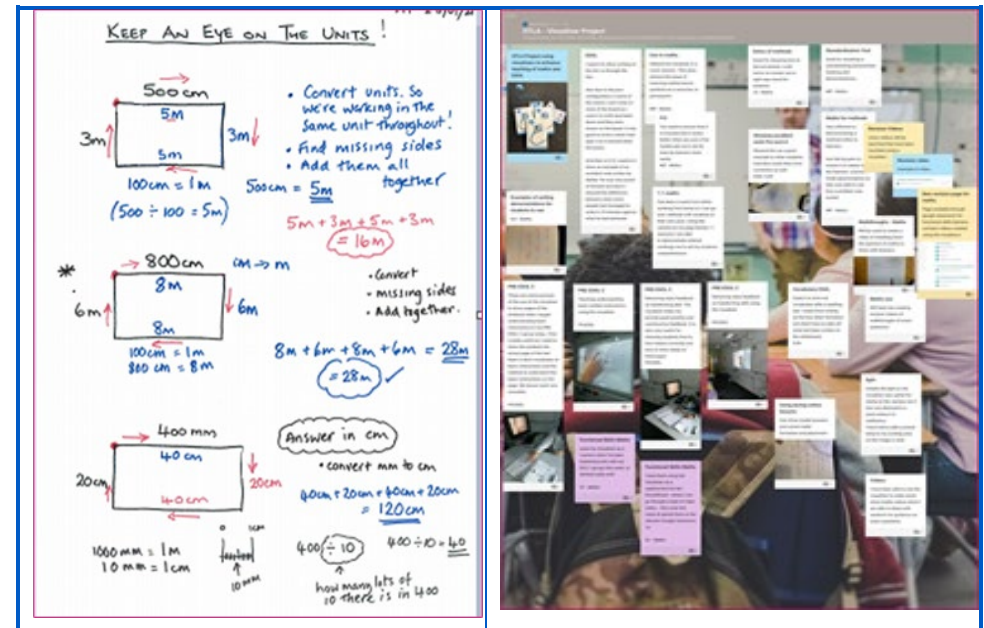

Figure 10a.5: Visualisers have been used in creative ways to facilitate teaching, learning and assessment activities.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-6/7-10a/

10b. FEEDBACK IN REMOTE DELIVERY

Leeds City College

This project looked at the improvement of feedback in GCSE English with the aim of improving learners' engagement with their teacher's comments. We focused our investigation on the provision of verbal feedback during periods of remote learning.

Summary

Leeds City College is one of the largest FE institutions in the country with over 20,000 learners, including 6,000 learners across GCSE English and Maths. A significant proportion of learners at the college come from areas in the highest indices of both social and economic deprivation ratings, with over 50% of learners recruited from the poorest 10% of postcodes in the country.

This action research project initially involved 8 teacher participants across 4 different sites to encapsulate a diverse range of learners, something inherent in our student body as a whole. Our primary objective was to investigate and explore ways of improving the quality of feedback in GCSE English sessions as well as the learners' engagement with their feedback. Refining our feedback delivery was more pertinent than ever given the increased usage of online and blended learning in 20/21, which has accentuated the importance of quality feedback so learners can develop skills independently and understand how to progress when working remotely.

Rationale

We identified teacher feedback in GCSE English as an area for improvement, as although it is regularly given, it can be inconsistent at times and learners do not always respond to it, often forgetting constructive comments provided by the time they revisit the task. We set

out to explore a variety of approaches to improve how feedback was given and increase learner engagement with this, as evidence suggests that for feedback to be useful, learners need to have time to reflect and act on the marking given (Jackson and Marks 2016).

For this reason, we originally set out to use visualisers for modelling live marking and feedback alongside use of model answers; however, we had to adapt this approach in order to respond to the challenges and demands of remote learning within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, we investigated a variety of innovative online feedback techniques during this period of remote learning, particularly using resources that fostered a sense of interaction, which felt even more crucial during the remote setting, e.g. Nearpod, Jamboard and Mote.

Approach

Our project benefited from the flexibility of an iterative and adaptive approach, which allowed us to respond to the numerous obstacles and challenges we encountered, such as a college-wide cyber-attack, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent site closures. At the beginning of the project, we quickly realised that visualisers were not going to be the most effective feedback method to use during remote learning where we had a limited scope for synchronous learning, and so we expanded our approach to include formative feedback technologies. Of the various resources explored by our participating teachers, it quickly became clear that the Chrome extension 'Mote' was popular with learners, and therefore the decision was made to explore this verbal feedback technique for our project, focusing on one department for this investigation. Whilst other resources (such as Jamboard) did work relatively well for generating interaction or engagement from learners, we found this was much more the case for synchronous usage and less so for immediate feedback. We

also felt that Jamboard lacked a personal or 'human' element, being more focused on multimedia, which perhaps contributed to this. Conversely, Mote enabled our practitioner to maintain a personal connection in an asynchronous manner and provide engaging, individual feedback to each learner. Because we had a limited scope for live sessions during the remote periods, this approach felt much better suited to our provision. Our Course Leader for Digital and IT studies at our Printworks campus led the trial of Mote, choosing it because it was a way of connecting with her learners whilst also optimising her time spent providing feedback, with voice commenting being approximately three times quicker than typing comments. She explained her decision to use Mote:

> *"I like Mote because they can hear my voice and I hope it feels like more of a personal connection for them whilst we are remote. Also, many of my students struggle to take in written information and I am fairly sure they don't always read the written feedback. [...] It allows me to be very specific as it takes a lot less time to record verbal feedback than type it. I can zoom in on a specific sentence they have written and discuss it in detail for example."*

As a Google college, we routinely use Google Docs and Google Classroom as part of our lessons, and so the Mote extension was easily compatible with the technology already widely used. Mote works by enabling teachers to record verbal feedback in a maximum of 30 second bursts, by attaching voice notes to specific parts and sentences of the learners' work, in a similar way a 'comment' on a Doc might work. The teacher who pioneered our use of Mote used these voice notes containing her own verbal feedback for tasks completed within sessions, in assessments, and also for flipped learning. She reported that many of her learners struggle to absorb written information and do not always read written feedback, and so this pilot was a response to learners' expressed learning preferences. Furthermore, during her use of Mote, she found that learners felt far more connected to

her through the voice notes than with written feedback - something which is crucial in the environment of remote learning where many learners report feelings of online isolation and detachment. We believe that having even a small amount of this personalised, verbal feedback from their teacher helped to foster learner engagement with their College work, as it is a more personalised way of communication that upheld the learner-teacher relationship more effectively than solely using written feedback.
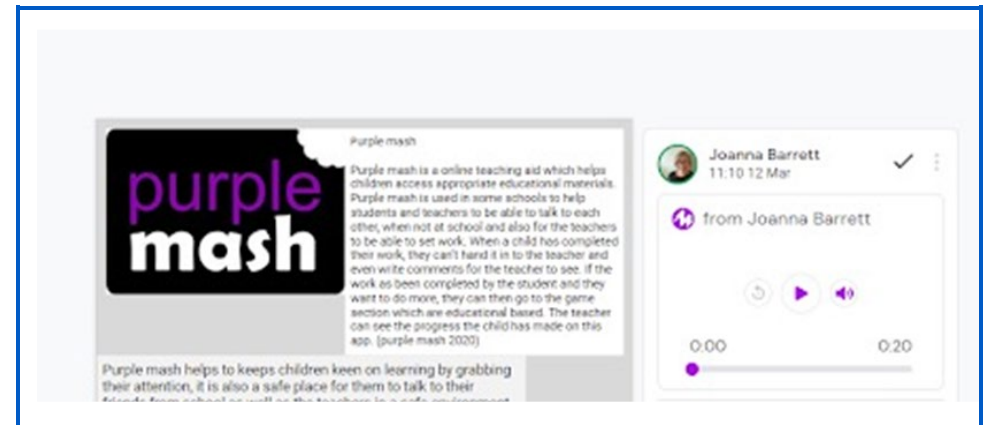

Figure 10b.1: An example of a Mote voice note left as feedback on a learner's work.

Another key benefit unique to Mote is that the voice clips can be replayed, meaning that learners can revisit it, unlike with the verbal feedback they receive in the classroom. Our teacher also praised Mote as being highly time efficient; giving verbal feedback allowed her to provide more detail but in a shorter timescale, thus providing individual feedback to her entire group in a manageable time. This notion of time efficiency is extremely valuable particularly in the context of teachers' saturated workloads throughout this academic year.

> *"I like the discipline of keeping to the time, it makes me think about exactly what I want to say. You can use several voice notes for 1 student by picking out specific areas you want to focus on. It's great and definitely has saved me some time when marking work."*   Teacher

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Through participating in this action research project, our teacher developed her knowledge and understanding of how her group learns most effectively and also increased her awareness of how to encourage learners to take a proactive and responsible attitude to their own work and study. Through this process, she was able to reflect systematically on the effectiveness of the feedback she was giving and use this to design and improve future formative assessments. Furthermore, the action of recording the verbal feedback she was delivering has undoubtedly increased the awareness of the language she uses, which prompted her to reflect on the effectiveness of her comments when giving verbal feedback in class. This type of reflection and consciousness enhances the effectiveness of the feedback given, and ultimately makes the feedback more impactful and meaningful, something further ensured by the succinct nature of the voice clips.

By using Mote, the practitioner's feedback methods developed from traditional to a much more innovative and technologically advanced style. This allowed for more meaningful marking and, during live remote sessions, live feedback without the traditional delay of collecting and writing comments in exercise books etc. Another significant benefit of this change in practice is that learners' can revisit and listen to and repeat their teacher's Mote comments at their convenience. Indeed, in a survey conducted, our participating learners detailed how they refer back to previous feedback received; with some learners stating that they *'always'* refer back to comments from previous sessions.

This experience ultimately developed her ability to adapt her teaching to respond to the individual needs of her learners; for example, although she learned that the class as a whole responded well to Mote, she identified that one SEN learner preferred written feedback, which was then given. During this period, our practitioner continually evaluated and collaborated with the learners to develop the best method for providing effective

feedback during remote learning. This experience and use of Mote ultimately added another dimension to her skills as a practitioner and added to her professional development.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

During the initial stages of remote learning, a number of the project's participating teachers held a Google Meet session to exchange a variety of ideas, strategies and teaching resources that they had explored in the online teaching sphere. This was a collaborative session to discuss the best practice they had utilised to date, and also provided the opportunity to reflect on things that had not worked as well or were too complex or time-consuming. This session was clear evidence of the validity of collaborative working across our diverse departments and campuses to support other teachers and offer fresh perspective, forming new relationships with colleagues from different areas. This meeting helped to enforce a sense of team ethos and allowed colleagues to share some of their most effective teaching strategies for helping learners engage effectively.

Although we trialled the use of Mote on a small scale within one department, our teacher has already championed this tool across multiple departments, for example during meetings with all our English and Maths Leads in which she shared her experiences of using Mote and gave suggestions of best practice. This in turn led to the promotion of the use of Mote within the wider college community, as the awareness that this could make a positive contribution to feedback in other subject areas, particularly during remote learning and periods of isolation for students and staff, led to our Independent Learning Team (30 staff members covering all campuses) trialling the enhanced version of Mote - '*unlimited*'.

It is clear that this technique will prove extremely useful for blended and flipped learning in the future and will be promoted further across college. The use of feedback via Mote is something that we hope to incorporate into the ongoing development of engaging and impactful feedback across the college community.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The learners who have received feedback via this approach found it beneficial in aiding their understanding of how to progress and work independently. Learner opinion was positive, with typical quotes being *"it is very helpful"* and *"I'm very satisfied with the feedback from my teacher"*. Another learner reported that they *"like it because I can access it from home as well"*.

We currently have limited statistical achievement data as we are in the process of collecting assessment evidence in lieu of exams, though we trust that evidence of potential improvement in learners' rates of achievement will emerge later throughout the course of this academic year.

However, perhaps the largest impact of Mote has been in the success in boosting attendance and retention in a time where attendance was clearly declining. Indeed, during the period of remote learning between January to March, our college average for attendance was 67%, whereas the department where we based our trial had a 7% higher attendance figure of 74%. Other departments at the same campus who were not taking part in the feedback pilot had attendance rates of around 65%, and it is possible that the practitioners' use of verbal feedback may have had a significant impact on student attendance and retention. This is echoed by our teacher who reflected on the importance of the learners being able to hear her voice in terms of retaining levels of engagement:

> *"The personal connection seemed to motivate them despite them being at home [….] they really responded to the verbal interaction"*.

Learning from this project

Though we were forced to significantly adapt our project's focus due to the impact of the cyber-attack and due to difficulties surrounding remote learning because of COVID-19, we were ultimately able to use this as an opportunity for innovation. Our practitioners displayed tenacity and creativity during a very difficult period in the industry, and ultimately ensured that our learners received relevant and meaningful feedback for their GCSE English work throughout the academic year.

Through numerous opportunities for reflection, our project has helped learners identify their own preferences for receiving feedback and allowed our teachers to focus on those method(s) accordingly. The quotes below are from some of the teachers who participated in the project:

> *"It's a really great tool from what I've seen so far and some of my learners have said they've already relistened to a few clips!"* Teacher.

> *"It's just so much easier from the learners' perspective too […] They can listen to what I'm saying, and they just get it. It's so much better than messaging them on Hangouts back and forth, or when I write in their books, and some don't even read it"* Teacher.

> *"Verbal feedback using Mote on any piece of online writing is extremely easy to use"* Teacher.

Learners also shared their views, a selection of these are captured in the table below:

Are you satisfied with the feedback you receive for your English work? Please explain your answer.
"I would say yes! I believe it has enabled me to progress much quicker to the Grade I wanted."
"Yes, I am satisfied and know what to improve."
"Yes, it's great feedback."
"Yes because my teacher tells me what I'm doing right and it reassures me."
"Yes I'm very satisfied with the feedback from my teacher as she gives me positive feedback and she points out what I have done well and also the improvements I need to make."
"I am most satisfied with the feedback I have been given as I have learnt more and been able to make my work a higher grade."
"Yes it is very helpful and I can look back on it and do better."
"Yes I'm satisfied because she knows where I'm at."
"It's good because it makes me feel a bit more confident."
"Yes my teacher always gives me loads of feedback so I know what I need to work on next."

Table 10b.1. Table showing learner responses to the question 'are you happy with the feedback you receive for your English work?'

We have seen an improvement in feedback via technological resources by identifying an effective way to give personalised and accessible comments even when online. We have developed our provision of verbal feedback through our experience with Mote, ensuring that instruction to learners is precise and engaging. Though our project sample was small, the learning from this has the potential to impact the feedback given in future online and blended learning. It is also important to note that the Mote tool is not just relevant for English feedback, but is applicable to multiple subject areas and levels, and thus has scope for widespread success that will impact a diverse range of learners.

Finally, we have also gained valuable insights into the research process itself, which will better equip us for future endeavours. A key lesson learned is to not be too ambitious with our aims; instead we need to be realistic in our vision by anticipating some of the potential difficulties and time pressures that can arise in a busy academic year.

We hope to make further progress with this research, and, by incorporating visualisers as a next step, we hope to embed more time to react to feedback in a live session.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-6/7-10b/

11. NEW SUPPORT MODELS
Develop

This project aimed to explore ways of improving the effectiveness of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when working with learners to improve their confidence levels in maths. Our research activities together with the challenges presented by the pandemic have highlighted more clearly than ever before the critical role of the LSA in providing essential pastoral and academic support and how we can use them more effectively within our organisation.

Summary

Develop is a not-for-profit organisation that delivers a comprehensive range of education and training programmes at four centres in the Eastern Region with a particular focus on high needs students aged 14-19 who have struggled in mainstream schooling.

One of our core aims is to develop learners' independent study skills and to encourage a 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2006). In 2019-20 we carried out a successful OTLA 6 project which set out to find ways in which tutors could develop their learners' skills and attitudes in the area of greater learner autonomy. Our plan was to use this year's OTLA 7 project to involve LSAs much more fully in the process of promoting a growth mindset and greater independence in learning.

As will be explained below, we had to refocus our research activities at a key stage of the project but we feel that we have still been able to gain insights and make changes that have led to an important clarification and extension of the role of the LSAs in ways that we feel will have lasting effects across our organisation and across the teaching of all subjects too.

Rationale

One of Develop's core aims is to develop learner's skills in self-reflection and metacognition. This challenge is particularly prevalent in maths and English lessons, where learners have a preconceived idea of their ability and often lack confidence, hindered by a 'fixed mindset' which is largely shaped by their previous experiences with the subjects. LSA's can also unwittingly bring this fixed mindset to their role which can have a compounding effect. Our original plan was therefore to focus on involving LSAs more actively in exploring growth mindset support strategies with both maths and English learners.

However, as a result of a temporary break in our Study Programme contract in December we had to withdraw temporarily from the OTLA programme but re-joined in February by which time teaching had to take place remotely. This made the closer focus on the learner/LSA relationship trickier to quantify and so, in the time that remained we decided to try to capture insights from two of our maths tutors, one in Dunstable and one in Hitchin, who worked with LSAs during this challenging time and were in a position to highlight what they felt was best practice in the use of LSAs. We hoped then to use these insights to review our use of LSAs, their job description, induction programme and CPD opportunities.

Approach

At the beginning of the project we created questionnaires for tutors and LSAs to complete which aimed to gather information about their –

- Qualifications
- recent experience of training
- perception of priorities in their LSA activities

- career aspirations
- feelings about working as an LSA
- view of their impact as an LSA
- involvement in joint lesson planning
- their understanding of growth mindset approaches

There was also a 'learner version' of the questionnaires which was not sent out due to the many changes during the pandemic at this time. This is shame as learner opinion on the role and impact of an LSA would obviously have added great value to the project.

The information gathered from these questionnaires has helped inform the research activities that we then undertook in our Dunstable and Hitchin centres. When we decided to focus on those two centres we also involved our Lead Practitioner in Maths as our key research project worker who carried out a range of professional discussions with both tutors and LSAs in addition to class observations at the two centres.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

As a result of insights gained at our Dunstable centre we now share SOWs much more fully with LSAs so that they know that they have the freedom to make amendments to tailor the resources where necessary to best suit the individual learners. Where this happened, we found that learner attendance has improved significantly. However, the amount of information in a SOW can be 'overwhelming' for the LSA and so we found that it was important for the tutors to mentor the LSA in this aspect of their role. If such support were offered on the job, it could have a significant impact. The following quotes are reflections from LSAs who participated in the project:

> *"When I saw the whole SOW it freaked me out a bit but with support from the tutor I was able to get my head around it."*

> *"I took the lesson plans that the tutor had given me. If they needed something else in the lesson then I felt enabled to do this."*

> *"It made me feel more responsible."*

Normally in lesson a LSA would be briefed at the start of a lesson with their expected role and allocated the support requirement. However, because of the range of learner abilities in this maths group and the need for remote lessons it became clear that the LSAs would need to deliver the lesson. This required that they be given a scheme of work, resources and lesson plans and the tutor chose to give them a whole term's worth. At the start this was overwhelming for the LSAs whose own abilities in maths were limited. However, this was quickly circumvented with professional discussions and mentoring support from the tutor who encouraged the LSA to make changes to the resources as they saw fit thus tailoring the course to the learner. LSAs knew they had support and could feed back to the tutor after each session and were happy to take on the responsibility.

Not only has providing LSAs with schemes of work been useful when delivering sessions to one or two learners at a time, it has also equipped them to take on a greater involvement in whole class sessions which continue now that face to face teaching has resumed. The pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated the involvement that some LSAs have had but this has been a welcome improvement in the way in which learners are supported within our institution. This model has proved so useful and successful that we plan to roll this out for all mixed ability groups where tutors and LSAs can be provided additional CPD to explore this "mentored teaching" approach.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

In professional discussions with maths tutors at the Norwich centre the Lead Maths Practitioner gathered a range of information on how they approach the deployment of LSAs in their lessons. As a result, the tutor from our Norwich Centre shared a document that she had created to support LSAs in her maths lessons as it was clear that tutors and LSAs held a range of different perceptions about what an LSA could and should do. The tutor was keen to provide a working guide that encouraged her LSA to focus on supporting learners who needed less maths support. This would then free up the maths tutor to make better and more effective use of her greater expertise in working with students with more substantial learning difficulties.

The tutor also thought it would be useful to review some of the ideas about 'growth mindset', demonstrated in the poster below:

Figure 11.1: A poster designed to promote a 'growth mindset' attitude to learning.

Level		Degree of help
1	SUPERVISE	Keep students on task without giving them any ideas or answers. Help students understand what is expected of them on a task.
2	HINT	Give students hints but no direct ideas or methods for any questions. Students can be given vague pointers but not specific scenarios or examples.
3	SUGGEST	Students can be given scenarios or ideas they could not come up with on their own. This includes helping them choose method for questions but not doing the question with them.
4	TEACH	Students can be given any help possible to get them through the task. This may include clear step by step instructions or doing the work alongside the student.

Table 11.1. Redesigning LSA support to focus on those who need the least intervention.

Following on from what we have learned about the role and involvement of LSAs during this project we have subsequently redefined the job descriptions for LSAs to reflect their more diverse roles.

In addition to this we have revised and strengthened our HR processes when allocating short-term and long-term lesson covers. We now have in place a robust process that looks at selection, bespoke induction and short term CPD to ensure effectiveness in these roles so that the impact on disruption to learners is minimised.

There have also been changes in observation practice, with a greater focus on the LSA's contribution in lessons. This approach now ensures that the LSA is an integral part of any observation, looking at the partnership between tutor and LSA, how the LSA supports the students with maths

topics and that the LSA will, in future, contribute to the reflective practice of the lesson review.

Lastly, there have been changes in our recruitment practice. Instead of appointing LSAs without considering their potential progression within our centre, we now actively work with them to ensure that there is scope for progression to a tutor role if this is what they wish to work towards. If not, then we now use the definition of 'trainee LSA', 'LSA' and 'senior LSA' to provide recognition of progression within the role.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

At the Dunstable centre encouraging findings emerged as we changed the way LSAs were deployed. One of the Entry Level 1 learners said of the LSA:

> *'I wish you could be my tutor all the while'.*

Learners who frequently used to leave lessons now remain the whole time and now clearly enjoy the teaching. The LSA in this group had been a learner himself last year which highlights the benefit of encouraging learners to take on an LSA as they are acutely aware of learners' needs having been one so recently and they know from experience what it is they find helpful and valuable.

Our Lead Maths Practitioner is now more strongly confirmed in her commitment to considering how LSAs can be regraded and offered mentoring to become tutors: this is not new within the organisation as the Bedford Centre already has two LSAs who have become maths tutors via mentoring on the job. However, this project and in particular our findings from our work at the Hitchin centre has highlighted that this should be developed as standard progression opportunity for any LSA who shows an interest in maths (or English) and would like opportunities to demonstrate their skills. This requires building relationships between LSAs and tutors, observing LSAs as well as tutors and offering targeted CPD.

Building LSA maths knowledge can be done on the job if the tutor has the experience and support to do so. Findings from both centres (Hitchin and Dunstable) show this is possible in different ways. Our work in Dunstable shows what can be achieved when 'needs must'. Both the LSAs involved in that element of the OTLA project will be given the opportunity to gain Functional Skills Maths qualifications at Level 2 to prepare them for their future roles as a senior LSA or potential tutor.

Learning from this project

As a result of this project we are committed to developing training and team building opportunities to encourage better relationships between tutors and LSAs with clear indications of job roles and where the crossover is, as well as highlighting appropriate progression opportunities.

What this project has highlighted most noticeably for us is that the pandemic has afforded us the opportunity to evaluate the dramatic, unexpected change to teaching, learning and assessment. We view this learning curve as an opportunity to promote and explore the relationships with LSAs and tutors across our centres and across subjects too. We feel that this clarification and extension to the role of the LSAs will have lasting effects across our organisation and across the teaching of all subjects too.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-6/7-11/**

12. NEW SUPPORT MODELS: HOW CAN WE HELP LEARNERS BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS WHILST STUDYING ONLINE?

West Suffolk College

This project aimed to find ways to enable learners to connect with each other whilst studying online. Opportunities for collaborative working in small groups and a whole department approach to induction led to learners getting to know each other better, increased confidence and improved learning outcomes.

Summary

The practice of learners working alongside their peers is integral to the experience of learners in the Adult Skills department of West Suffolk College, with students benefitting from the support and encouragement of peers throughout their learning journey. The aim of this project was to investigate how we could provide space and opportunities for these support networks to develop whilst students were learning online and not meeting in person.

Interventions focused on the 12-week Level 1 & 2 Functional Skills Maths classes taught online by the deputy project lead using the college's preferred platform of Microsoft Teams.

Learning and feedback from classes in the autumn term led to a range of developments being implemented across the department. A focus on collaborative activities in breakout rooms and a departmental approach to induction led to learners reporting that they were getting to know each other better and appears to have had a positive impact upon learner achievement throughout the course.

Rationale

We noticed during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown that the learners who remained engaged with their learning, and who made the most progress, were those who had formed friendships within the group before learning was moved online. These learners supported each other, encouraging and spurring each other on with their maths learning. Their connections with one another seemed to lead to better engagement and stronger outcomes.

We were aware that during this academic year we would be faced with the challenge of providing space and opportunities for social interaction to take place whilst having to adhere to strict social distancing and delivering courses online. As we re-imagined what education would look like in this new 'Covid' world it was important that we did not lose these positive social interactions that benefit learners both personally and academically.

> Our action research aimed to focus on finding effective ways to encourage learners to quickly build community and mutually supportive relationships within their teaching groups. It was proposed that the provision of such opportunities would lead to improvements in attendance, retention and progression as well as making the learning experience more enjoyable for learners.

Approach

We set out to provide opportunities for learners to interact with each other through:

- break out rooms or opportunities for small group work
- time before each class to chat
- ice-breaker tasks

Information was gathered through:

- tutor observations
- learner surveys at the start of the course, mid-way through, and at the end of the course through MS Forms
- monitoring of attendance and progress
- interviews with individual learners

Difficulties in setting up learners' college IT accounts and delays to the roll out of breakout rooms in Teams meant we were unable to trial the interventions as planned across our first cohort of courses in the autumn term. Observations suggested that learners who had met with the tutor before the start of the course gelled much faster with other members of the group and were more relaxed and willing to engage with online classes. It was also noticed that those who were more comfortable with the technology were less anxious about the course.

A review of the online courses in December involving tutors, admin staff and managers led to the decision to effect a number of administrative changes to support the delivery of the next cohort of courses. It was decided to implement a 'week zero' session across the department in all Functional Skills English and maths classes (not just those directly involved in the project), with the aim of giving learners the opportunity to meet the tutor and each other and to become familiar with the technology before teaching started.

Advances in Teams meant that breakout rooms were possible in the second cohort of courses which included the following interventions:

- implementation of 'Week Zero' (group induction & individual meetings between learner & tutor)
- learners meeting in fixed tutorial groups each week
- tutors developing collaborative activities

Adjustments were made to collaborative tasks throughout the course in response to learner feedback and observations. Initially the Teams Class Notebook was used as a platform for accessing the group work, before moving to Jamboard which proved more successful for encouraging collaborative working.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The design of the course on Teams, utilising a flipped learning approach, allowed students to take responsibility for their own learning. The completion of the self-assessment sheet each week guided their pre-class preparation. The ability to set, keep track of and provide feedback on assignments through Teams has made it easier for staff to monitor learner work and thus saved time. A number of tutors plan to continue setting work through Teams once back in the classroom.

New learning tools and strategies have been adopted out of necessity to make the online classroom more engaging, many of which will no doubt become features of the classroom once in-person classes return. IT skills across the department have improved with tutors becoming proficient in using a platform many had not heard of 12 months ago. Members of the team have worked together to practise using online tools and team meetings have included mini-CPD sessions involving the sharing of tools and resources.

Whilst reflection is a standard part of the teacher's toolkit, the process of the being involved in the project has meant greater emphasis being placed upon listening to learners, on gathering information from a wide range of sources and of sharing these observations and ideas, with colleagues within the department, the wider college and with fellow FE practitioners in other contexts.

Learners have been keen to share ideas and feedback, readily acknowledging the belief that 'this is new for all of us, and we're in it together'. The novelty of online learning for most people has meant tutors have not been burdened by the range of expectations often brought to class by students, and learners have been willing to embrace new ways of doing things.

The structure and accountability offered by involvement in the OTLA project has ensured that interventions have been adapted and honed throughout the process rather than being abandoned when challenges have been faced.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Although COVID lockdowns have meant the vast majority of our team working from home this year, in many ways this has encouraged greater collaboration with staff actively seeking out opportunities to discuss and collaborate. Team meetings have been much better attended this academic year than previously.

Collaboration with an English tutor from another college inspired the use of Jamboard as part of the project. The knowledge, experience and practical tips that she shared gave the project team the confidence needed to get started and use the tool professionally with learners. This experience was in turn shared with other members of the maths team, and a number of tutors now regularly use Jamboard.

The knowledge gained through the project of online course design in the autumn term meant that the team was ready with an effective course and resources to be rolled out to all tutors upon the unexpected move to full online learning in January 2021.

Constructive dialogue between all stakeholders in the process of enrolment and induction led to an effective solution to a number of issues including learners not receiving their college log ins (meaning they were unable to access the full functionality of Teams), learners joining courses late leading to difficulties 'catching up' & learners not having the IT skills or resources to be able to access the online course effectively. The enrolment process was restructured and 'week zero' sessions instigated across all courses.

Common ground rules and expectations were decided on across the subjects ensuring a consistent approach and experience for all learners. The team worked together to produce a Padlet of pre-course information to be sent to each learner. These adaptations meant that learners were as prepared as possible before starting their course and aimed to reduce the anxiety around accessing an online course.

Learning from the project was shared with the wider college through the college managers' meeting, digital steering group and with other colleges through the Maths Practitioners' Network.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learner feedback and observations show that learners who took part in small, fixed tutorial group sessions got to know each other better than those who only took part in whole class live teaching sessions (see figures 12.1 and 12.2 below).
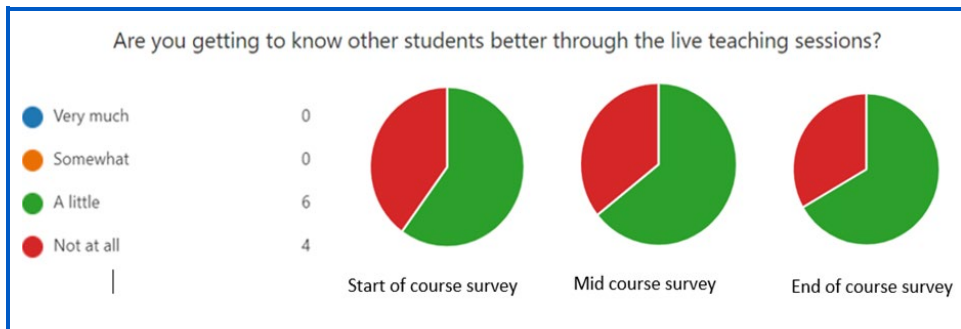
Figure 12.1: Cohort 1 classes: Whole group live teaching sessions and optional drop ins
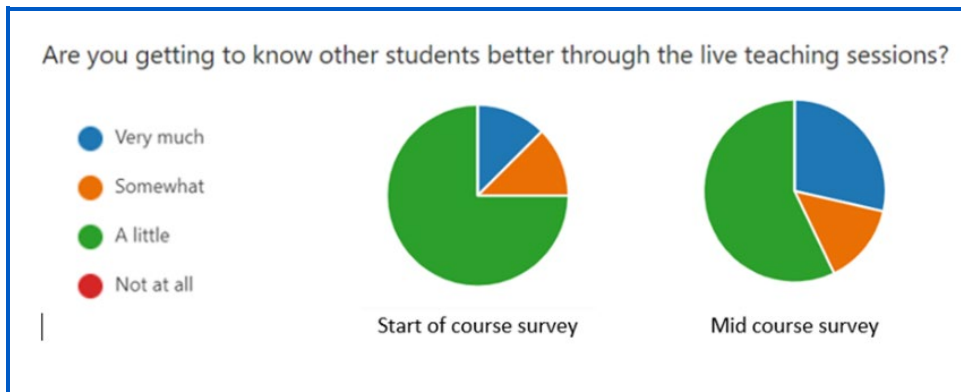

Figure 12.2: A cohort 2 class involving whole group live teaching sessions and compulsory small group tutorials.

Learner 'JB' describes how it takes time to get to know other learners:

> *"I think it's developed over [time]…the first two weeks it was a little strange and you're seeing these faces and you're like, hi, and then it becomes a little bit more comfortable."*

Another learner, M, describes the importance of participating in a small group:

> *"[It was a] closer knit, little group, we were able to get our views across easier because it was such as small group. It did work really well having a small group."*

Learners also valued being able to discuss maths in small groups and felt it had an impact on their learning:

> *"I think it's made a massive difference having other people because there have been times when I've not known the answer. Like the circumference of that circle, I said diameter & a couple of them jumped straight in and said no it's circumference and there have been a couple of times where I've been able to help other people as well. I don't think my learning would have been as far if I had been on my own."*

Learner Karly felt it was important to be part of a group when learning but was also aware of the 'flip side' explaining that she sometimes did not want to answer questions verbally, or in chat, as she was concerned about what others would say or think if she got it wrong. Being in a group with the same people each week seems to have eased her anxieties as the learners have got to know each other better:

> *"Last couple of weeks 'C', 'M' & myself have been in a group together. It's been nice seeing how we've worked together over the past couple of weeks, kind of formed a little bond in that group and we talk a little bit first and got to know each other a little bit more as well as how we work together and how we figure out the work through the equations together."*
>
> *"If it was in the group, I'm working in now I'd say I don't understand it, if it was a new group of people, I wouldn't say anything."*

Whilst learners' achievement on milestone assessments in the second cohort appears to be better than the first, this could be due to the connections built between learners or that the extra hours practice of maths per week has boosted their learning. The majority of learners felt that learning alongside others in their tutorial group had helped to develop their maths knowledge and skills.

'Week Zero' appears to have had a positive effect on learners with both teachers and learners stating that they felt it had prepared learners well for the course with many learners specifically stating that it helped them feel less anxious.

Contrary to our initial thoughts figures for those leaving the course appear to be higher for cohort 2 courses. Possible reasons for this include the decision not to learn online as the more thorough induction to the course ensured learners were aware of the time commitment needed across the 12 weeks and opted to postpone their learning.

Learning from this project

Learners reported that working collaboratively, in smaller groups had a beneficial impact on their learning & data suggests that those in the 2nd cohort did perform better. However, it is important to bear in mind that many factors may have contributed to this outcome such as the impact of Covid upon learners' mental health.

'Week Zero' had a positive effect especially for anxious students. Aside from the benefits of ensuring all learners understood course expectations and technology, the building of the tutor-learner relationship appeared to be key to this, as the quote from learner JB demonstrates:

> *"Me being petrified of coming online…[it] made all the difference when you've got a supportive teacher…Hilary and yourself… it gave me peace of mind that I had that support in place … has meant the world to me because on a system that I'm not used to, it was very very scary for me."*

Tutors reported that learners whom they had got to know better were more likely to contact them to discuss any issues and seek support; the Adult Skills department are looking at how we can apply our learning from the success of Week Zero on online courses to the classroom when we return in September.

A major difference between 'in person' and online classes is the lack of spontaneous opportunities for meeting up with other learners, as learner M described:

> *"You can interact with people but it's difficult to become friends by an online class… Because we're so spread out it would be hard to meet up. If it was in usual times we would go out for a cup of coffee and get to know people. You can't sit down and have a chat."*

On this project all opportunities were mediated by the tutor and so a future project could explore the benefits of facilitating learners to communicate outside of class through the setting of group work projects that did not involve the tutor.

The project worked well because it encouraged tutors to engage learners at each stage of the course design process and involvement promoted a spirit of collaboration within the wider team.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-6/7-12/**

EDUCATION & TRAINING
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OTLA 7 ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (SOUTH)

Research Group Lead: Claire Callow
Mentors: Catherine Gray
                         Rachel Öner
                         Sue Southwood

PRACTITIONERS USING ACTION RESEARCH TO DEVELOP THEIR DISTINCTIVE PEDAGOGIES
Claire Callow (Research Group Lead)

In this section, we see committed practitioners experimenting with fresh pedagogical practices (teaching methods, technologies and organisational strategies). It is through researching these alternative approaches that they develop new insights into deep-seated barriers experienced by their learners. Through action research into their teaching, practitioner researchers develop their personal pedagogical decision-making and become critically aware of the effects of their teaching activities on learners.

Lee Shulman (2005) identified what he described as **"signature pedagogies"** which characterise the ways that different groups of professionals (including teachers) are inducted into their professional practices, and through which these emerging professionals learn *"to think, to perform and to act with integrity"*. He stressed that these signature pedagogies embody tensions that must be resolved by practitioners as they begin to exercise their professional responsibilities; for example, Shulman asks whether teachers teach to the *"benefit of those students most likely to earn high test scores"*, or do they *"teach in ways that equalize educational opportunity and emphasize educational ends whether or not they are externally examined"*? (2005, p. 58).

Thomson et al (2012) argue that there is a default signature pedagogy common across English schooling, and that this approach – which is typically content and assessment-driven – is not appropriate for all learners. Consequently, many of our post-16 teachers frequently encounter demotivated learners who have become negative about their English and maths abilities as a result of this default pedagogy that has failed to inspire them. However, in the following reports we see how this default operates as the starting point from which practitioner action researchers begin to develop their improved practice, and through their reflective investigations,

they hone their own distinctive pedagogies which help learners to recover from previous failures and to begin to rebuild their sense of identity as successful students.

Practitioners typically began action research by focusing on a particular practice (e.g., use of online technologies; paired learning; new content matter, etc) but it was often through listening to individual learners that they came to appreciate the deeper causes that had been inhibiting learners making significant progress.

As we read the reports, we see practitioners adopting new pedagogical understandings, and rethinking their practices in order to refocus and inspire demotivated learners who may have been excluded by the dominant practices of the default assessment-driven pedagogy.

In these reports, we learn that practitioners on this programme don't just lift a pedagogical approach 'off the peg'; rather, they fashion their own particular understandings of the teaching that learners' need – in essence, post-16 practitioners are working towards shaping, crafting and owning their own distinctive pedagogies.

The importance of community for improving pedagogical practice.

We can see practitioners on OTLA 7 developing more informed pedagogical understandings to help learners for whom traditional pedagogical approaches were proving inappropriate. Through systematic inquiries into their practice, many practitioners arrived at pedagogical understandings that aligned with social theories of learning.

Social theories of learning are already popular throughout the post-16 sector as is evident in the widespread use of group and paired activities in sessions, and from reading these projects, it becomes apparent that

practitioners as well as learners also respond productively to social learning opportunities that are stimulated by project collaboration.

For example, **Shipley College** and **Waltham Forest College** planned collaborative action research into English students writing for real audiences, and their experiments with sharing learners' work between the colleges left teachers stunned by the level of responsiveness in learners. This raised staff expectations of learners' potential, preparing them for further reciprocal activities in the future.

The United Colleges Group collaboratively investigated their use of online learning, and their ethos of sharing inspired participating practitioners to overcome inhibitions about adopting new technologies in their teaching. A teacher of twenty years' writes how, *"Taking part in this collaboration has changed my life"* and the report arrives at the astute conclusion that, in order to stimulate commitment to such initiatives, project leaders should, *"Call it research, not a project"*.

At **Westminster Adult Education Service**, reports of improved staff 'confidence' are evidenced by demonstrations of greater staff agency – practitioners were not just utilising 'handed-down' resources but were expressing their improved pedagogical decision-making through interdependently creating and designing more learner-centred, contextually relevant online resources.

The collaborative nature of cross-departmental projects is also evident in **South Essex College**'s pairing of maths and English teachers to learn from each other as they tackled the challenges of 'the language of maths'. The shared experience helped refresh practitioners' restrictive individualistic practices; one liberated teacher delightedly reported that he no longer felt it necessary to be *"hammering on about maths terminology"*.

Making changes in pedagogical decision-making required support from colleagues, the organisation and project mentor to encourage risk-taking with established practices. Thus, we see how the project community at **New City College** provided the conditions for continuing change, and their

collaborative efforts to stimulate creative writing left the team hungry to explore new ways to develop vocabulary, showing that the project was not just satisfied with making progress in specific strategies, but is intent on building on the collaborative impetus in future teaching and learning endeavours.

In Devon, **Petroc** embraced the wider support community to discover how Additional Learning Support (ALS) practitioners could contribute their skilled practices more effectively. Although ALS practitioners are typically deployed to support specific learners, the project discovered that all learners enjoyed benefiting from the help and insights which support workers could provide, and both ALS and teachers took a new pride in their collaborative potential, thus opening new pedagogical understandings upon which they can plan future practice.

ELATT works with a variety of very disadvantaged learners in London, and they used the action research opportunity to explore how to help staff to elicit and respond to feedback from these learners. In the process of developing feedback tools to provide individual staff with constructive formative feedback which could inform their pedagogical decision-making, participating staff reported not only getting insights into learners' needs, but also gaining new understandings of the power of Teaching Assistant support. This search for even better ways to gain high quality learner feedback has become an ELATT development point.

A legacy of improved teaching

One of the aims of the OTLA programme is to leave a legacy of improved teaching throughout organisations and this wider pedagogical culture change can be seen in two contrasting settings. In **Essex Adult and Community Learning**, managers designed an online initial assessment tool for learners applying to improve their maths. This led to greater uptake of the initial assessments and reshaped how tutors planned their contact time with those enrolling, enjoying the personal satisfactions of making a

difference for nervous and inhibited returners: *"You have time for a proper chat with learners"*.

The wider organisational changes needed across our learning communities are captured in the **Weston College** project which attended to the needs of foreign national prisoners. Many prisoners were being misdirected onto programmes through use of an unsuitable generic initial assessment tool. The project team were able to raise the pedagogical awareness of those organising prison education, by showing how pre-Entry ESOL learners were inappropriately conflated with illiterate learners (as ESOL learners are literate in their first language but may not be in English; illiterate learners cannot read or write in any language).

The project devised and trialled a new assessment approach which greatly reduced wasteful misdirection, and this was shared at local, regional and national levels. The initiative had influence beyond the teaching domain, as the new initial assessment provided vital intelligence to the prison's Labour Allocation organisers, thus ensuring that prisoners can be allocated to appropriate and worthwhile activities. As well as developing ESOL teachers' pedagogical decision-making, this initiative can be seen as educative for a wide range of stakeholders.

In reading the following reports, we hope that you will appreciate how this OTLA action research programme has created the opportunities for all participating practitioners – in a variety of roles, and with differing levels of teaching experience – to better understand the effects of their teaching in particular contexts and to develop their distinctively personal pedagogical responses. Too often, practitioners have been drawn into pedagogical processes that fixate on future results for learners who have been wounded and frustrated by their educational pasts.

These action research projects have provided much-needed spaces for practitioners to pause, to enjoy listening to and working with their learners, so that together they make progress on the learners' journey at a pace and style that better acknowledges the individuals in their settings.

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 7

Mentor: Catherine Gray

13. Petroc
14. New City College
15. South Essex College

CURRICULUM APPROACHES TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE LEARNING APPROACHES

Catherine Gray (Mentor)

The common theme of my three projects was collaboration. Each team identified a barrier to engagement: limited vocabulary range was denying students access to the higher GCSE grades; difficulty reaching the maths problem due to literacy constraints; a need to approach students holistically to help them engage and succeed when they feel assaulted with so many anxieties. Of course, the context grew far more problematic when the teams were compelled to adapt their approaches for online learning. Nevertheless, there were some common outcomes that grew from their action research in challenging times:

- The teams grew an extra coat of determination when conditions became more complicated, rather like the Mastermind line: 'We've started so we'll finish'. They were projects they'll never forget for this reason, and I suggest that undertaking the projects in lockdown gave them an edge.
- Teamwork at Petroc gave value to every member of the team. A united front of support assistants, facilitators and teachers demonstrates what can be done if all staff around the students are included in a venture. At South Essex College, English and Maths teachers were paired up and entrusted to create their own bespoke strategy to help Maths students with their English.
- In all projects, the work has led to further trials and adaptations.

Petroc's project was designed to look at the use of Additional Learning Support (ALS) within the college and how they could make this more effective, in combination with the expansion of the instructor role, a change they introduced last academic year in their GCSE English lessons to help learners engage with their taught session content.

New City College aimed to improve responses to creative writing tasks from high needs learners by developing their use of descriptive vocabulary. This included improving their range of vocabulary and their understanding of when and how descriptions should be applied. Although the focus was on high needs learners, the entire GCSE English 16-18 cohort took part in the project.

South Essex College asked *"How many times have maths teachers identified that the low literacy levels of their students prevents them from being able to understand the questions and 'do' the maths"?* Their project adopted an 'umbrella' approach which involved 5 GCSE English teachers and 5 GCSE Maths teachers to work together in pairs in response to the overarching theme of the project. It was designed to improve GCSE maths outcomes for learners, by exploring how to expand English skills within the maths curriculum. The focus was on creating a culture of collaboration and evaluation among students and staff; as part of the impact on the students, with the objective that this would remove barriers to learning and help develop resilience and confidence.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-7/**

13. DOES INTEGRATING ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT AND COACHING INTO LESSONS IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND OUTCOMES?

Petroc

This project was designed to look at the use of Additional Learning Support (ALS) within the college and how we could make this more effective, in combination with the expansion of the instructor role, a change we introduced last academic year in our GCSE English lessons to help learners engage with their taught session content.

Summary

The use of instructors to support GCSE English resit learners was something we saw success with through our OTLA 6 research project, where we explored the impact of coaching through the implementation of the VESPA model (Oakes and Griffin, 2017). By using and adapting VESPA principles to suit the needs of our learners, we were able to gain a better understanding of what learners needed in order to succeed in their GCSE English lessons. VESPA looks at Vision, Effort, Systems, Practice and Attitude and we looked at how to help learners improve these skills through instructor-facilitated coaching sessions as an addition to their subject-specific lessons. This time, we were interested in expanding our research to include Functional Skills (FS) and GCSE maths, as results in these subjects have tended not to be as strong as they were for English GCSE.

Petroc is a large FE college in a rural location with campuses across Mid and North Devon. There are around 2,000 learners at Petroc studying maths and English and these are made up of Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 learners studying both FS and GCSE. The pass rates for GCSE maths and English are above national average but this is something that we are always striving to improve. The project involved our instructors and ALS support staff as well as the maths and English teaching staff.

Rationale

Why the need for change?

- National average pass rate for GCSE resits is around 30% for English and 22% for maths. This means that 70% of English and 78% of maths learners currently fail year on year. This statistic is incredibly demotivating for both learners and staff and something needs to change.
- Repeated failure can cause a lack of confidence in learners - we have noticed a reluctance to take risks with English and there is often a barrier in moving beyond the basics in maths. There is often a fixation on the unfairness of 'failing' and learners can be unwilling to learn from failure and move forward.
- Learners who are motivated can often lack the study skills required to revise effectively. There is a 'Learned helplessness', (Seligman, 1970) where learners will copy material down but do not know how to organise this for themselves into revision notes. As Miller discusses in 'Avoiding Learned Helplessness' (2015) we needed to remove the over scaffolding for learner responses and instead help 'to scaffold the process of self-direction.'
- We were aiming to improve the uptake in ALS for learners who needed extra support. In the past we had found that the stigma of attending extra sessions would be off-putting to learners. Having these appointments in a separate building with an unknown ALS tutor also often meant that the uptake of ALS was not as successful as it could have been. Some learners also lacked the study skills required to progress with their education and we wanted to see the impact of

combining the knowledge gained from the previous project around the instructor role and the study skills with the change in ALS delivery on learner engagement and achievement.

- We were also looking to improve communication between the ALS staff and the English and maths curriculum staff in terms of weekly content delivery to make the session more meaningful.

Approach

This year, when timetabling, an ALS tutor was matched to a specific teacher, and accessed the lessons as part of the class. As the term developed, the ALS tutor, instructor and the teacher then regularly met to discuss intervention needed and identify learners that would be offered support. Breakout rooms were used while online delivery took place so that the learner and ALS tutor could go and discuss any part of the session that the learner had struggled with. As the ALS staff member was a familiar part of the session, learners became far more likely to request this extra support as the stigma to it was removed, due to them seeing it as part of the lesson, rather than as additional work. The learners saw this as part of their core delivery and an opportunity to access extra help rather than a confirmation of their continued failure. This new delivery, combined with the impact of the VESPA and coaching activities in the instructor sessions, saw many learners become much more independent with their learning. Embedding ALS in this way also meant that asking for help could be reframed as a strength rather than a weakness. We decided to take a flexible approach to this method of support and delivery, to recognise that each learner is different and has different needs.

GCSE English- Learning behaviours qualitatively and quantitatively measured indicated apathy for returning learners as pass rates fall by 3% overall. The cohort of returning learners includes a higher percentage of disadvantaged learners and boys studying at Level 2 for the second year. Learners enrolled on Level 3 demonstrated strong value added, suggesting that systems and practice were stronger. The achievement gap for

disadvantaged learners is broadly in line with 17/18 data but there is a widening of the achievement gap for Level 1 disadvantaged learners. Implementation of VESPA will address and promote clear expectation of Vision, Effort, Systems and Practice. The application of study skills (systems and practice) will also address the attainment for SEN learners studying GCSE. Although the gap hasn't widened, work is still needed to address the existing attainment gap. We looked to address these by incorporating ALS intervention into the classroom to be accessible to all.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

In addition to working on the mindset of the learners, we also found that we needed to work on the mindset of some staff members. Teaching during a pandemic with such a large GCSE cohort has meant that we have moved most of our delivery online in order to accommodate such large numbers safely. This has meant that staff have had to negotiate online learning via Google Meet as well as embed the ALS into their lessons. For some staff this has been seamless and the utilisation of the staff with breakout rooms and general support has been positive. For other staff it has meant that they have become fixed on a reluctance to embrace more change and have found it harder to reflect on their teaching practice, meaning that valuable opportunities to respond to learner need could be lost.

Some ALS staff reported that:

> *"The atmosphere between classrooms is very different, I don't feel like I am being as fully utilised in some classes as I am in others."*

Building confidence and CPD around reflective practice would be something to bear in mind for any centres wanting to bring changes to the organisation, particularly with team members who have been with the organisation for a considerable amount of time and may be resistant to change.

The danger with this can be that the ALS staff members are not fully given the opportunity to support learners in the moment, meaning that the chance for maximising learning opportunities are lost.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

What we have found this year with the ALS intervention embedded within the classroom is that the ALS staff themselves have found their work much more impactful as they are fully aware of what is happening in the classroom and are able to respond more directly to learner need rather than having a separate appointment where the learner spends some of the appointment time explaining the work for that week. The collaboration has led to ALS staff feeling more involved and empowered and as an integral part of the lesson.

ALS staff have commented that:

> *"I have found this new way of working has meant that I am more involved in the maths curriculum and am able to support the learners in a more robust way."*

> *"Being in the lessons every week means that I am able to get to know the learners far better than I would from a short appointment every week. It means that I can build on their confidence from prior learning I have seen in the classroom to help motivate when covering trickier topics."*

Having had such success with this model, this is something that we will continue to develop at Petroc, with plans to look at offering embedded ALS intervention across other curriculums within the college.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Although we do not have final achievement data for the GCSE groups, early indications show that for the focus groups, attendance has improved significantly with the English group showing 84% overall attendance, with 81% of learners having 80% attendance or above. For maths, the results are similar, 91% overall attendance with 80% of the students having 80% or above. These figures are particularly noteworthy this year where the pandemic has had a negative impact on attendance generally.

Learners from the GCSE English focus group were generally positive about their experience of studying English at Petroc and felt that the ALS, and Instructor sessions had helped with their motivation and understanding of the subject.

Learners identified that *'the bond between you and the teacher also matters'* and it was also noted that the relationship between the two teachers is also important, with one learner commenting, *'the two teachers complemented each other.'* When asked how they felt about studying GCSE English at the start of the course they reported:

> *"I feel happy when studying GCSE English here."*

> *"At first not good at all but after a couple weeks, very happy."*

75% of learners reported that they felt they had benefited from the extra support with the ALS in the classroom, and even those who did not particularly enjoy English as a subject, felt that the dynamic between lecturer and ALS staff had enhanced their learning experience:

> *"I like how the lessons were always interesting as I dislike English, boring personally, but Kate and Katy always found a way to make it interesting."*

Learners also felt that the instructor sessions continued this support:

> *"They have increased my motivation"*

> *"[instructors have] helped keep me on track and motivated to pass this year."*

When asked how they felt about GCSE English at the end of the year, the learners reported positively:

> *"Same way I felt to begin with extremely proud of how far I have come."*

> *"Happy and confident."*

> *"Better than I did last year."*

Learning from this project - Does integrating additional learning support and coaching into lessons improve attendance and outcomes?

Taking part in this project during a pandemic has been a massively rewarding and interesting experience. The general mindset of the learners has been fairly low, the impact of the cancelled exams last year and the uncertainty of whether the GCSE exams would run this academic year, which was the position we were in when we started the project. All this uncertainty has left learners feeling incredibly unsettled and anxious about their education and futures. This meant that we were in a different position at the start of the project than we had originally thought but we felt that making the changes with the learning support and incorporating it with the VESPA and coaching were even more important for the learners as their confidence had taken a real hit. Seeing the trust built with the support staff and the learners was brilliant and learners who may not have previously accessed ALS were confidently asking for extra feedback. We had assumed that it would be mainly Level 1 and Functional Skills learners who may need the extra support, as these were the learners with the lower grade profiles, but we found that learners across all levels and vocational areas were happy to access the support, which has led to an increase in progress made across the academic year.

Learners also made specific comments about their appreciation of support they have received this year, noting that their teachers were *'very good at their job'* and saying *'thankyou for all the support given'*.

The increased motivation and confidence seemed to move beyond the English and maths and translate to all learning experiences with feedback such as:

> *"It has encouraged me to do better with all my classes after seeing how well I was doing in English."*

> *"Maths has helped me a lot this year as I have actually gotten a lot better at it and it's helped me become more disciplined and hardworking."*

> *"The motivation I got continued through to help in other sessions."*

Learners also reported that they felt proud of their achievements and had more of an understanding of their learning.

> *"Absolutely proud of myself. I think I never seemed to listen and wasn't motivated in previous years which led me to fail. I'm really proud of what I've been able to achieve this year."*

> *"I feel it was challenging year but I feel I have tried my best and with Kate's guidance I am happy that I have given the course 100%."*

Learners who regularly accessed the ALS support and coaching in lessons began to steadily make progress in their assessments throughout the year and had more confidence to take risks with their learning which enabled them to access the higher bands in the mark schemes.

One thing we have learnt with the project is that communication and relationships are key, having the right pairing of ALS staff and lecturer means that the support staff fit seamlessly into the lesson and become an extension of teaching, rather than something that is bolted on. Where these relationships have been positive, we have seen the learners flourish, both in confidence and in progression throughout the course. We have had some resistance from a small number of staff who see the addition of ALS in the classroom as a negative reflection of their ability, rather than as something to enhance their teaching and outcomes. We also realised that we needed to be flexible with our groups as different groups needed different types of support and a 'one size fits all' approach was not entirely successful. This is where the communication between staff became vital and where those staff who had been resistant to change seemed to struggle. For the next academic year we would look at some CPD around this to help staff to have more tools to be able to be flexible in meeting the needs of the learner.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-7/7-13/**
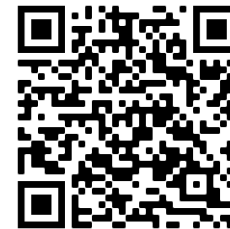
14. DEVELOPING THE DESCRIPTIVE VOCABULARY OF HIGH NEEDS LEARNERS

New City College

This project aimed to improve responses to creative writing tasks from high needs learners by developing their use of descriptive vocabulary. This included improving their range of vocabulary and their understanding of when and how descriptions should be applied. Although the focus was on high needs learners, the entire GCSE English 16-18 cohort took part in the project.

Summary

New City College is the fourth largest college group in the UK with campuses across Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Redbridge, Epping Forest and Havering. Students who are on English or maths programmes are re-sitting to either improve their level, boost their grades or achieve a pass. The college has a significant amount of SEND students.

The project proposal was written during a period of lockdown and aimed at supporting high needs learners who often found it difficult to engage meaningfully with online learning and who had typically struggled with imaginative writing. However, the project was also applied when on-site teaching took place.

Rationale

At NCC, we teach the Eduqas English language specification. Creative writing accounts for 50% of the marks for component one. This means that it can often be the deciding factor between grades. The purpose of the project was to develop high needs students' use of descriptive vocabulary; we had previously attempted an initiative through silent reading which was largely unsuccessful because the students were not convinced or engaged. Having learnt from this, we decided that the new initiative needed to be fun. So, we decided to use a combination of quizzes and writing activities. We

expected that students would find quizzes engaging as it is a form of gamification. Furthermore, the use of quizzes presented an opportunity to monitor progress without placing pressure on the students.

Some of our high needs students have difficulty with long-term memory and often rely on habit formation to improve recollection. Using quizzes at regular intervals was likely to mitigate issues they faced with recollecting information. In fact, recent studies on spaced retrieval have shown that regular revisiting of work benefits long-term memory and can be used to break up a long session to prevent concentration loss, making it ideal for high needs students (Kelley, Evans and Kelley, 2018)

As an outcome, we hoped that students would improve their use of descriptive vocabulary and improve their responses to section B questions for component one.
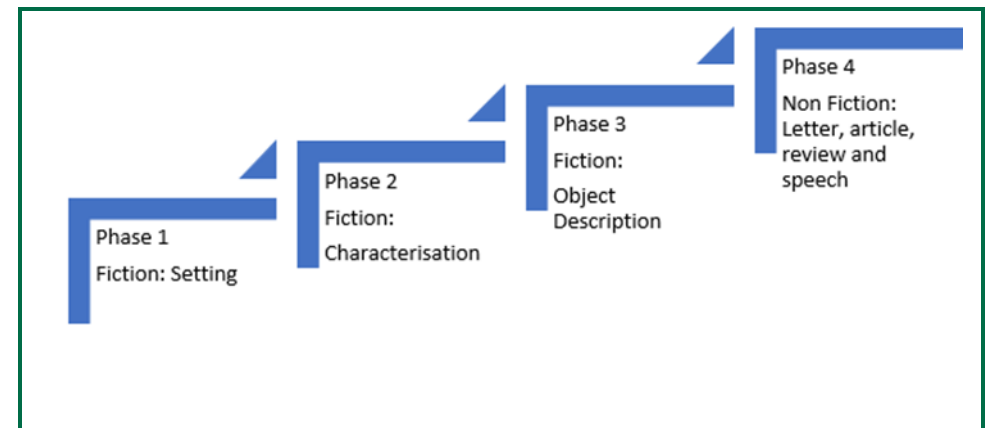
Approach

Figure 14.1: The research project took a 4-stage approach. Each phase focused on building vocabulary for different aspects of writing.

Fiction

Phase One: Setting

Quizzes were created on Kahoot Premium. Students completed one quiz each week and 10 words were introduced through the quiz each time. These 10 words were thematic and linked to a prompt. We asked students to imagine that their character was in the location represented by the prompt; They would then describe the setting using the first-person narrative voice by writing a paragraph, which would then be marked using a marking sheet. They received a score based on how many words they used from the quiz and a separate score for how many words they used accurately. The themes were: 'Dark Alley', 'Sunrise' and 'Desert'.

Students recapped the words every second lesson of the week and completed recap quizzes before moving on to the next phase.

Phase Two: Characterisation

For this phase we asked students to imagine that the person presented in a picture prompt was a character in their story. They then needed to describe that character using the third person narrative voice. The themes included: 'Old Man', 'Lazy Youth' and 'Traditional Lady'.

Phase Three: Object Description

For this phase students focused on describing the objects displayed on the prompts. We asked students to imagine that their character could see the object and they had to describe it accordingly, but this time they were free to choose a narrative voice.

At this point we had sought feedback from students and subsequently amended the process so that students who were struggling now received definition sheets with example sentences to help them understand the 10 words in use. Emotive language was also more prevalent within the 10 words. Themes included: 'Ancient Vase', 'Bizarre Clock' and 'Classic Car'.

Non-Fiction

Phase Four: Letter, Article, Review and Speech

We then extended our approach to non-fiction covering aspects of letter, article, speech and review writing. Here, we asked students to focus on the descriptive elements of these formats. An example of this is when students imagined they were writing a letter to a friend describing the hotel room they were staying in during a holiday.

The impact of all four phases was measured initially by Kahoot scores, feedback and subsequently through mock test results.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Meeting with colleagues to discuss progress was unlike any other year because the only effective means to exchange ideas and highlight progress was through Teams. While this method of collaboration was unavoidable, it meant that the teachers did not have to travel and therefore less pressure was felt in terms of time. Also, on Teams, teachers tended to take their turn without interruption while listeners would add comments and questions in the chat facility; in many ways this was an unexpected positive in terms of discussion and logistics.

There was a reflective process involved in the project as the project team developed the content as it progressed. For example, during the early stages of the project the team decided that it would be more engaging to have a different focus every three weeks and also change the narrative voice for the fiction part of the project. This would not only keep students engaged but would also ensure that they had a better understanding of narrative voice and how descriptions can be applied in different situations.

Those colleagues who participated had become reflectors in practice and they were actively engaging in action research as part of their professional

practice. Teachers completed a survey based on Kolb's reflective cycle, which enabled them to reflect on their experiences.

> *"All students were fully engaged throughout the project. They thoroughly enjoyed competing with their peers to get the correct answers."*

Another participant teacher noticed an increased confidence with the students: *'taking the risk of using a new word'*. Another teacher observed a friendlier atmosphere in the class: where before there had been a divide between the mainstream and high needs students, the Kahoot quizzes provided a leveller and brought the students together. The final meeting with the team was evaluative and all teachers said that they intended to incorporate a similar strategy for their new cohorts.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Collaboration improved considerably within Redbridge campus and with the Epping Forest campus. The materials were used by all teachers at Redbridge and with one high needs class at Epping Forest. Regular meetings with all participant teachers led to better networking particularly between campuses.

In addition to this we had an Additional Learning Support Lecturer who used our materials with the students we were tracking during their one-to-one sessions in the Learning Resource Centre. This played an important part in reinforcing what was learnt in the classroom and helping high needs learners retain new vocabulary.
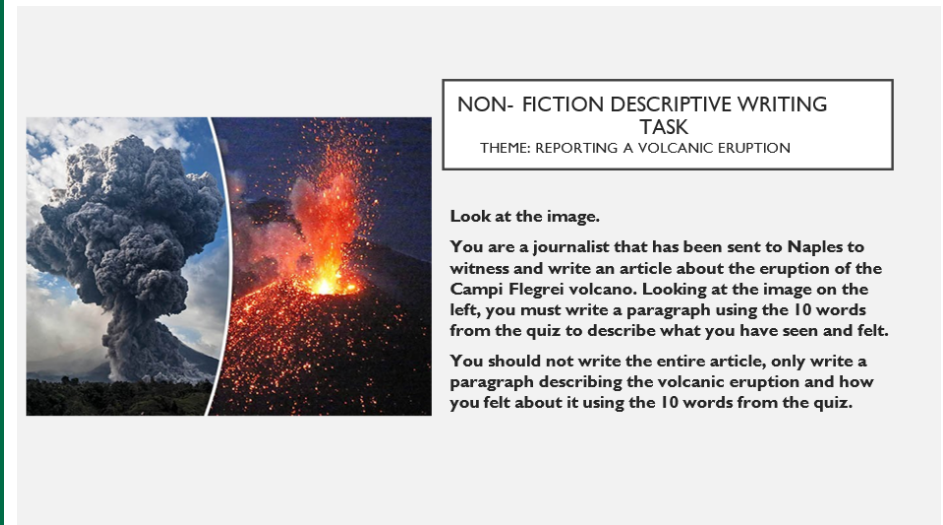
Cooperation between team members was very high and materials would be created in collaboration at the end of each week. Words would be selected in accordance with learner needs and changes would be made immediately if necessary.

Our project, which was mainly aimed at high needs learners, gained a lot of support from the ALS workers in our classrooms. They would often report back positive changes in learner engagement and progress, emphasising

how important they thought expanding the vocabulary of high needs learners was in order for them to progress further in English:

> *"Student A really benefited from the visual examples used on the smart board as she could relate the new word to it. For example, Azure – not a word she had ever come across. To sign it to her, I would have to sign Blue/bright. But this would not give a true reflection of the colour. But she could get the true meaning by seeing an example of the character with bright blue azure-coloured eyes."*

Furthermore, before phase four, all team members collaborated in paving a way forward for the project. Ways of adapting materials for non-fiction were thoroughly discussed, alongside methods of improving what we were already doing so as to have better outcomes.

Figure 14.2: An example of a non-fiction writing task where learners were asked to use key vocabulary learnt during quizzes.

Lastly, the maths department, seeing the success of our project, adapted the use of quizzes as starters in their classes. This was implemented across all college campuses with our support.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

During the project, we saw a significant improvement in the engagement of learners. They enjoyed the use of technology, were fascinated by words they had not come across before and appreciated being able to quickly apply new words to small bite sized tasks.

Teachers could see learners having discussions about the vocabulary in the quizzes and students were asking teachers if they could complete more quizzes during each lesson. Their positivity about the project came across in the survey that was conducted where 87 students responded. Students were positive about expanding their vocabulary, evidenced by the quotes below:

> *"Yes, I did enjoy taking part in the quizzes as it helped me to learn new words that I didn't know before."*

> *"I enjoyed taking part in quizzes. They help with concentration, identify gaps in knowledge, build confidence and help retain information."*

Other students mentioned how the quizzes engaged and motivated them:

> *"I definitely enjoyed taking part in the quizzes especially the words that are challenging because it helps me stay motivated and learn."*

Some students also mentioned how beneficial it was for their writing:

> *"I feel as if I have learned new words and have been able to use them within my writing."*

> *"I feel that I have developed my writing skills by introducing new words into my writing."*

Further to this, we can see how students progressed. We kept a record of their scores using a live Excel tracking sheet on Teams where we recorded scores from their writing tasks. We also kept a record of their baseline assessment and mock scores to see how it impacted their exam results.

We can clearly see that students' scores improved as the weeks progressed. Initially there was a disparity between the number of words students used and their accuracy, but this gap closed as they became familiar with the activities. The definition sheets also clearly had an impact on words used and accuracy as the scores for both went up after this was introduced.

Mock scores also went up, although this was not significantly so for all learners, we could see that there was an improvement in assessment objective 6 where vocabulary use is part of the assessment measures. One student went from having a score of 7 for the entirety of section B in her baseline assessment to 21 for her first mock.

Learning from this project

The project was initially designed to help us navigate the difficult terrain of online teaching while not leaving behind our high needs learners. It quickly developed into being much more than that: it became an effective tool for improving the vocabulary of our learners by providing us with a framework to introduce words and see them used. By using this method, we were able to reinforce the importance of vocabulary and effectively promote the increased use of adjectives, adverbs and descriptive verbs in creative writing.

We benefited greatly as a team during the course of the project. We saw that focusing on descriptive vocabulary was very beneficial to learners who were often vocabulary poor. It not only helped their comprehension but, through the use of themes, students were increasingly able to present more depth to their imaginative writing. Getting students to use different narrative voices helped them understand the function of narratives and how it affects the reader. As practitioners, we saw how we could introduce students to these ideas and concepts in a fun and engaging way.
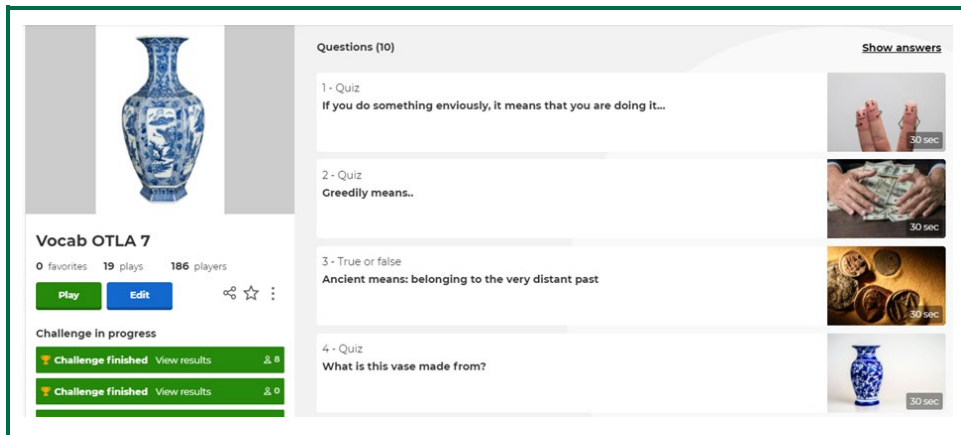
Figure 14.3: Using quizzes to support learners to develop key vocabulary for writing tasks.

> *"From a personal and teacher perspective I really enjoyed this activity. I thought it was engaging and interactive and the students' focus was almost immediate (you will always get some students that are anti!) …the activity gave students the exposure to new vocabulary, seeing words in context of varying levels of difficulty, reinforced and reviewed grammar knowledge and enabled reluctant writers."*
>
> LSA Reflection.

When we moved on to teaching non-fiction, we reflected on our experiences and developed our materials to suit the non-fiction formats in the curriculum. We discovered that descriptive vocabulary could certainly be used in non-fiction if the purpose and audience was suitable and, through this, we were able to carry on with our methods. However, we would like to further develop these materials by thinking about the vocabulary more closely. Could we have chosen better words? How could we differentiate the 10 words marking some of them easier to use and some of them more complicated? And could we implement spaced retrieval in a different way rather than just having recap quizzes at regular intervals?

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-7/7-14/

15. CURRICULUM APPROACHES TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT IN GCSE MATHEMATICS
South Essex College

How many times have maths teachers identified that the low literacy levels of their students prevents them from being able to understand the questions and 'do' the maths? This action research project adopted an 'umbrella' approach which involved 5 GCSE English teachers and 5 GCSE Maths teachers to work together in pairs in response to the overarching theme of the project. It was designed to improve GCSE maths outcomes for learners, by exploring how to expand English skills within the maths curriculum. The focus was on creating a culture of collaboration and evaluation among students and staff; as part of the impact on the students, with the objective that this would remove barriers to learning and help develop resilience and confidence.

Summary

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education is a large general further education college with approximately 16,000 full time equivalent students. It consists of 5 campuses across the South Essex Region. There are currently over 3400 learners enrolled onto GCSE Maths and English

The objective of the project was to increase GCSE maths attainment, by developing English skills, particularly around problem-solving questions, which require reading and comprehension of language. The rationale for the project is based upon evidence from assessments and observations, highlighting that our students struggle with longer questions, particularly where there is a lot of complicated text or several steps. Learners who are re-sitting Maths are in most cases also taking English. Learners may know the math calculations; however, they struggle to identify what they are being asked to do.

Rationale

The demands of mathematical English are higher than those of everyday English and students need to develop the necessary proficiency. We have seen an increase in worded problem-solving questions. The aim was to create a culture where tutors developed small activities that developed English skills in maths: short starters, or plenaries or considering different approaches to delivery that are not always observed in maths - for example, discussions and group work. Alongside developing English to support understanding of maths questions, the rationale was that these small curriculum changes would help students start to build resilience particularly around the fear of getting a question wrong.

> **The focus of the projects was to develop a community in the classroom where collaboration and problem-solving are encouraged.**

It was felt that this would lead to better attendance, particularly if the environment was found to be more inclusive and engaging. We wanted maths and English teachers to learn from each other's practice and develop a community of evaluation and collaboration, building a culture of sharing common findings and challenges through evaluation of their teaching and learning and using the outcomes from learner voice to find different activities. In the long term, we want the experiences of the team involved in the project to change the culture of maths lessons and become a driver for change, impact and skills to embedded into the implementation of curriculum delivery.

Approach

We sought expressions of interest at the start of the project to ensure that all participant teachers were committed to our goal. We were fortunate to have a good balance of English and Maths tutors across the campuses come forward which enabled partnerships to be formed and individual projects undertaken in response to the overall theme, including:

- Giving meaning of key words to our learners when answering worded exam style questions.
- Building the maths vocabulary of the students by discussing the meaning of key words and linking? to how the topic is used in their course/real life
- Creating a bank of words which will be displayed in the classroom and used in future lessons.
- Employing Reciprocal Teaching techniques in maths lessons and Guided Reading techniques, to strengthen foundational reading skills
- Creating a visual word wall in the classroom using maths terminology and imagery created by the students which would be a focus throughout the year and built upon.

Figure 15.1: A participatory approach was taken throughout the research project, with learners co-creating resources.

The intention was for maths tutors to research their own teaching and learning strategies, test out theories and gain feedback from their learners; then to adopt teaching and learning strategies that could be introduced within starters or plenaries.

The aim was to develop one or two strategies during the project period, and the encouragement of peer collaboration. Activities could focus on vocabulary and technical terms being introduced to the class, chunking down questions and encouraging discussion in class to share and encourage dialogic teaching. Every week English terminology and vocabulary were encouraged in lessons alongside mathematical language; this naturally developed and was in response to learners' and group needs.

The utilisation of English tutors to share practice and work with maths teachers on strategies particularly around reading, discussions, and vocabulary expansions was a successful strand. Partnerships were formed within the OTLA project group with a pair of Maths and English teachers working directly together. They held regular meetings and discussed the curriculum and teaching and learning. English teachers shared practice around the delivery and planning of their subject specialism and both practitioners looked at what aspects of delivery could be duplicated to embed skills further with learner. An example of this was where an English teacher highlighted maths terminology as it came up in English lessons – For example: greater, adjacent, opposite, descent. This shared practice led to a natural change in some maths teaching, with simple changes that had a strong impact. An example was more exploration of group and paired work in the classroom, to support discussions and problem solving in teams.

Feedback from learners helped teachers to evaluate and reflect critically on their own practice and its impact on learners and the learning experience. Tutors observed confidence building among learners and a classroom with shared expectations and collaborative learning led to a more inclusive environment where attendance improvements were observed alongside engagement in learning.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

- All teachers involved challenged themselves to try new approaches
- Tutors have made simple changes e.g., displaying English vocabulary in the maths classroom, adopting an approach of underlining key terms and discussing the meaning of words
- Students have been encouraged to deconstruct the long questions to determine what is being asked of them
- Discussion has been included in lessons to encourage shared knowledge and deeper learning
- There has been an increased awareness of the importance of vocabulary in maths and a realisation that changing the delivery approach can have a positive impact
- Key words have been extracted from the maths questions which has enabled students to complete the questions more accurately and when approaching reciprocal reading there has been more focus on breaking down these key words and skills which has gradually improved learners grasp on long-worded maths questions.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices.

One of the main areas for exploration in the project was to encourage shared practice between Maths and English tutors. It was felt that English lessons naturally have more discussions, collaboration, and active learning taking place. The strongest part of the project was that we had enough interest early on to be able to establish partnerships of English and Maths tutors working together. This opportunity to work as a team and to collaborate with colleagues has provided a great opportunity to learn from each other's practice and consequently self-review and self-evaluate.

One of the English teachers wrote in response to the project:

> *"As an English teacher supporting this project I found it very easy to embed some of the ideas and terminology that myself and my maths colleague introduced as part of our OTLA experiment. It didn't take long to produce resources for a connect activity that included maths, and I found that this small contribution of maths in my English lesson really had an impact on the results."*

The campuses at South Essex are in a range of different socio-economic contexts which meant that the teachers involved in the project represented a range of students. Collaboration led to teachers having a greater insight into the variety of provision the college offers.

Some of the projects have further evolved to include collaboration with vocational specialists, for example, the involvement of motor vehicle teachers in sharing maths context and vocabulary in practical workshop lessons.

> *"Mathematical terminology must be introduced while connected to everyday use and/or vocational area of study."* Maths Teacher

The project has grown to now include dissemination of the strategies applied across the department through CPD with the practitioners involved in the project sharing their findings and leading further research initiatives.

Further development is starting to be undertaken by looking at how further enhancements can be made to the maths curriculum to support learners with SEND who struggle with the complex content in written English in maths. Collaboration is currently being undertaken with the Additional Learning Support (ALS) team around further research and training around SEND and neurodiversity linked to the project.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention, and progression

Across all projects, tutors tracked the progress of two learners and evaluated the distance that they made in relation to progress and attendance. An example of success was progress in mock scores which was partly attributed to confidence. All tutors saw an increase in engagement for the groups involved in the projects.

They all noted a developing trend of growing confidence and engagement in maths as students overcome barriers with English. One student has been able to now feel confident to ask questions because the tutor has enabled him to break down the barriers around reading and not understanding, by exploring this far more in lessons. Students struggling with English can now attempt some worded questions. The students developed the practice read questions twice and underline key facts before answering. Before the intervention, they just answered worded questions by applying any mathematical operation without any reason.

In response to the evidence of improvement seen one maths tutor wrote:

> *"I have realised that it's not all about 'hammering' on mathematical terms but to introduce and discuss terms as they are used in daily life and in the students' main Vocational Course"*

All tutors involved in the project noted that learners appeared better equipped for questions and understanding problem-solving in maths through the application of being taught better reading projects – particularly evident in the reciprocal teaching project. This is captured in some of the strategies that have been developed including the Teams Quiz template to support Reciprocal reading utilised as part of Group 4.

Learners have also adopted new skills starting to automatically develop the approach of underlining key words to questions they did not understand and finding out the meaning instead of simply ignoring the question or giving up and this is leading to a noticeable improvement in their confidence.

The processes being developed also encouraged students to naturally identify gaps within their own learning and the extraction of key words from questions enabled learners to make better noticeable progress as they were observed answering the questions more accurately.

Learning from this project

Although the project approach was to have umbrella groups, everyone responded to the objective and all involved demonstrated an **increase in development of 'familiarisation of terminology'. This success led to the idea that we can continue to produce collectively designed resources.** Posters and resources have been displayed around the campuses to expose learners to key vocuabularly and terminlogy in mathematics. For example a motorbike labelled with the shapes used in mathematics that can be visually displayed in the Motor Vehicle workshops.
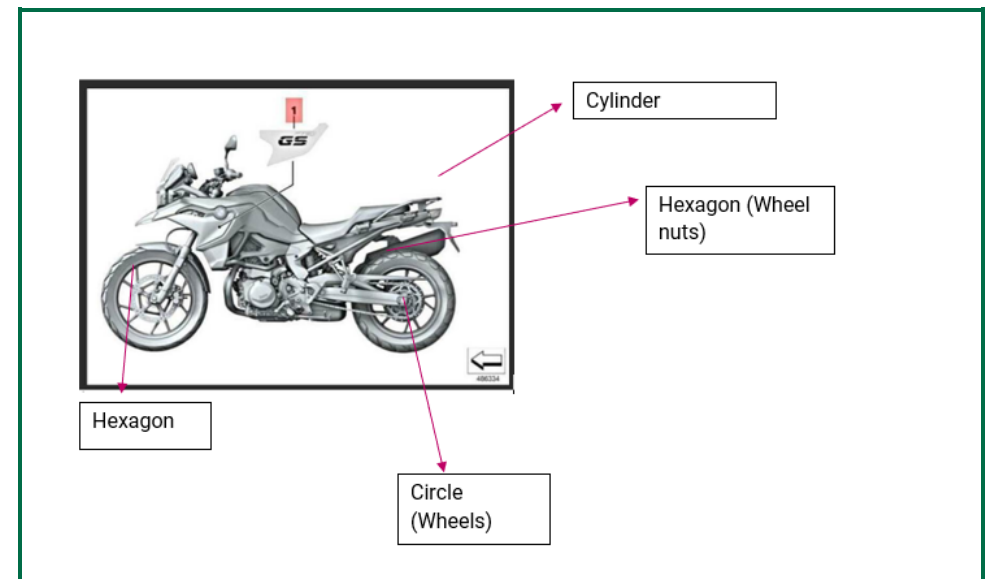

Figure 15.1: A poster designed to introduce Motor Vehicle learners to key maths vocabulary.

The engagement and positivity of teachers in the project was apparent and it is felt this is because they had been selected to take part and they have been positive with concern to engagement. It is easy to see how we can evolve and move the project forward by sharing good practice.

> The effective teamwork and collaboration between English and maths practitioners learning from each other has been a particular strength. This has enabled some evaluation of practice and maths teachers starting to adopt approaches observed more within English lessons like discussion work and group-based activities. A wealth of practice has been developed through the research being undertaken by practitioners with different subject specialisms.

There has been a common conclusion that small, simple changes to practice can be pivotal in engagement of learners. This has been a strength of the project. Tutors developed a strong awareness that they were breaking down barriers to learning by establishing an understanding that the poor confidence from learners was linked to a lack of English skills not necessarily maths.

> *"We as tutors face similar problems in maths classes, language difficulties are one of them. Students may have poor decoding (reading) skills or expressive or receptive language difficulties. These language-based problems stop them from effectively developing mathematical abilities. If these students are only provided with lecture or text-based instruction, they are limited by the teaching style in addition to their poor understanding of math concepts.*
>
> *Maths can be viewed as language. Numbers represent nouns, while operational signs (+, -, x, /, =) serve as verbs. Students should be encouraged to speak in complete sentences, to deliver an entire thought. They should be encouraged to think loudly about? how they arrive at an answer"* Maths Teacher Reflection.

The reflective and evaluative teaching methods undertaken have meant that the project has taken different directions with more resources and ideas being developed given further scope for more progression of the project.

The unforeseen circumstances of this academic year and the global pandemic COVID-19 meant that we have been able to be adaptable with our approach to the project. Tutors have been able to develop strategies and resources that work both in the classroom and online for remote learning. There is further scope to take the project in the direction of online learning development to support and underpin face-face delivery.

We intend to disseminate the project within the organisation and work collaboratively with other providers. Throughout the project, considerable interest from other providers has been evident and we are in the process of exploring ideas around reciprocal reading to help support our SEND learners and promote further inclusivity.

There are opportunities for collaboration with the vocational departments; this was a strand of development starting to emerge from one of the groups who had started to adopt this approach with the engineering and construction department.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-7/7-15/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 8

Mentor: Rachel Öner

16a. Weston College
16b. Westminster Adult Education Service
17a. Essex ACL
17b. ELATT

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND FEEDBACK / TARGET SETTING
Rachel Öner (Mentor)

It has been an absolute pleasure to support Weston College, Westminster Adult Education Service, Essex ACL and ELATT this year through the OTLA programme. Broadly speaking, the focus of each of these projects was on assessment for learning (AfL), however each organisation worked within their own unique context to research and develop effective and engaging assessment strategies that met both the individual and collective needs of their learners.

Project teams from Weston and Westminster each focused on developing bespoke initial assessments for ESOL learners, helping ensure that both learners and staff teams were aware of learners starting points, sticking points and aspirations.

Project teams from Essex ACL and ELATT focused on developing remote assessment practices; Essex worked with maths learners to develop, trial and explore the impact of online assessment tools and ELATT explored participatory approaches to assessment design and facilitation that supported the development of positive staff-student relationships in online spaces.

Whilst each of these projects had different starting points and shared different perspectives on assessment, a key theme that quickly became evident was the importance of developing learner-centred assessment practices that enable actionable and supportive feedback.

I hope that you enjoy reading about these projects as much as I enjoyed supporting them, and that you are able to take inspiration from each in order to continue to devise and develop inclusive and engaging assessment practices within your own organisation or setting.

Weston College engaged with a nationally significant issue in prison education: how to assess the English ability of ESOL learners.

Westminster Adult Education Service actively engaged ESOL learners to stimulate intrinsic motivation so that they were able to understand and realise the relevance of maths in an applied sense, thereby enabling them to overcome some of the challenges studying the subject can pose.

Essex ACL demonstrate the process to create a new online initial assessment tool to be used independently with all maths learners. They share the challenges they identified and benefits of this process to both tutors and learners.

ELATT asked *"How can supportive tutor-learner relationships be strengthened, especially with online and blended learning"?* This project devised a survey tool for tutors to elicit actionable feedback directly from learners.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-8/**

16a. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
Weston College

This project engaged with a nationally significant issue in prison education: how to assess the English ability of ESOL learners.

Summary

Are ESOL learners best served by the BKSB English Initial Assessment? The disconnect between learners' levels at assessment and their performance in classes suggested there might be a better approach. This project developed an Initial Assessment (IA) specifically for ESOL learners. The purpose of this was to ensure ESOL learners get into the right class, first time, every time. In turn, this would maximise class time and facilitate achievement.

The project ran at HMP Maidstone, a Foreign National Prison (FNP) holding up to 600 male prisoners. As an FNP, HMP Maidstone holds residents who are ESOL learners and Functional Skills (FS) English learners. The ESOL learners are almost entirely low (Entry) level. As far back as 2011 and in the Coates Review, it was highlighted that ESOL learners have even greater difficulty than other prisoners in accessing education and, therefore, benefitting from reducing reoffending initiatives.

Further, there are consistently a significant number of non-native speakers of English across the prison estate in the UK. The ESOL Initial Assessment designed at HMP Maidstone could be deployed nationally to improve access to education for ESOL learners all over the country. Finally, the ESOL Initial Assessment is analysed by a trained person rather than a computer, making it more personalised.

Rationale

During a nine-month period prior to the pandemic, it was found that 40% of learners allocated to ESOL classes at HMP Maidstone were either transferred or withdrawn. Although mostly transferred to a different level of ESOL or to FS English, this nevertheless represents an inefficiency in lost or misdirected classroom time.

As a result, HMP Maidstone joined the OTLA 7 project for the academic year 2020-2021 with the aim of developing an Initial Assessment (IA) specifically for ESOL learners. This ESOL IA would run during Education inductions, which are held in the Virtual Campus (a facility with a suite of computers for accessing assessments and short-course learning modules). Learners identified as FS English would take the BKSB English Initial Assessment as normal but those identified as ESOL would take the newly developed assessment.

The ESOL Initial Assessment has three elements:

1. **A verbal pre-screen:** This comprises five questions graduated in difficulty, easiest first. The idea is to quickly and effectively ascertain whether a learner is pre-Entry ESOL, Entry-level ESOL or FS English. If a learner is pre-Entry ESOL, there is no need to go further as this learner will not be able to produce meaningful work at the next stage.
2. **A writing activity:** There are two options here – a lower level and a higher level. Based on the verbal pre-screen, Entry-level ESOL learners try either writing activity. This allows the learners' level to be accurately determined for the purposes of allocation to class.
3. **A reading activity:** There are four reading activities, each at a different level – pre-Entry, Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. These can be used to further differentiate if the writing result for a particular learner is ambiguous. The reading can also be useful for potential maths learners because the mathematics classes require a certain level of literacy in English for understanding the examination questions.

The purpose of this approach was to investigate whether giving ESOL learners an initial assessment designed specifically for them would improve the accuracy of their assessed level and therefore provide more accurate information to the prison's Activities department (the group responsible for allocating prisoners to work and education). The procedural aim here is to minimise inefficiencies in and disruption to prisoners' education while in custody.

Approach

The ESOL Initial Assessment is designed to be run in a face-to-face induction context. The Oral Pre-Screen is a filter to categorise the language needs of learners to direct them to the correct Initial Assessment.

With the increased prevalence of Covid and the reintroduction of lockdown, the team at HMP Maidstone established a partnership, with a digital media provider. Using a large part of our project budget, this external partner was engaged to create 'How to Complete ESOL Initial Assessment' videos in February, when we were unable to see learners face-to-face. From the beginning of March 2021, this digital content was made available on a dedicated prison TV channel which is played on the sets in prisoners' cells.

As a result, we were able to send Writing assessments to all new receptions and help to overcome the limitations prevailing at the time. Subsequently, a reasonable number of samples have been obtained. It is clear that there is a considerable number of both ESOL and Functional Skills English learners in the establishment, indicating that the ESOL IA may be useful. At this stage, and with the restrictive circumstances, one particular imperative was to establish the nature of the link between the result obtained on the ESOL IA Writing and the work produced in the activity packs that currently form the backbone of our provision.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

ESOL teachers at HMP Maidstone attended a series of online training sessions with CC Consultancy via the ETF. These sessions developed the reflective process where a team came together to step back from practice, assess an issue, and determine what might work better for our learners, in reference to the ETF's Professional Standards. The sessions informed the project's design of the ESOL Initial Assessment materials by helping to sharpen the focus on intended outcomes of the assessment.

Through the digital media content and the decision to send out the ESOL Initial Assessment Writing to all new receptions, the team was able to monitor the accuracy of the assessment results by cross-referencing learners' performance with their subsequent work on their ESOL packs (where enrolled). As there has been found to be a tight match between assessment level and pack level, ESOL learners' progress has been facilitated by the assessment.

The ESOL Initial Assessment has proven effective for Functional Skills English learners. The Writing assessment allows these learners to produce language samples that can be accurately assessed. This offers an alternative assessment for learners not suited to the BKSB English Assessment. Further, there has been an historic issue with pre-Entry ESOL learners being conflated with illiterate learners. This does not reflect the reality: ESOL learners are literate in their first language but may not be in English; illiterate learners cannot read or write in any language. The ESOL Initial Assessment identified such learners at the earliest opportunity, opening the door for greater partnership working with the Shannon Trust, the organisation that oversees the 'Turning Pages' literacy programme for native speakers in prisons.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

In this section, there are three levels to consider: local, regional and national. At the local level, there has been collaboration between the project team, an external digital media provider, the prison governor and the LSM (Learning & Skills Manager). In addition, further collaboration with prison partners was required to ensure the digital context was available on the prison's Media Channel.

At the regional level, other establishments have a high proportion of ESOL learners, such as HMP Elmley. In the near future, the ESOL Initial Assessment could be expanded to these establishments. The Ministry of Justice's Regional Education Management Team have taken a keen interest in the project and recognise its potential wider significance. At Weston College, the Lot (Regional) Director is also the project Lead. The involvement of these teams in the project connects it to a regional network of practitioners and stakeholders.

Nationally, the CPD training sessions relating to OTLA 7 projects have involved collaboration and discussion with practitioners across the country, including FE Colleges and the voluntary sector. The Initial Assessment designed at HMP Maidstone has national significance: if rolled out across the country in all prisons, the assessment resulting from this project may transform the access of ESOL learners to the high-quality, meaningful education provision in secure settings.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Of the 100 learners who have completed an ESOL Initial Assessment Writing task, 53 have been returned after the Media Channel video was introduced. This is in a period of two months, as compared to 47 returned in three-and-a-half months prior to that. This suggests that the video has helped to engage ESOL learners.

The ESOL Initial Assessment Writing we received from learners who we were tracking over the course of the research project suggests that this approach elicits work from learners that accurately matches their true abilities. We tracked learners who working at different levels, so we can conclude that not only is the Writing effective, but also that the Oral Pre-Screen is effective in determining whether a learner is pre-Entry. Learner HK's lack of productive vocabulary and challenges in reading basic sentences and pronouncing letter sounds are characteristic of a pre-Entry learner. However, during support sessions, HK has shown clear progress in retaining some basic vocabulary such as 'chair' and 'table'. Also, his ability to form his own sentences based on examples from reading texts has improved.

1. **Do you speak any English? How much?**

2. **How did you learn English?**

3. **What did you do yesterday?**

4. **Tell me about your home country?**

5. **What are some differences between your country and the UK?**

Figure 16a.1: Oral pre-screen questions have helped teachers determine whether ESOL learners are working at Entry Level or Pre-Entry Level.

In the case of learner FP, he was correctly identified as being at the lower end of Entry 3 via the ESOL Writing Assessment. He then progressed through the entire suite of Entry 3 learning packs which were created by College teaching staff for the purposes of remote learning during pandemic restrictions. For example, in earlier packs, he struggled to use past simple verbs accurately. However, his accuracy in using past simple regular and irregular verbs improved markedly across the packs. By the end of the course, he was differentiating correctly between when to use past simple and past continuous.

Learner PP, at Entry 2, lies between HK and FP in current language ability. He was accurately assessed at Entry 2 and his work on the early Entry 2 packs confirm his level. As he has only completed two packs so far, it is difficult to say whether or not he has made progress. However, the progress of the other learners who we tracked during the research project demonstrates that allocating a learner to the right level facilitates rapid progress, even in the absence of face-to-face teaching.

Learning from this project

The ESOL IA Oral Pre-Screen allows a clear differentiation between pre-Entry ESOL, Entry-level ESOL, and Functional Skills English learners. At the next assessment stage, the ESOL IA Writing is effective at eliciting work that enables accurate assessment of the learner's level. Finally, the ESOL IA Reading can help to establish whether or not an ESOL learner may have the literacy level required to meaningfully engage with an Entry Maths course.

Based on the learners we specifically tracked over the course of the research project, and the wider sample of work from ESOL learners, using the ESOL IA for ESOL learners would facilitate accurate allocation to courses. Additionally, the Writing Assessment is suitable for FS English learners and enables accurate level assessment. As such, the ESOL IA is ideally positioned to improve the accuracy of the information given to an establishment's Activities / Labour Allocations department.

In turn, this would reduce the number of transfers between classes, thus maximising the learners' time on their respective courses. It is reasonable to suggest that if a learner is placed on the right level course, first time, it would ensure that they are maximally appropriately engaged from the outset. This would be a positive factor in encouraging them to continue with their studies.

However, a constraint in this project was the fact we were unable to run the ESOL IA in its usual context and track learners as they are allocated to courses. Nevertheless, the evidence we collected (in the form of learner case studies and writing samples from new learners) strongly suggests that the ESOL IA would be effective identifying the kind of support learners could benefit from, and which ESOL / English class is most suited to their current level and educational needs.

Finally, the next steps in the project are, firstly, to run the Initial Assessment as part of a face-to-face Education Induction and monitor the outcomes. Secondly, we will use the remainder of the project budget to run a 'sharing best practice' or dissemination event. The aim of this event will be to explain how the ESOL Initial Assessment works. Those attending will be Weston College teaching staff and managers across the South-East region, prison governors, Learning & Skills Managers, and Heads of Reducing Reoffending. This event will underscore the importance of partnership working, something that has been enhanced during the course of the project.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-8/7-16a/**

16b. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
Westminster Adult Education Service

This project actively engaged ESOL learners to stimulate intrinsic motivation so that they were able to understand and realise the relevance of maths in an applied sense, thereby enabling them to overcome some of the challenges studying the subject can pose.

Summary

Learners studying Entry maths often come with an ESOL background; the language of assessment can be a challenge. How can we best support them with the language of maths assessments? This project aimed to create meaningful, contextualised resources.

We have a significant proportion of ESOL learners from the deprived communities in Westminster who attend our functional skills maths courses. Working with the maths and learning support team, which included classroom practitioners and learning support staff, we set out to improve outcomes for learners by giving them opportunities for meaningful contextualised problem-solving activities.

Rationale

Progression from ESOL courses onto functional skills maths at entry level is a challenge for our learners, due to the language demands required to access the content. For the majority of our ESOL learners their mental maths skills are good, but when presented with worded questions they are unable to comprehend what the questions are requiring them to do (we have significant anecdotal evidence by teaching staff to support such findings).

Maths questions are often set in contextualised scenarios that are unfamiliar or have little relevance to the everyday experience of learners.

This lack of contextualised materials available can put ESOL learners at a further disadvantage.

To address this gap in understanding, we developed maths resources specifically aimed at ESOL learners - allowing them to apply their mathematical knowledge to problem solving scenarios that are familiar. In turn, we aimed to develop their mathematical understanding to make these skills transferable when working towards an accredited functional skills qualification.

Contextualising materials and supporting learners with the language of maths makes the content matter more accessible and thereby improves outcomes for learners when taking controlled (summative) assessments.

Figure 16b.1 illustrates our rationale to building confidence in maths.
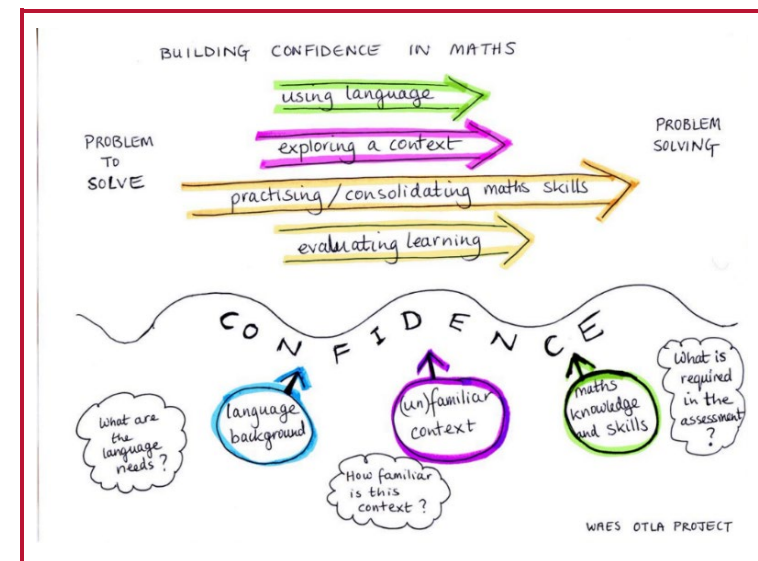
Figure 16b.1: Building confidence in maths.

Approach

Our team took the following approach:

- Identify language background of learners. In one class, out of 11 students, there were 9 different first languages spoken.
- Analyse exam questions – pick out key language. For example: 'to the nearest division', 'left over' and 'packs'. A resource was specifically created around home improvement language, such as: 'hooks', 'base', 'bracket', 'shelf', 'corner'.
- Create contextualised questions. One team member had allocated hours and responsibility for this. We then created a table outlining our new resources that were created at entry 2 and 3.
- Trial questions in class. In both semesters 1 and 2, there were two classes of Functional Skills maths at Entry level, this included Entry 1 to Entry 3.
- Learners complete an evaluation following the completion of the activity. This had a 5-star rating, a question about vocabulary (did you learn new words today?) and 'would you like more practice with the topic of...? - Yes/no'.
- Direct learners to additional workshops, such as the Friday entry support one hour session.
- Liaise with the learning support workshop tutor (suggest topics, target language and in some cases, provide materials to repeat)
- Meet regularly to discuss how using the materials went and agree next steps or modifications of materials.
- Monitor achievement (progress tests, mock controlled assessments, end of course controlled assessments)
- Progress learners to the next level of maths.

The journey showing the creation of resources can be seen in Figure 16b.2.
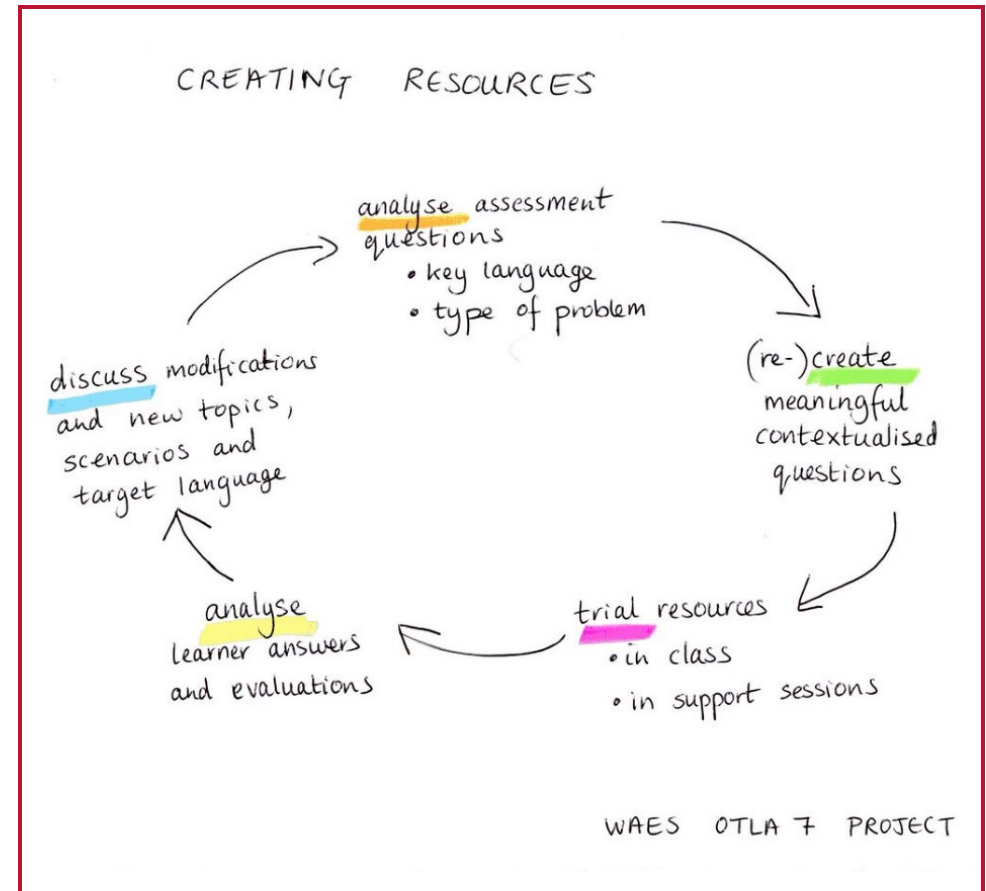
Figure 16b.2: Cycle of creating resources.

Figures 16b.3 and 16b.4 below, show examples of contextualised resources that were created as part of the project.

Overall, we created and trialled 11 Entry 2 and 3 resources.

Figure 16b.3: Activity D (Number)

Figure 16b.4: Compass NSEW

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

According to Chinn (2004), *"the main difficulties and confusions in the words of maths come from aspects involving vocabulary and then in the interpretation and comprehension of the language used to write mathematics word problems."* In light of this it is important to examine the models of delivery in adult education when looking at ways to include more learner led methods in delivery to improve conceptual understanding and identify gaps in prior knowledge. Focusing in on the language of maths and problem-solving techniques works towards that goal.

We also considered which Professional Standards (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) related to the key points of our project, such as *'Evaluate your practice with others and assess its impact on learning'.* This was captured at each stage of resource design (see figure 16b.2) and resulted in modifications in light of the feedback. Crucial to this, we included a mini learner evaluation at the end of the worksheets which encouraged learners to reflect on how helpful the activity had been, new vocabulary as well as an opportunity to request further practice on the topic at hand.

Figure 16b.5 shows Alewia's evaluation of an activity and how she was able to distinguish her different learning needs within the topic.

Figure 16b.5: Learner feedback.

Procedural fluency and conceptual understanding were developed by adapting the content of questions, whilst keeping the design the same. This encouraged allowed learners to repeat the same pattern of steps to solve problems and thereby not overwhelming working memory.

Due to the third lockdown, lessons went online, however this allowed us to continue to gain rich feedback from learners by using an adapted evaluation using MS Forms.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There were three significant changes in practice within our organisation as a result of this project. At the start we consulted ESOL tutors to discuss language in our assessments that could prove a challenge, and this was an ongoing dialogue, feeding back to the ESOL team about our moments of discovery. Moving forward, we plan to continue communication with the ESOL team about the additional embedding of maths language.

The project team worked with the learning support team to organise workshops for learners on the OTLA 7 project. The support staff delivering these workshops were provided with recommended topics and references to specific language. Project resources were shared with the support staff to enable the repeating of some of the activities. The learning support tutor reported that learners had found it helpful to repeat activities.

Tracking the language background of learners became more detailed as a result of the project: in Semester 1 the tutor produced a table, listing first language only. In Semester 2, the project team devised a profile for learners to complete. This form will be used on future courses and could be adapted digitally in MS Forms. Recording the language background in more detail enables tutors to more easily identify learners who may require more support with language.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners learnt real life skills, such as counting with time and using points of a compass for direction. Some reflections from learners are shared below:

Learner 1: *I never thought about points of the compass before I completed the activity, now when I go about my business, I understand my direction.*

Learner 2: *"I found the compass activity hard, I don't use if in my everyday life, I use my phone for sat nav and follow the arrows when travelling, using the points of compass is interesting and I have learned new skills"*

Learner 3: *"The worksheets were very good as was written like exam paper, but the example use was local areas, which I know as I walk there sometimes, so I check my answer is right, by thinking in my head as if I walk there. I find difficult some questions around problem solving and find difficult topic division…."*

Learner 4: *"I learn new word that I don't really use in my life, like capacity which is total amount that can fit"*

Learner 5: *"I find time question a bit difficult as only use mobile phone to check time and do not do counting with time"*

The Learning support tutor reported that one learner requested to go through the bus drivers' activity again and commented that she now understood what a diesel gauge and fuel tank was. This will give her more confidence with using language in a forthcoming assessment.

In semester 1, all learners who were involved in OTLA 7 and of an ESOL background achieved at the qualification aim they were enrolled on and progressed to the next level, Semester 2 learners (in progress) to date have completed two assessments: an Entry 2 Practice Test (produced by the project team) and an Entry 2 Practice Paper (produced by Pearson).

In Semester 2, the Entry 2 practice test results for ESOL background learners were promising - with a pass mark of 17/24 (68%) - there were 11 passes, 4 fails and 2 absences.

This practice test also showed that several learners understood certain language, such as *'the least'* but in a later question got confused with *'at least'*.
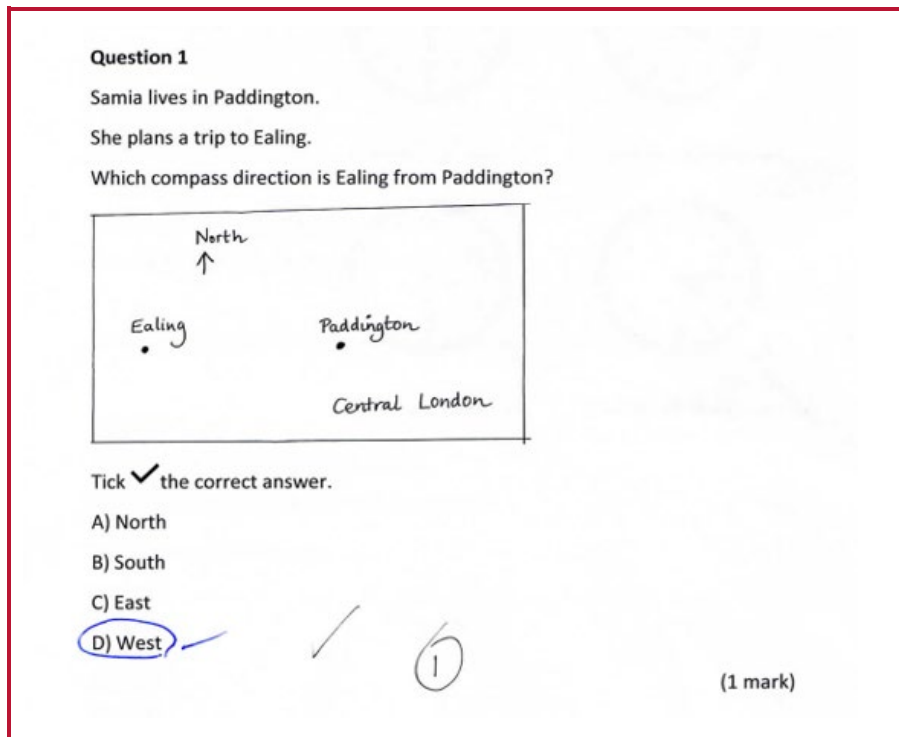
Figure 16b.6: Over the course of the project, learners became more confident with exam style questions.
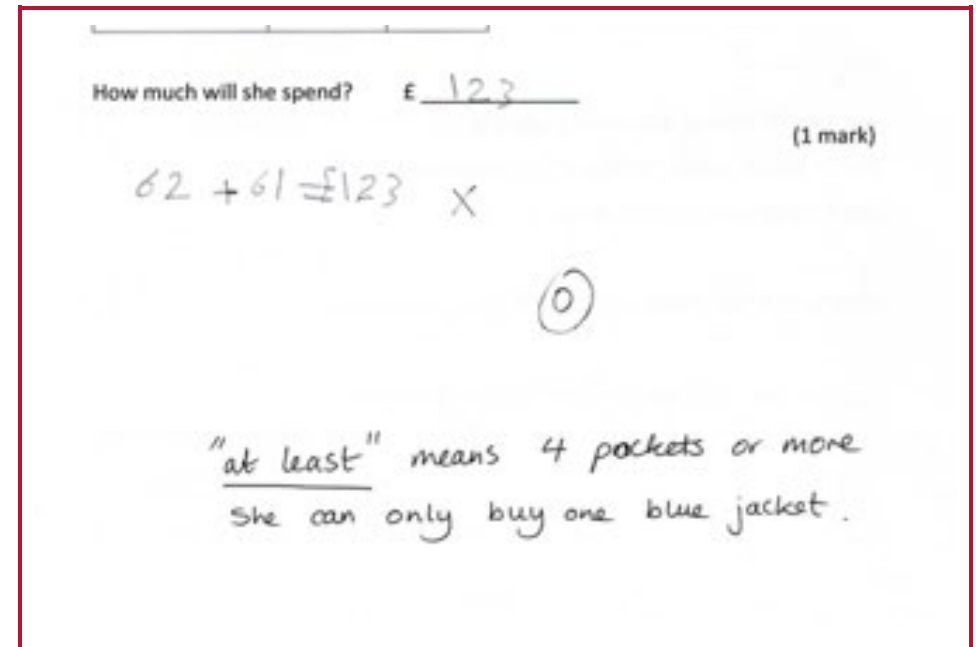
Figure 16b.7: Approaches devised during the research project supported teachers to identify and address language misconceptions.

Learning from this project

Contextualisation of resources

Contextualising was an effective approach, with materials including London bus journeys, a map of familiar places and shopping for familiar items. This encouraged learners to make better connections and overcome challenges to unfamiliar settings.

Adaptable resources

The team developed a bank of contextualised materials which can continue to be used, developed and adapted in different digital formats. Having the materials in an editable file also means that the text and diagrams can be re-sized if learners need a larger or bolder font.

Analysis of learner answers

Tutor reflection and feedback to the materials writer was useful as it showed what language was being understood by learners and which questions were still causing difficulty:

> *"In the May Practice Test, improvements to questions 8 and 9 are required; it needs increments of 10, not 20ml. In terms of language, there was some confusion between 'the least' (q3) and 'at least' (q7). This needs to be further explained in class, with additional questions."* Teacher Reflection.

Analysis of evaluations

Giving learners three evaluation questions after each activity encouraged learners to reflect on what they had learned, note new language and say if they would like more practice with the topic. This would be even better if the learners always wrote down the new words they learnt. It was more efficient for collating the feedback when this was done as an online task using MS Forms. Tutors can prompt for more in depth or extension answers and in MS Forms you can build in a second question after a particular answer.

Repeating activities

Having repeated tasks helped learners to further practice and consolidate their learning. Some questions, such as those featuring two bus drivers gave an opportunity for the learners to practice a similar problem again with different numbers. The Learning Support Tutor commented that learners were *"very appreciative of going through the same questions again"* in a support session and she felt that it *"built up their confidence"*. This could have been improved if more of the resources had differentiated questions available at Entry 2 and Entry 3, which helped them consolidate their knowledge by doing the level below their operating level.

Reflective quotes from staff:

> *"I gained confidence in creating differentiated resources and want to continue doing this."*

> *"The OTLA 7 project has meant that we now have a shared folder of topic-based exam style questions. These questions have been useful revision for all of our learners."*

> *"The resources helped learners become more confident – they were using the target language whilst problem solving."*

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-8/7-16b/**

17a. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
Essex ACL

This project demonstrates the process to create a new online initial assessment tool to be used independently with all maths learners. We share the challenges we identified and benefits of this process to both tutors and learners.

Summary

Our aim was to ensure that the assessment process used for GCSE and Functional Skills maths was fit for purpose. We wanted to engage the learners from the beginning and encourage them to evaluate their own starting point whilst also developing a process which was streamlined and timesaving for staff.

Essex ACL supports adults across the whole county of Essex in nine main centres and other outreach sites. Our ethos is to 'improve lives through learning'. ACL works with adults over the age of 19 in the main but also has apprentices under 19. We deliver English and maths across the whole county from GCSE to pre-entry level. In the current climate all delivery has moved to online but, in the future, will return to both classroom and online learning. Initially the project involved maths tutors and learners but, following successes, has now included stakeholders from other curriculum areas.

Rationale

We found no suitable pre-course assessment for reform maths Functional Skills qualifications. Essex ACL previously used BKSB which, although a very well packaged resource, we felt did not meet our needs following changes to their reform assessment package. It had become far too fluid and did not allow the overriding of levels. For lower-level learners the initial questions could be too hard which could cause an initial dip in confidence

and therefore lack of engagement. None of the awarding organisations at the time had updated assessment materials and other providers in the region had commented on the lack of suitable assessment materials also.

Our Functional Skills tutors previously completed assessments for both Maths and English which caused some issues with interpreting results and therefore signposting learners to the correct class. Learners in an incorrect class are unlikely to engage with learning which could be too difficult and this can therefore, effect retention and the learner's success.

The COVID-19 situation meant all centres closed and so ACL needed to have the ability to assess learners remotely in order to signpost them to an appropriate class. This meant any resource developed needed to be compatible with online platforms and also classroom delivery in the future. A version was created, however feedback from tutors identified that whilst the content of the initial assessment was appropriate, it was a labour-intensive process from the perspective of the tutor and also resulted in poor attendance. This links to Ofsted's assertion in the EIF note *"Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff or learners"* (Ofsted, 2021a). We, therefore, wanted to improve this process.

Approach

After feedback from the tutors, it became apparent that the tools we already had in place were working well but that the initial assessment was extremely time consuming. We therefore decided to focus on improving this. From tutor feedback and use of interactive tools, the initial assessment questions were adapted into a Microsoft Form. A previous barrier to assessments was learners requiring (and remembering) a log on. The Form was created with direct access which removed this barrier.

Tutors evaluated the Form and marking guidelines then fed back any initial changes they thought could further improve this process. This was then trialled with a small cohort of learners who gave feedback.

The Form was amended to remove the scoring as this did not mean anything to the learner and we did not want them to feel demoralised. We also included other questions to support with future planning and to save further time for both tutor and learner.
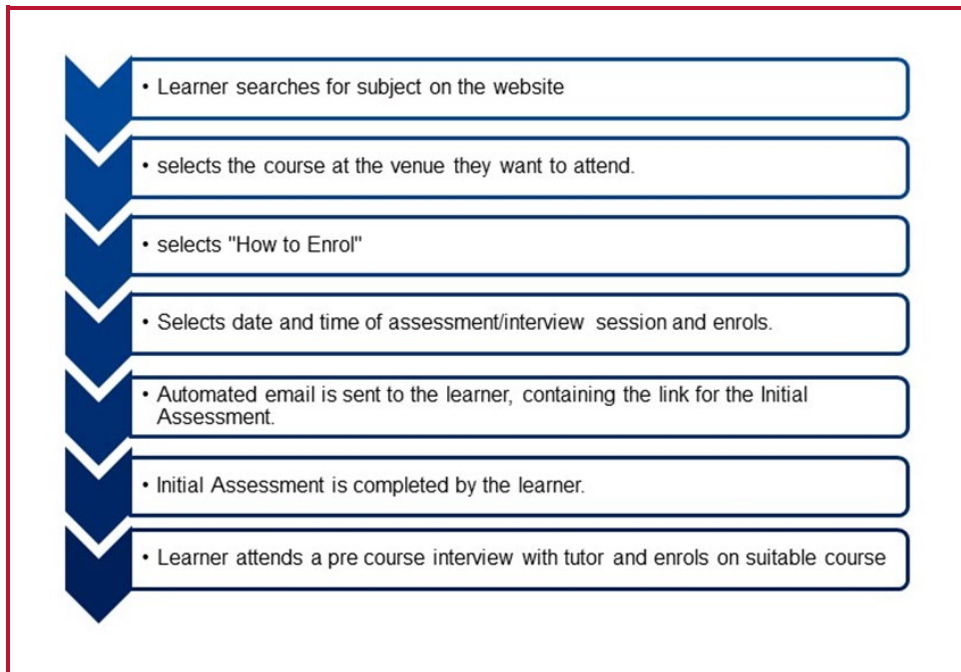
- Learner searches for subject on the website
- selects the course at the venue they want to attend.
- selects "How to Enrol"
- Selects date and time of assessment/interview session and enrols.
- Automated email is sent to the learner, containing the link for the Initial Assessment.
- Initial Assessment is completed by the learner.
- Learner attends a pre course interview with tutor and enrols on suitable course

Figure 17a.1: The learner journey

This process was then implemented for all learners enrolling on a maths course for the second cohort of the year. To date 329 learners have successfully completed the new Initial Assessment and have enrolled on a suitable course. Based on recent feedback received 96% learners who completed the IA went on to do the pre-course interview with a tutor. This was a vast increase to a previous attendance rate of approximately 55%.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project has now involved every maths tutor in Essex ACL across all 9 of our centres. Tutors have developed confidence in the assessment process as they are only assessing their own subject area and feel the assessment is valid and meets the needs of ACL learners. Tutors experience a less time intensive process and believe this benefits the learner as well. A tutor commented:

"You get a proper chance to chat with the learners and they have time to ask the questions they need to so that they can choose the most appropriate course for them. I also think because it is a proper 1:1 they feel more comfortable discussing and concerns or declaring any additional needs."

The tutors involved in this project have increased their digital skills and promoted the benefits of technology to their learners. It has given tutors an opportunity to see how a tool such as MS Forms can support formative and summative assessment within their classes and, as these can be shared across the team, further save time and develop a greater collaborative environment which was challenging due to lockdown. They have also been able to contribute to the wider organisational change by evaluating the process and giving feedback on improvements which can be made.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Following on from the success of this within the maths area, we have shared our challenges and successes with colleagues in English and ESOL who also had to amend their assessment practices due to the challenges brought about by Covid19. We have worked alongside our marketing, business development and MIS team to develop a more autonomous process for learners accessing assessments. We now have the opportunity

on our website for all learners who wish to join one of these three curriculum areas to complete the assessment online in their own time and then be contacted for a pre-course interview. Already, at this early stage, the successful pilot has influenced the assessment process for newly launched qualifications in the Creative Industries. By following this method there has already been a noticeable increase in enrolments.

Across the wider sector, we have also shared our findings in maths network groups, both regionally and nationally, enabling other providers to gain from our experience. We have shared the process, pitfalls, positives and the impact this has had on our service.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Whilst it is too early to know the impact this change in initial assessment process has had on learner achievement, we have evidence that it has impacted their journey. Learner attendance on assessment sessions has increased significantly from 55% to 96% with 93% of learners surveyed commenting on the ease of accessing the assessment. We know that learners often find it daunting to come back to studying, especially a subject such as maths, using technology can help overcome this:

> *"Computer programs and apps have also been recommended for practising maths. One advantage of this approach is that computers offer a motivating, attractive and non-judgmental environment for practising some essential skills, and they can be used without the contribution of trained professionals."*
>
> Morsanyi et al, 2020

Therefore, this move to online assessment in an environment learners feel comfortable will be of benefit.

This has been shown in the improvement in our retention on courses from block 1 to block 2 showing how this has helped learners even with the challenge of learning remotely. Maths retention in the first block was already excellent at 94.3%, but since implementing the new assessment process it is now an outstanding 95.1%. Some comments from learners are shared below:

> *"I found it all really easy. The tutor was lovely and I'm happily working through my course now."*

> *"The process was easy, efficient, and straightforward. I would never have thought it was something new. What I would have appreciated, is some feedback on my initial assessment and a bit more time to talk through my needs. But I appreciate that this might happen next week when I do the diagnostic."*

> "It all seemed straightforward enough, bearing in mind it's all online, so no issues with access."

> *"I found it perfect."*

We will continue to monitor learners' results and assess the impact this change in process has across other curriculum areas as they move to the same model.

Learning from this project

Eliminating the challenges we faced of a labour-intensive process and lack of suitable initial assessment materials have overall been highly successful and effective. These have brought about changes to our assessment processes which will now be implemented across the whole Service.

By using MS Forms for this process, it is very easy to make any changes to the assessment questions or format which means we can quickly adapt and adjust as necessary. We can use a new form per course or cohort as required and the results are easily accessible by anyone who requires the information whilst still meeting the requirements of GDPR.

Enabling learners the opportunity to access an initial assessment at a time which is convenient to them has removed some of the previous barriers. The process has also become more accessible as learners no longer need a log in to access. Tutor time is now used more effectively and enables the important interview before joining a course to focus on each learner's individual needs and aspirations. Attendance on these sessions has increased from 55% previously to 96% due to these changes.
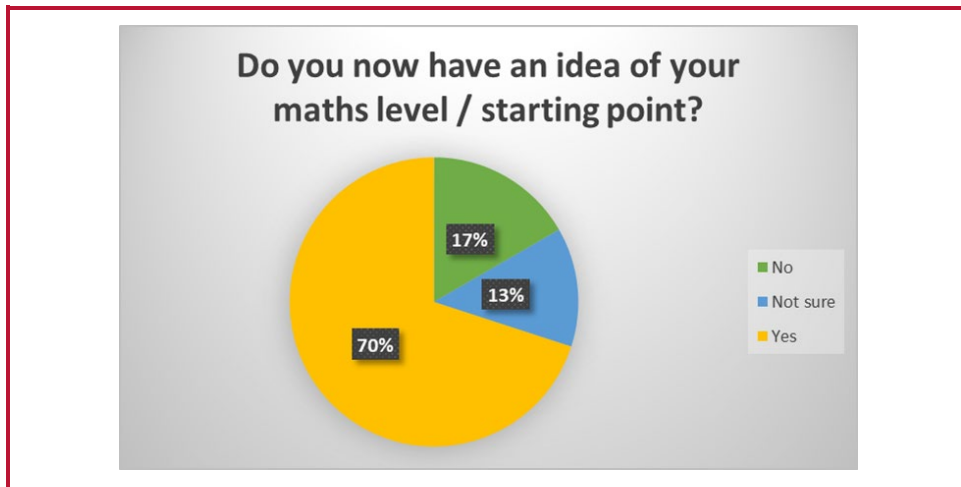
Figure 17a.2: Effective initial assessment helped learners understand their starting points more clearly

Whilst we appreciate not all our learners will want to, or have the skills to access an assessment online, we will use this model to support learners who may arrive in our centre or use our phone lines to request information about a course. Tutor support in centres will be available for those learners who require it to ensure our classes remain accessible for all.

> *"Definitely a less stressful process."*
>
> Teacher Reflection on the revised Initial Assessment process.

However, we are aware that to continue to maximise our learners' successes we need to identify ways in which they understand what their own starting point means for their journey and see the progression they make throughout their programme of learning.

> *"You can concentrate much more on the interviews as you're not trying to juggle four other learners at the same time all at different stages or having technical issues."*
>
> Teacher Reflection on the revised Initial Assessment process.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-8/7-17a/**

17b. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
ELATT

How can supportive tutor-learner relationships be strengthened, especially with online and blended learning? This project by ELATT devised a survey tool for tutors to elicit actionable feedback directly from learners.

Summary

Like many education providers in FE, emergency remote teaching and learning began at ELATT in March 2020, with all classes scrambling online. By mid-April, new applicants were navigating the online enrolment procedure. This meant tutors were meeting these new learners for the first time on Zoom or Teams. As of May 2021, adult classes are still online, while the 6th form provision is following a blended model.

The aim of this project is to support our tutors in this 'new normal' to build supportive and collaborative relationships with their learners. This is achieved by facilitating those learners to give feedback to their tutors through creating 'how to give feedback' sessions and an online survey tool. The tool we developed ensures the feedback is direct, focused and timely, creating a democratised teaching and learning experience.

ELATT is an educational charity based in Hackney where initiatives are often tutor-led. We have a Life Skills department delivering ESOL and English community projects, an IT Vocational department delivering web design, software development and other IT vocational courses, and an alternative provision for 6th Form. Our model is to support learners in identifying and achieving their life goals by developing skills, knowledge and confidence.

Rationale

Research into online teaching and learning suggests that the biggest factor relating to learner retention, progress and success is having a supportive tutor (Roddy et al, 2017; Bawa2016). To move from emergency remote teaching to an effective model of blended/online learning, we needed to review and develop our teaching, learning and assessment practices. Eliciting good-quality feedback and understanding our learners' experiences at ELATT will help us continue to develop our quality model and processes for the new normal.

The project proposed to do this by providing a tool for tutors that would fit within existing organisational structures. These relate both to tutor support activities, such as tutorials and ILPs, as well as the wider quality framework, in particular the OTLA (Observations of Teaching, Learning and Assessment) lesson observation policy. It was important that the tool created would not be replicating current activities or adding to workloads.

As part of our regular review of ELATT's observation policy and procedures, the learner feedback project became phase 1 of a larger quality review. Part of our former observation model was tutor observation accompanied by manager-elicited 'learner voice'. The OTLA phase 7 project enabled us to pilot self-directed tutor observation and direct eliciting of feedback from their learners. It has always been ELATT's main aspiration to enhance learners' life opportunities; we also aim to support the development of learners' analytical and communication skills. This project hopes to empower our learners to reflect and analyse, having nothing but a beneficial effect for our organisation.

Approach

The project was launched to teaching staff at our September CPD event, generating a lot of interest among teachers. With the encouragement of managers, a working group was formed of three tutors who also fulfil the roles of 6th Form English co-ordinator, volunteer co-ordinator and quality support.

The first task was to identify current points at which feedback is given, and to trial a variety of feedback models. At an early workshop, support was also sought from the organisation's well-being officer on the tutor experience of eliciting and receiving feedback.

The working group trialled individual, group, oral and written feedback, as well as a mix of open/closed and 'on a scale of…' questions. The elicited feedback was then evaluated by the project group. Open questions were identified as most suitable for feedback because (a) learners were less likely to feel it was a tick box exercise; (b) learners didn't feel they had to shoehorn their experience into narrow questions and (c) as a consequence, actionable feedback was more likely to be received.

Two surveys were devised and set up in templates using the Forms app (Office 365). The process then was not onerous as:

- the template adapted/contextualised by each tutor.
- the tutor shared a survey link with the learners for completion on their device.
- the tutor monitored completion rates on the Forms app and downloaded the results to Excel.

It was important we had a range of learner voices, so feedback methods were trialled with approximately 40 learners from three learner cohorts.

These included:

- Level 1 adult ESOL learners, a mix of continuing and new learners.
- 6th form FS and GCSE English learners. All have EHCP or are 'Looked After Children'. 70% of these learners have SEND.
- Adult ESOL learners looking for jobs in education enrolled on L2 Support Work in Schools award.

The questions were then adjusted before being rolled out as part of the experimental OTLA policy. Tutors were given the option to choose which set of questions they preferred and also to adapt to their context.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The following are some comments received from staff involved in this project:

> **Tutor 1:** *"The project changed relationship with my students. I stop and listen more. I appreciate what they are able to do, so I hand over control to the students more. It means students take part in leading the class and it has improved their confidence."*

> **Tutor 2:** *"Feedback told me that students really enjoyed the activities I set up but that sometimes my explanations were too fast. On reflection, I also realised that when individual students don't understand instructions, I often ask the TA to help out – but they in turn tend to over-explain. It made me change the way I work by giving fewer instructions. However, I did find myself slipping back after a few weeks. I think I need to do the surveys regularly. I will schedule it into my scheme of work for next year."*

Tutor 3: *"As a result of the feedback, I streamlined the course for the following term to allow time for the additional workshops which students said they found useful. It was also a useful reminder that sometimes I talk too fast. I will plan to do surveys three times during my 16-week course."*

Tutor 4 was the first tutor to report back to the team on his experiences with the survey after roll out. He reported being pleased with the positive results. One student who he knew was struggling made this clear, providing a useful basis to discuss moving to a slightly less challenging qualification. The other constructive feedback was that some students wanted more practice exercises. However, when the tutor checked online, he realised that those students had not accessed the exercises provided and had forgotten where they were located, so he was able to remind them about this. Tutor 4 plans to adapt the survey to his own context and schedule it regularly.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Pre-lockdown, there was a clear and collective idea of what outstanding teaching, learning and assessment looked like. The rush to emergency remote teaching removed some of these certainties, which then gradually re-formed through collaborative work by tutors and managers. CPD became more regular, with shorter sessions to raise urgent topics and exchange tips relating to online learning.

The learner feedback fitted well within this collective endeavour and has now become phase 1 of a larger project. With good results from the trials, the aim is that the feedback tool will be incorporated into the OTLA policy for 2021-22, to create a system which is high on trust and aims not to add to tutor stress or workload.

Going forward, an experimental policy has been created, comprising an unseen observation and tutor-elicited feedback at the first stage. At the end of 2020-21, both the feedback tool and the policy as a whole will be evaluated.

Finally, and importantly, another benefit was the teamwork by members of different departments. Even in a small organisation, time pressures and home-working reduced opportunities to work together. This opportunity to create a project space for regular meetings, workshops and support from the ETF allowed for thorough trialling, reflection and evaluation. Collaboration with the well-being officer also enabled us to move some questions into the annual wellbeing survey, which was also under review. This was an unexpected outcome of this project.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners across the organisation managed to achieve and progress despite the disruption of the past year, albeit with reduced numbers securing employment. Our research findings (in particular the insight we have gained from tracking specific learners over the course of the project), demonstrate how tutor-learner relationships have supported achievements.

In an online ESOL L1 speaking and listening class with nine learners, the regular feedback sessions and subsequent strengthening of tutor-learner relationships supported a high proportion of learners into volunteering (four) or finding employment (two). Amazingly, one learner, SA, reported they stopped taking anti-depressants, became healthier, found a job and started to think about setting up her own business:

"Every lesson we talk about what we would like to learn more about, grammar and so on. I have a job in a restaurant because I think about my goals, and I achieve it."

In the online teaching assistant (TA) course, which supports many progressing ESOL learners to find entry-level employment in schools, learners were encouraged to give constructive feedback, which helped them to take on the mindset of education professionals, rather than consumers of education. One learner stated:

> *"I went for the interview, and I can talk about everything."*

In the 6th Form English and Personal Social Development course for young people with EHCP and/or SEND, classes are blended. Pre-lockdown learners were generally keen to attend in person. However, a few new learners joining online were mainly 'camera off' and interacted through chat or intermediaries, e.g. families. It is challenging for both teachers and learners when classes are a mix of on-site and at-home learners. However, the classroom camera, chat and Zoom are now left open during breaks. This means that learners like N, who is severely disabled and unable to attend at present, can interact with those on site and maintain social relationships.

Learning from this project

The rationale for this project is strong, especially for our many remote learners. We found many tutors had previously relied on ad hoc/unprompted comments from learners to provide timely, insightful feedback. This type of high-quality feedback had generally opened up in informal spaces, e.g., on enrichment visits or during 1:1 sessions where there was not a time pressure.

While the team felt the project had productive and positive outcomes, we recognised that evaluation of this small sample is difficult, since the feedback survey is one piece of the jigsaw relating to tutor-learner relationships. The phase 2 data – including analysis of the outcomes for classes using each of the two survey tools - will allow us to evaluate the wider roll-out.

One roll-out challenge was to ensure all tutors fully understood the rationale behind the survey. An initial brief presentation did not provide sufficient space for tutors to discuss and absorb the purpose and value of the approach. A separate CPD session with breakouts gave more opportunity to consider both the aims/rationale as well as the practical implementation. A smaller challenge was technical. While the Forms App (Microsoft 365) is straightforward, it still needs the right support when being rolled out to busy tutors. A particular feature which caused frustration was the 'only people in my organisation can respond' default setting.

The questions trialled among a diversity of learners proved to be flexible tools for broad use, although data from lower-level ESOL classes is needed. However, the question regarding the frequency 'sweet spot' for survey use is still open. Used too often, and it can become rote. Used too infrequently, and learners do not have the practice in analysing their experience and giving feedback openly.

The trial did not find the anticipated deference and/or lack of interest, so the main barrier for a minority was in analysing their experience and communicating their thoughts. The wording on the survey was important, e.g., asking for 'comments and feedback which helps us to change and develop our teaching and the way we interact with learners.'

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-8/7-17b/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 9

Mentor: Sue Southwood

18. Shipley College
    Waltham Forest College
19. United Colleges Group

ONLINE LEARNING APPROACHES
Sue Southwood (Mentor)

Prior to COVID-19, projects focusing on online learning pedagogies in the English classroom would have seemed forward-thinking and quite cutting edge, but the world quickly caught up as more or less all learning moved online, seemingly overnight!

Shipley College and Waltham Forest College collaborated to use digital technology to support the progress of GCSE English re-sit students working face to face and online during lockdown 2020–2021. They focused on building engagement in online learning. Teachers from both colleges shared their lessons and recorded online webinars to share with each other's students.

Students from both colleges collaborated online, reflecting on their own writing, sharing their experiences, and giving feedback on each other's work. The results were amazing and provide a real insight into what motivates students to learn in GCSE English.

United Colleges Group urgently addressed online teaching and learning during COVID-19 lockdown. They revised their original plan to explore synchronous and asynchronous approaches and instead focused on supporting teachers to use online tools, to think about their online classroom and how best to use a range of tools effectively for the benefit of learners.

They established starting points and devised an intensive CPD programme to address specific areas of pedagogy and use of online tools. The project created space for teachers across different campuses to meet and discuss their experiences of using specific tools and reflect on what worked and what changes they could make to support deeper learning and make the online classroom a meaningful and enjoyable experience for learners in lockdown.

Teachers collaborated to reflect on their learning and how they were applying it in their online classroom to improve practice. This contribution to teachers' professional practice was acknowledged by Ofsted (2021b).

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-9/**

18. ONLINE LEARNING APPROACHES
Shipley College and Waltham Forest College

Shipley College, Bradford and Waltham Forest College (WFC), London collaborated to use digital technology to support the progress of GCSE English re-sit students working face to face and online during lockdown 2020–2021.

Summary

Our aim was to share ideas, resources and innovations in the teaching of post-16 GCSE English Language between the teaching teams from two colleges in the north and south of England. The challenge we wanted to explore was centred around the question: How can we engage GCSE English students using digital technology for learning?

Shipley College is a small Further Education College situated in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Saltaire, in the District of Bradford. Our local population is culturally and ethnically diverse and this is reflected in the student cohort. At Waltham Forest College, we are one of the most diverse colleges in London and are even more diverse than the local community. Our borough is one of the most culturally rich areas in the country, but also one of the most deprived. There are 97 different languages spoken and our students are drawn from across London and from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Rationale

The project was born out of a collaborative relationship between two Advanced Practitioners who had already worked together on a pilot study to engage learners through using webinars. We wanted to cement this cross-organisation relationship and build on some of our findings as well as investigate how we could develop students' confidence in transferable skills for further and higher study as well as in the workplace. We hoped to learn from the participants – both students and colleagues - about how our learners could be encouraged to help themselves to learn. We also wanted to develop a professional exchange of ideas and resources.

Our intention has been to engage students through using authentic, collaborative activities and facilitate cross-centre peer feedback to support their development both in terms of GCSE and also in developing transferable skills relevant to progression.

We were originally concerned about motivation and engagement, particularly how we engage students remotely using digital tools and this has proven to be a pertinent area of interest during lockdowns. We wanted to harness the power of technology (for example, Google and Microsoft Forms) to easily collect feedback from students about face to face and online methodologies in a qualitative way with short, regular responses from both staff and students to trace developments. We wanted to gain feedback about engagement, confidence, progress and the effectiveness of learning strategies from our groups and from specific students.

Approach

Both colleges created content to be used with our own students and with each other's. Shipley created a webinar and digital learning materials exploring Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) and this was co-taught at WFC. Shipley students wrote responses to the set tasks, which WFC students discussed and gave feedback on. Both cohorts learned from the experience in several ways, including reflecting on how they approached such tasks themselves, and how they engaged with texts in their own writing.

There is much research on Assessment for Learning and student engagement (see, for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998). Our research with students also revealed that participation in self- and peer-assessment

activities enhanced both their engagement and their achievement. We found that students 'didn't hold back' with their comments and that they enjoyed the process of giving feedback.

Comments on other learners' work were constructive, for example:

> *"Never start a sentence with 'I think', expand your vocabulary"*

> *"Use a better adjective than 'scared' such as 'worried or anxious".*

We found that engaging in peer-assessment also gave students the confidence to voice their opinions:

> "*In my opinion, I feel as if JW evidence is a much stronger piece and more detailed because he goes straight to the point in detail of how the writer is subconsciously feeling. In addition, he uses more quotes to back up his point".*

WFC created a webinar and digital learning materials exploring Rudyard Kipling's The Mark of the Beast (Kipling, 1890). Shipley students learned from the resources and responded with a range of literary analysis and imaginative writing based on the theme.

As the second lockdown occurred and the prospect of the planned exchange visits was thwarted, the action researchers changed course and WFC wrote letters to the students at Shipley, introducing themselves, sharing a little about their lives, and writing about their experience of studying GCSE English.

The learner voice has been captured throughout and both partners in the collaboration have learned from the shared experience. This can be seen in the students' responses at the beginning and towards the end of teaching by two parallel surveys conducted across both colleges as well as at various points in between at WFC.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This year has brought challenge and change; our collaboration has enabled us to respond to the immediate need to engage learners remotely and to develop our practice. Both colleges had cohorts of students to teach and needed to respond to their needs, but the project enabled us to share our passion about teaching, discuss new ideas and promoted a culture of sharing ideas and academic exchange.

Digital learning has become the new norm! Staff have upskilled in a way we never thought would be possible and this will have a long-term future impact on teaching and learning. Students have also come to appreciate what we offer in college and the relationship and collaboration between students and staff has proved, this year particularly, to be a central and invaluable part of the educational experience.

The structure of using quick response methods to gather student feedback and reflection has allowed us to put the student voice at the centre of our planning and preparation. When surveys or polls were completed, the practitioners 'drilled down' on individual responses to gain more insight as well as to respond to particular needs, and often outside of the classroom contact space. A typical example of this is when a WFC student mentioned they would like extra sessions and/or practise exam papers to do in their own time; these requests were discussed with individuals and accommodated for wherever appropriate. In another example, students were able to share their feelings about how they had responded to learning in lockdowns before they returned to face-to-face sessions which tutors could follow up. Around half of our learners wanted to continue learning online.

One learner commented:

> *"I feel like online no matter the time or place, I find it easy concentrating at home without being disturbed."*

The student work produced during the research project demonstrates high engagement from our learners which has affected how we plan and the activities we choose. Our collaboration has stimulated us to reflect on our practice and motivated us to share what we have learned. To summarise our key learning, we can reflect that students can be motivated and engaged with different types of learning (whether online or face-to-face sessions) using a variety of digital tools, and in anonymous as well as identifiable ways. Aside from this, when students are made aware that peers will be reviewing their work (for example for reading comprehension/evaluation skills), and that they are writing for a 'real' audience - as opposed for a teacher/examiner - they are much more likely to make extra effort in the production of work. In practice, peer assessment turns out to be an important complement to self-assessment. Peer assessment is uniquely valuable because students may accept criticisms of their work from one another that they would not take seriously if the remarks were offered by a teacher.

We have recorded a podcast, *'Let's Get Digital'* (Sheppard and Salt, 2021) and written an article for Future FE Pedagogies, soon to be published. We have also discussed another article for publication in a German online journal publication*: 'Ideen-und Innovations-management'* (Ideas and Innovation Management), (Gutkneckt and Heitmeyer, 2021).

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Over the course of the project, practitioners within the department have been working constructively in a new relationship with colleagues and students within and across institutions. Our research has revealed that there are several comparisons to make between students who were involved in the project and students who were not. It is perhaps difficult to draw meaningful comparisons from this data due to the difference in response levels between OTLA and non-OTLA students. However, if we reflect on the information that has been given and assume that (for the non-OTLA students) it represents a significant minority (almost a third) of opinion then this is worth further investigation. Also, as practitioners we can still use the low response numbers as valid opinions that may well represent a larger but 'silent' majority.

All colleagues from the GCSE team at Shipley took part and the letter writing task proved popular. One tutor made a PowerPoint from the resources to use with her groups and another used the exercise as part of her annual observation and received great feedback.

At WFC, the English department is using the OTLA project outcomes and results of surveys to feed into discussions on how they can seek to use a range of canvassing tools and techniques to capture student voice throughout the academic year, and use feedback derived from the learner experience to dynamically respond to needs. Colleagues have been inspired to develop new and adapted TLA methods to motivate students towards higher levels of engagement and achievement and are working closely with the Quality Team to develop college-wide thinking on pedagogy and practice across areas. One particular practice we are reviewing is the use of surveying techniques (learner voice, targeting learning preferences, etc) at common points across the English cohort, and perhaps widening out to other areas.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The groups have made great progress, attendance and engagement have been moderate or high. One SEND student who has progressed from Entry Level to pre-GCSE and now GCSE has worked with increasing independence and now achieved a grade 4.

> *'When the teacher helps us, that's good', 'I like it when we do fun things in class', 'I got to concentrate more this year', 'We do good work'.* Student.

The November re-sit results showed an 80% success rate at Grade 4 or above across both institutions prompting a new direction as the original sample of students left the course upon receiving their result in January 2021.

Learner journeys captured in half-termly ILP reviews at Shipley on Google forms and at WFC using Microsoft Forms have demonstrated positive engagement and feedback from our students. We have evidence from documentation of conversations, anecdotal feedback from students and staff and short interviews which also reflect the positive response from students.

The exchange of ideas between our students led to a wonderful sharing of experiences and a very interesting documentation of the online learning experience during lockdown. Students spoke about their lives and described the places in which they lived; they demonstrated a genuine interest in the unknown student they were writing to.

One student commented:

> *"Reading the letters gave a great insight into what it's like for other students. It allowed me to improve my English as it gave me ways to describe my city."*

Over the course of the research project we collated peer feedback on the Dracula text, some sample letters exchanged between Shipley and WFC students as well as some samples of Learner Voice as captured in the WFC end of year reflection survey (amongst students who participated throughout the year in the project, including writing letters). It demonstrates our students' understanding of the success criteria required for GCSE English Language.

Figure 18.1: Students across the two colleges provided detailed peer feedback to one another.

Four students involved with the OTLA project from start to finish and who completed all the surveys, peer review and letter writing work made the following comments in response to the survey question **'What has helped you most to make progress in English this year?'** as follows:

> **Learner 1**: *"I've definitely gained more confidence in my reading of different texts and understanding the concept and meaning of new words."*
>
> **Learner2:** *"Identifying the language techniques and knowing where to put them in my creative writing."*
>
> **Learner 3:** *"The assessments we had helped me in English this year it helped me to have better writing skills and vocabulary."*
>
> **Learner 4:** *"Inspiration from my teacher and other students."*

Learning from this project

The collaboration has enabled both tutors to gain considerable insight into student's lives and learning styles which has impacted on how we plan, teach and assess our learners.

One tutor at Shipley said:

> *"I've found out so much more about my students that I would never have known."*

Students have responded positively in that they felt staff were making the effort to do something different, to give a real audience and purpose and engage them in learning. One student stayed online to say, *"Miss, I'm really excited about this."* The letter writing has proved to be successful on an unexpected level. The letters form a unique document of life and learning during lockdown. Some students chose to write anonymously but many were happy to sign with a personal name and keen to respond to the letters which had a name attached.

A Shipley College Student
C/O Shipley College English Dept.,
Salt Building, Victoria Rd,
Shipley,
Saltaire,
BD18 3LQ

11 February 2021

Dear College Student

I just thought I should write to you and introduce my self to you. Well hello -- I'm 17 years of age nearly 18.

I currently live in London but I used to live in Somerset. The bit of London that I live in is North East London specifically the borough of Waltham Forest. And the bit of Somerset that I used to live in specifically was Taunton.

Well in life I have many things I dislike and many things that I like for example I dislike people that talk about their friends behind their backs but there are also many things I do like ice skating. When I finish college I am hoping to join the army but if not I will join the police which will require going university.

My education experiences have been quite boring but very educating. I went to secondary school for 5 years and ended with no grades due to my mental health going down hill drastically. I am also going to college for 4-5 years. My opinion on studying English is that it is one of my stronger subjects but it is not one of my favourite subjects.

I hope to hear from you soon and I look forward to meeting you in person.

Yours faithfully

CL

Figure 18.2: Learners based at Shipley and WFC exchanged letters that gave an insight into their lives and experiences.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-9/7-18/**

19. EFFECTIVE TEACHING ONLINE THROUGH REFLECTION, COLLABORATION, AND EXPERT INPUT

United Colleges Group

COVID-19 lockdown led us to urgently address online teaching and learning. We established starting points and devised an intensive CPD programme to address specific areas of pedagogy and using online tools. Teachers collaborated to reflect on their learning and how they were applying it in their online classroom to improve practice.

Summary

We provide maths and English GCSE and Functional Skills to approximately 1,200 learners across a range of vocational areas at 5 London campuses. Many of our learners are from lower socio-economic groups. Our mission is to meet the diverse educational and skills needs of our learners and to raise aspirations through innovative and outward looking practice.

Our aim was to enable a group of English specialists to explore methods for improving their learners' experiences and outcomes in the blended learning environment (BLE). Since lockdown, teachers have been employing a variety of methods for remote learning, to varying degrees of success. Through collaborative practice, we focused on offering interventions to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the BLE. This meant facilitating reflective practice and capturing learner voice at every stage in order to improve levels of learner engagement and achievement.

Rationale

In common with many colleges, our learners face demotivation by having to repeatedly re-sit English GCSE and Functional Skills exams. Since the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, this level of disengagement has intensified. Since the move to online teaching, we have attempted to employ a variety of methods and online tools. Our research (TES, 2021) was predicated on providing a platform to share what was going well, and

to find some solutions to the problems we were encountering as a learning community.

Specifically, we offered CPD on successful use of popular applications such as Microsoft OneNote and Teams for collaboration and teaching. We sought to measure the impact of a targeted programme of support and the resources provided. We applied the latest research on pedagogical approaches to blended learning (Ofsted, 2021c). The basis for these interventions came from an acknowledgement that although the participants in the project were competent and effective practitioners in face-to-face delivery, they wanted support to improve their online practices. Teachers were working from home and isolated. This action research enabled them to identify their learning needs, receive expert input, and practise new approaches, then share ideas, approaches, resources and experiences with peers to improve their skills and confidence in teaching online.
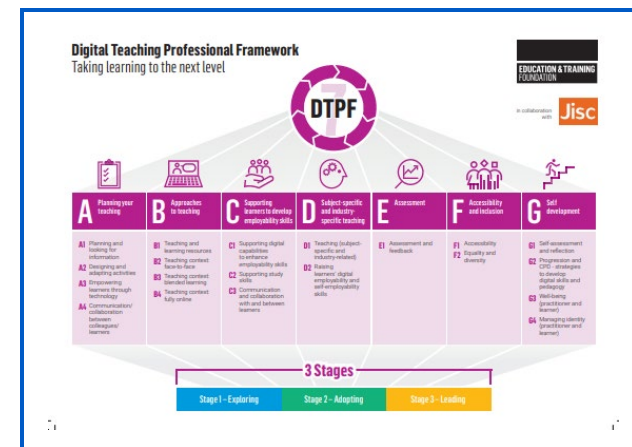
Figure 19.1: The project team built upon current pedagogical research, including the ETF's (2018c) Digital Teaching Professional Framework.

Approach

Step 1 – Initially we were going to examine the various approaches to asynchronous vs synchronous learning. However, we decided instead to focus on improving teachers' pedagogical practice in the BLE because the pandemic meant we had to move to wholesale online teaching almost overnight! We therefore needed something that would lead to more impact in the short term.

Our learning coaches asked for volunteers from the English department and we recruited 6 direct participants.

Step 2 - To harness the collaborative nature of the project we used a Microsoft Forms survey to establish specific support needs in relation to teaching in the BLE

The most popular responses from these requested support in how to:

- Use OneNote, Teams, and Forms effectively to provide feedback, communicate and monitor learning
- Adapt traditional pedagogy effectively for use in the BLE
- Be engaging and present with confidence online
- Effectively self-reflect on pedagogic practice in the BLE

Step 3 - Research: meeting participants' expectations.

We looked at guidance from the Government and the Education and Training Foundation to inform our approach (DfE 2021; ETF, 2021a).

Discussions with experts, including our mentor, helped to shape the nature of our research going forward.

Finally, we invited the participants to join online training events, with for example, The Skills and Education Group.

Step 4 -What, Who, and How?

Using our data to show baseline starting points, we devised a 6 week, twice-weekly programme of online CPD sessions. Each session incorporated a professional discussion (attended by staff from across the group) to encourage the sharing of good practice and focused on one approach. Teachers, for example, shared examples of how they used OneNote in their own sessions with other teachers, and to share tips and "easy wins."

Sessions included:

- OneNote to plan for success
- Deeper learning in the BLE
- Sequenced learning in the BLE
- Microsoft Teams updates – getting the most from the latest features
- Using TikTok for revision.

Sessions were teacher-led and therefore sometimes we returned to the same topic as different teachers would use the approach and share their experiences. We included learner voice to include this perspective in our reflections. This embedded our learning across the team, built confidence in using the BLE and created an environment where teachers could take risks and share their learning.

Step 5: Dissemination

To continue this work, we have developed an E-zine to share good practice across the college group. This is an interactive newsletter that shares our practice through videos, comments and top tips.

We also use 'ResearchMeet', a national online group bringing together practitioners to examine lessons learned and share with colleagues.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Through this work, we have begun to think critically about our practice. Our teachers have found space to try out new approaches and share their learning with colleagues which has raised levels of confidence in remote teaching as well as creating a community of practice.

We have built on established pedagogy (Sweller, 2011) such as embedded regular retrieval practice by using MS Forms and QR codes to engage learners. We established a centralised system of collating and providing feedback to learners via OneNote. Previously this process was random with learners using a variety of modes including for example, attachments to email and sharing Word documents, resulting in confused and often lost feedback opportunities. Our CPD session resulted in tangible changes and every member of staff in the English department now uses OneNote successfully to track progress and provide personalised feedback.

We used Microsoft Teams as our primary vehicle for learning in lockdown, however feedback from learning walks suggested that there was inconsistent and ineffective use of this online tool. Many teachers used it as a meeting rather than a teaching tool, with sessions often dominated by teacher-talk and few opportunities for checking progress or monitoring learner engagement. Our session on Effective Use of Teams introduced staff to using breakout rooms, Whiteboard, Forms as polls, and the Insights app to monitor and engage learners. Feedback from staff and teachers for this indicated that this led to profound changes. As one teacher remarked:

> *"We don't have to fear the tools anymore – we can just focus on delivering good lessons again!"*

This positive change was disseminated across the College group and recognised by Ofsted, who said, that the College:

> *"provide appropriate staff development so that teachers are competent in using relevant online platforms."*   (**Ofsted, 2021b**)

There is a stronger culture of self-reflection as a result of our strategy of self-recorded lessons, and completion for a self-reflection TLA form. One teacher remarked:

> *"I was really shocked how little time I give my learners to respond to my questions!"*

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The English department actively collaborated with colleagues from other campuses to share good practice on using effective and innovative learning strategies in the BLE. They used, 'Think, Pair, Share' and we held an online professional discussion. Teachers shared the following recommendations, which were then implemented by teaching staff across the college group:

- Learners who were initially reluctant to share ideas publicly on 'Chat' loved the ability to post in the teacher-learner area on OneNote and this also worked for learners who were similarly reluctant to engage face-to-face – and have now developed a new-found confidence.
- Teachers recommended the use of OneNote as a marking and assessment tool, where they had the option to record verbal feedback, which saved time and enabled a more personalised experience.
- One teacher recommended using the Insight app to encourage learners to stay in when they have logged in. Following this, using Insight was widely used to monitor log-in/log-out, but also to ensure they were there physically and hadn't wandered off.

Because of the success of filmed recorded online sessions and filmed face-to-face sessions, staff have developed much more confidence in self-reflection, and this practice has been successfully shared with colleagues in other departments, e.g., Business and Travel and Tourism.

A further innovation is our new teaching and learning 'E-zine' – an interactive newsletter. We can use this to share the findings of our research and bring together a greater number of teachers to share their ideas and experiences.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Our learner feedback showed evidence of significant improvement in the experience of learning online. A learning coach observed two sessions where fruits of previous CPD sessions were apparent: The lecturers used OneNote to replace screen sharing (which was limited by the requirement for all participants to remain on track at the same pace - not always realistic in varying home contexts, with variable internet speeds etc.) As a result, some of those learners who struggled, for instance due to SEN difficulties, were able to access the learning at their own pace. This was further informed by introducing these learners to the use of immersive reader in OneNote. One highly dyslexic learner commented:

> "Now I can blur out the rest of the writing, everything is so much easier to read and when my eyes are tired, I can ask it to read to me at my own speed."

Another commented:

> "I understand most of the information, but sometimes I just have to go over it again in my own time. This allows me to do that."

Following a session on using Microsoft Stream to enhance the learners' BLE experience one learner said:

> "I believe that we are learning a lot more and at a much faster rate, than we would have done in class. The videos are also helpful as I can go back and watch them if I forget or miss something." The teacher for this

group also commented, "Your CPD has been amazingly productive. It has helped me save and upload so much content for learners to access in their own time. Thank you, Azmol."

Attendance across the groups associated with the projected demonstrated a marked improvement in line with the roll-out of our CPD delivery. See below.

Online attendance	October 2020	January 2020	April 2021
Group 1	53%	67%	72%
Group 2	44%	58%	60%
Group 3	19%	67%	88%

Crucially, when teachers were interviewed about this improvement, they were unanimous that there was a clear link between improved attendance and improved delivery as a result of training and collaboration. One teacher commented:

> "The added confidence has paid dividends; students, when they think they have posted a good idea, are then much happier to engage." Another added, "Thanks to taking part in the research I was able to effectively review the merits and drawbacks of a range of approaches, then select the best for my particular requirements."

Learning from this project

What went well …

- The simple act of naming: Do not call it a project – call it research! This instils in participants the sense that this is something autonomous and continuous.
- We changed tack when required, and this meant we could maintain focus more appropriately. For example, at the outset our focus was going to be on asynchronous vs synchronous delivery. Soon we came to realise that this direction would not provide us with the useful outcomes we required, so we listened to the participants and adapted our planning accordingly.
- In line with the previous point about changing direction, whilst we took charge of overseeing the operational elements, we allowed ourselves to be directed by participants' areas of interest.
- We learned a lot! In response to requests for specific training in particular areas of pedagogy we undertook copious research and summarised this to disseminate, and, in the process, our own presenting skills and confidence improved enormously e.g., we had to present our finding on Dissemination Day.
- We also gained collaborative access to our colleagues across the FE sector and this allowed us to both share good practice and learn from others in similar situation.

Even better if …

- Teachers are busy! Flexibility is key. If we want people to give their time and energy, we need to be attentive to their needs, e.g., we responded to what they felt it was important for them to research / test.
- Some CPD sessions we decided were necessary, ended up being poorly attended. Survey staff to ask what is that they feel THEY need, not impose it on them.

- We harnessed support from members of the SLT: always useful but particularly so here as it allowed us the freedom, for example, to make time to collaborate across campuses.
- Provide incentives to keep participants involved once recruited in the form of small gratuities e.g., stationery/remission; this should not be seen as uncompensated extra work.
- We feel we could have benefited from having more time available in the working for the admin and research, because often we found ourselves working evenings and weekends. More than once we had to be chased for our monthly report! Next time we would negotiate in advance with our respective line managers to have ring-fenced time to work on the project.

> *"I believe that we are learning a lot more and at a much faster rate, than we would have done in class. The videos in OneNote are also helpful as I can go back and watch them if I forget or miss something."*
>
> **Learner reflection on the project.**

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at

https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-9/7-19/

SHAPING SUCCESS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (ENGLISH)

Research Group Lead: Tricia Millar
Mentors: Sheran Johnson
                                     Kirsty Powell
                                     Lesley Littlewood

PATTERNS & REFLECTIONS
Tricia Millar (Research Group Lead)

For many educators, this has been a year of just getting things done in the chaos and inconvenience of ever-changing circumstances. Yet, in the midst of it all, OTLA teacher-researchers have found time to be creative, take risks and listen to their learners – three themes thrown up by the end of project reports. Following are some anonymised quotes from the reports. You might use them as a treasure hunt through the reports or you might use them along with my further questions as thinking points for your own reflective journal.

One-to-one: expensive or priceless?

One-to-one learning is often seen as impossibly expensive but three organisations used OTLA 7 as an opportunity to explore the effects of one-to-one lessons in either non-accredited courses or alongside regular classes with learners who were stuck in either their literacy or their maths.

The results were unanimous that vulnerable learners benefited and that the confidence built by low stakes one-to-one sessions is not just a feeling but a solid platform from which to launch into accredited learning.

> *We will continue with a 6-week non-accredited programme in the classroom for low level learners to engage and build confidence.*

> *The learners were enthusiastic about their one-to-one sessions and could see the value of the project. There was only one instance of absence over thirty-six sessions and the learner was quick to rearrange a new session.*

Was it the one-to-one that made all the difference?

Was it the strategies offered that made the difference?

Was it a combination?

Is it worth reconfiguring teaching time to include one-to-one?

Learners as collaborators

The following insights from five very different projects could act as the jumping-off point for OTLA projects in years to come. They create a great opportunity for reflecting on how much we listen to our learners about what they both need and want.

> *There was a real emphasis on digging deep to discover what the learners needed rather than having a pre-conceived recipe for success.*

> *[They] want to learn. Do they want to learn what we are teaching them?*

> *[This] can be useful in building collaborative relationships with learners so that they see the teacher as supporting both their learning and independence in learning…*

> *This approach proved so popular that learners asked for it to be applied to other resources.*

> *We were moving from 'here's everything you don't know for your grade' to 'here is where you are on your journey'.*

What are the 'yes, but' questions?

How do I 'dig deep'?

What's the difference between a course and a journey?

How does my teaching support independence in learning?

Teachers as learners

It is always a joy to read about how teachers learn and refashion their fundamental professional practice throughout an OTLA project and these quotes spotlight some of those experiences.

We learnt that no one is ever too old or has been teaching too long to try new things.

Having the freedom to explore created a safety net against the perceived risks of creativity in our pedagogy.

The takeaway has been unlearning everything I had been trying with these learners.

[CPD] must be done through planned, regular, on-going support similar to that which has paid dividends with our learners.

How far am I willing to risk changing the way I've always taught?

What do I think of as risky in teaching?

Do I want my thinking changed?

Are we as a department or organisation willing to invest time and energy to make sure all teachers feel as supported as our learners?

Resilience

This year has tested every teacher's resilience and not one project succeeded without overcoming considerable challenges. Resilience is so ubiquitous a concern that it is almost not worth mentioning; however, we finish this OTLA 7 conscious that learners also rose above many challenges to continue their education. Therefore, it seems fitting to leave the last word to learners. (This is also a reminder to seek out and explore the appendices of the projects you find interesting! Click on the link or scan the QR code that you will find at the end of each report).

I think I finally get where I'm going wrong and what I can do about it.

At home I help my mam, who is dyslexic, and my younger brothers who didn't understand their phonics homework.

I used to feel quite lost but now I actually do understand [Functional Skills maths questions]. I feel that if I saw them in an exam, I would get the answer; whereas before I didn't.

I'm going to give it a go and smash it.

A poem
By NL

No matter what happens
I will never complain
No matter who stands on my way
A day always start again

EDUCATION & TRAINING
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RESEARCH CLUSTER 10
Mentor: Sheran Johnson

EMPOWERING ESOL LEARNERS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR STUDIES

Sheran Johnson (Mentor)

This has been a very challenging year but having the opportunity to work with three ESOL action research projects, committed to finding ways to support their learners at this difficult time, has been a thoroughly rewarding experience.

Hull College saw some of their learners struggling to communicate electronically during the first lockdown which impacted on motivation and progress. Equipping their ESOL learners with the language and technical skills needed to communicate via email proved a good way to tackle this. It not only created opportunities for naturally occurring writing practice but also helped provide the glue between lessons, encouraging more engagement which might have been lost as the result of less face-to-face delivery. What they learnt has resulted in an induction programme for their ESOL learners across the whole college group.

New College Durham recognised the additional impact that the pandemic was having on many of their learners, in particular their ability to learn new language. They found that many of their ESOL learners experienced difficulty remembering new vocabulary. This was particularly true among those who have experienced trauma. In a bid to overcome this, they used various memory strategies alongside relaxation techniques to help students feel secure in themselves and their knowledge. In addition to this, their project extended the focus on mental health and has been collaborating with a local social enterprise to set up a garden safe space for ESOL learners.

Wakefield College were also keen to ensure that their learners were not disadvantaged by the challenges of digital access during the pandemic.

They found that the obstacles faced by ESOL learners were never more evident than when COVID-19 hit Britain, with teachers and learners alike thrown in at the deep end. This project enabled them to experiment and develop remote teaching methods. They focussed on a wide range of different approaches which looked at both technical and language challenges with some inspiring results. One Pre-entry learner, illiterate in his own language, was loaned a laptop to continue with his studies. By the end of the course his tutor said that he was explaining to others how to use a range of features in Teams *'which enabled us to have some really productive lessons during lockdown 3'*.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-10/**

20a. READY TO SEND AND RECEIVE? IMPROVING ADULT ESOL LEARNERS' ENGLISH THROUGH EMAIL
Hull College

This project aimed to explore strategies designed to improve ESOL learners' skills in reading and writing emails in order to pass their ESOL writing exams and enable them to take part more fully in both their ESOL courses and as learners of the college. We learnt that from optimising learning opportunities in multi-task activities and opening up channels of communication in pre and post class activities, learners were encouraged to use their English more and were more likely to achieve.

Summary

Hull College is a large further education provider which offers ESOL courses from Pre-Entry to Level 2. It currently has over 600 ESOL learners. Many ESOL learners go on to access mainstream provision. The project named 'Ready to Send and Receive' attempted to improve ESOL learners' skills in writing and reading emails.

Initially, the skills would be used to enable learners to pass ESOL exams as one of the writing tasks includes an email. However, we also introduced a wide range of practical, interactive opportunities, to encourage the use of email in and around class time. These practice sessions were important, to improve learners' overall engagement in their ESOL courses as learning moved from face-to-face to blended (face-to-face and online) learning where use of electronic formats was important.

The project brought together adult and teenage ESOL learners of all nationalities and levels. Learners and teachers from the ESOL departments and Employment Services at Hull College worked collaboratively in sharing experiences of how they were communicating via electronic mail during lockdown. The materials were primarily delivered to Entry Level 2 learners but could easily be adapted to suit higher or lower levels.

The project has helped drive a new induction programme for the future of our ESOL learners and now recognises that digital skills are essential for our ESOL learners.

Rationale

From our experience of the first lockdown, it became apparent that learners were not completely happy with communicating via email or learning online and that they were much more comfortable with face-to-face delivery.

A teacher would receive emails with only a message in the subject line, a minimal message from a learner whose name was unknown to the teacher, or an unsigned message from an unknown email address which gave no clue as to the sender. However, it became apparent that learners wanted to get on board and use email despite the challenges of trying to do this as a second language learner.

Our project was designed to tackle some of the challenges that our ESOL learners face by teaching them the conventions of email writing, e.g. what to put in the subject line, how to start and finish appropriately, whilst still practising reading comprehension and improving their writing skills.
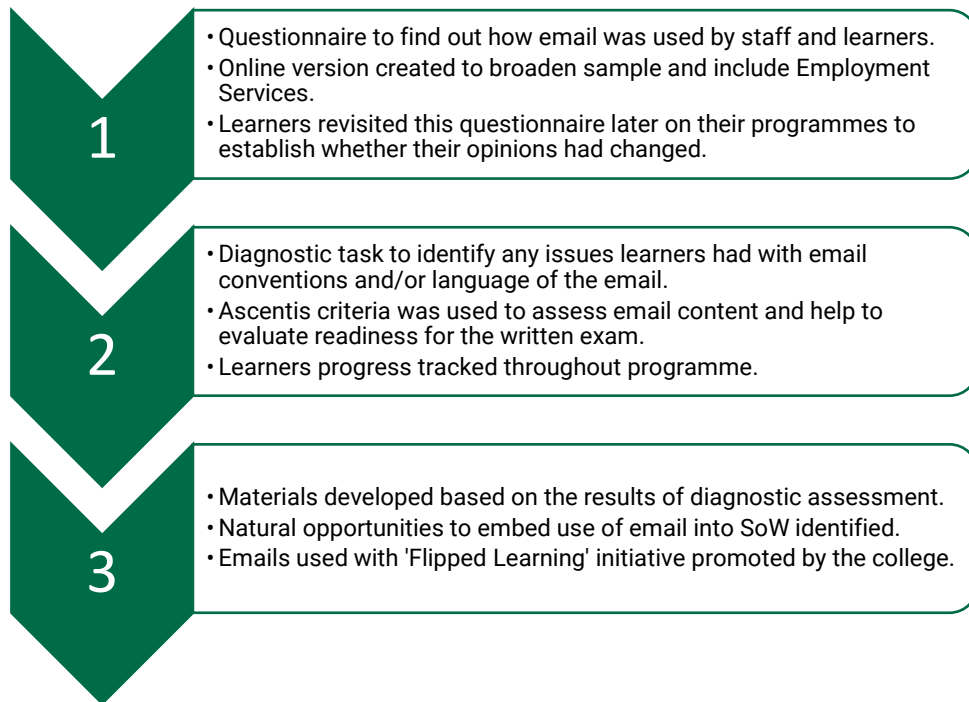
Approach

1
- Questionnaire to find out how email was used by staff and learners.
- Online version created to broaden sample and include Employment Services.
- Learners revisited this questionnaire later on their programmes to establish whether their opinions had changed.

2
- Diagnostic task to identify any issues learners had with email conventions and/or language of the email.
- Ascentis criteria was used to assess email content and help to evaluate readiness for the written exam.
- Learners progress tracked throughout programme.

3
- Materials developed based on the results of diagnostic assessment.
- Natural opportunities to embed use of email into SoW identified.
- Emails used with 'Flipped Learning' initiative promoted by the college.

Figure 20a.1: Project approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Working on this project has encouraged us to reflect more systematically on what works best for our learners and their language needs. It has also required us to be innovative in order to meet new demands of electronic communication and develop creative and inspiring language materials that would support learners to continue to learn whilst also gaining confidence in digital skills.

A lot of this professional learning has focused on acquiring new digital skills both for teachers and learners. Attendance at training events, positive collaboration, and sharing of new digital forms between colleagues allowed this advancement in learning. This in turn supported the development of the questionnaires from paper to digital format, ensuring a greater yield of responses and providing a truer reflection of our learners. In the paper version we had 30 responses whilst in the electronic format we had over 130.

This new digital learning benefitted the project in two ways. Firstly, it inspired and motivated colleagues to share the questionnaire with their learners and learn more about the project. Staff did not have to set aside an activity in their class to complete the paper-based version. Secondly, far more learners responded as they were able to open the form quickly and easily access the form on their phone wherever they were.

In addition, the creation of screencasts to help ESOL learners access email on mobile phones was a later advancement of the project, the full potential of which will come into play from September. This would not have been possible without other members of the department becoming interested and learning how to produce a screencast. As a result, we now have materials to reach those learners who find it difficult to access email on a mobile phone.

The project team were able to continually evaluate and challenge existing practices in ESOL. Suitable email-linked activities were embedded into the scheme of work for ESOL; for example, working within the topic of health, we included a task which tested reading comprehension and then asked learners to respond to the email giving advice to their friend. This allowed them to practise both the target functional language, encourage appropriate use of register and checked their email writing conventions.

Furthermore, this ongoing evaluation and challenge enabled teachers to widen the scope of their classes by incorporating both a pre-class and a post-class activity. This in turn, motivated learners to attend and achieve

more of what their course offered. Attending more often meant after lockdown, they were more likely to return to college and take part in the sessions.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Improved collaboration and changes in organisational practice can be seen in the alignment of plans for the future induction programme for ESOL learners. There was recognition that our ESOL learners need a more diverse and more inclusive induction programme and different support model before they start their courses. This was achieved by working alongside the new Director of English and Maths and supporting plans to develop adult ESOL provision at the college. This is evidenced in the action plan for the department.

Notes	Action	Deadline
Lessons learnt – Learners need to have IT knowledge and skills, emails, teams and CANVAS. Points noted from NFM's OTLA Ready to Send and Receive funded project this year	To design a short programme within induction around IT including actions from the notes. What do learners need? Be able to go to college email/ open and reply to emails/ Use To and subject line correctly	July 21 – lead Nadine
Learner unable to remember college email address and passwords	To develop a detailed handbook so learners can write their personal emails and passwords in to remember – key card to keep in wallet with details on	July 21 – Lead Nadine & Sarah

Figure 20a.2: Department action plan

Furthermore, the project encouraged liaison between colleagues from both Hull College and Employability Services. This resulted in a more successful outcome from the second questionnaire. The Employability ESOL team were keen to roll out the questionnaire and became interested in how the project could assist their own delivery. This has resulted in positive comparison of materials and discussion. The project also provided us with an opportunity for professional sharing of strategies and methods of teaching and it is hoped that the two departments will work more closely together on the new induction programme.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The project data supports the improvement in language used for writing an email at Entry Level 2. The majority of the specified learners at this level, who followed the lessons, succeeded in improving one or more of the assessed areas.

We used a progress tracker to monitor progress against the Ascentis assessment criteria. These criteria not only included the format and conventions of writing emails but also the ability to follow task instructions as well as the accuracy and quality of the written content. Of the 15 specific learners whose initial starting points were analysed in terms of the above criteria, 12 made progress in at least one of these areas. 8 learners made progress in 3 or more areas which resulted in most of the learners being entered for their ESOL writing exams in May and June 2021. The learners who had engaged in the email activities were also more likely to be retained by the college and return to studies at college after lockdown ended.

One example of this progression was Learner F who, in the early stages of the year, tried to write an email using only the subject line. After some teacher support, they were able to write a longer message in the main part of the email.

08/09/20 – sent in subject line of email / don't know who from

Hi

08/09/20 – sent in subject line this time student adds name but in subject line

Hi nadine how are you Im xxxxx – (gives student name)

13/10/20 sent in subject line

Hi nadine I like going to the gym in my freetime can you com with me Re: Hello

However, after a number of months of the sessions the learner produced the following email:

20/04/21 in response to homework writing an email about a journey

Hi Ali

How are you my friend? I hope you are fine.I feel happy when I write to you .I writing this e mail to tell you about my journey to London.

To begin with.I would like to say that.

The trip was beautiful and I wish you were with me.the road was beautiful and the views were amazing.but the road was too long and tiring.

Finally,I hope you receive and read my email quickly. I wish that I could give you enough information about that subject.try to reply me as soon as you can.write to me about your news.

With my best wishes.

XXXX name given of learner

Improvement in the quality and length of written content can also be seen in non-email tasks. For example, a learner who was asked to describe a new colleague at work adopted the same format in paragraphing and organisation of content that was promoted in the email session (Figure 20a.3).
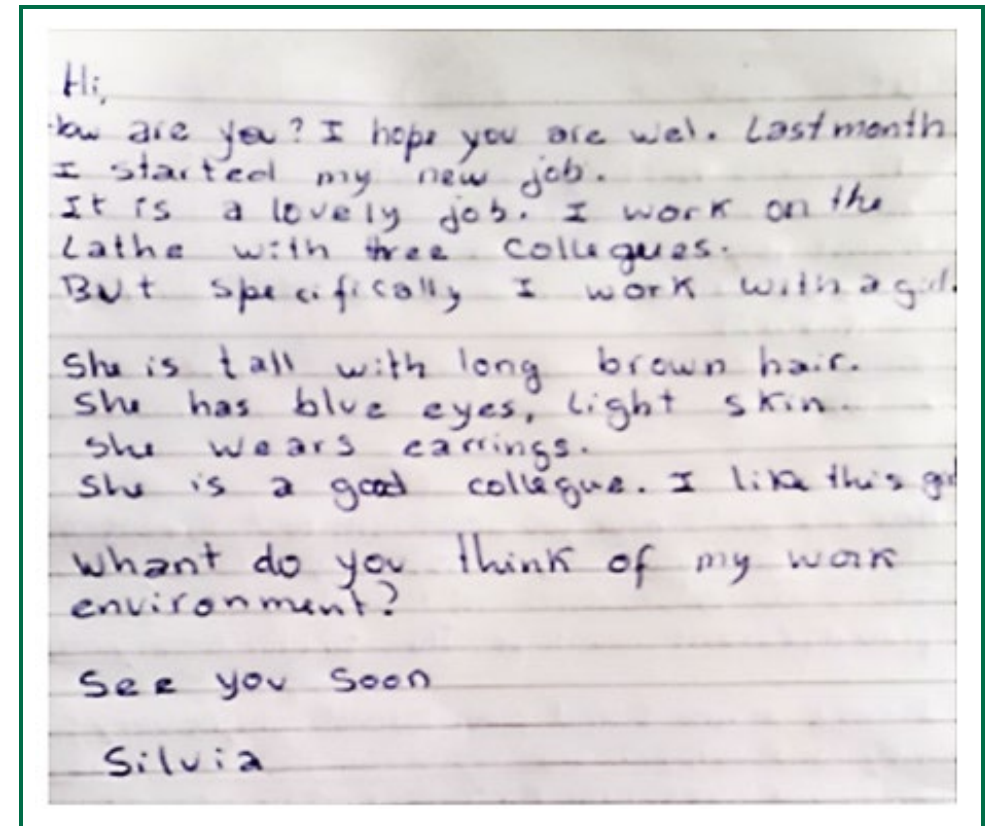
Figure 20a.3: By focusing on structure and form in electronic communications, learners developed transferrable skills, which led to simultaneous improvements in handwritten tasks.

The scaffolding of tasks supported learners to adopt the format of an email structure and content. For example, the colour coding email template (Figure 20a.4) was always shown to learners before they had to write their own email. It was found previously that learners would often write 'Hi' and

'How are you?' on the same line. Also, learners missed off any close and most often did not sign off with their name. The colour coding activity and exercises asking learners what goes in the first box and second box and final shorter line helped learners to achieve this.

Other learners show part progression of one skill such as the use of complex sentences.
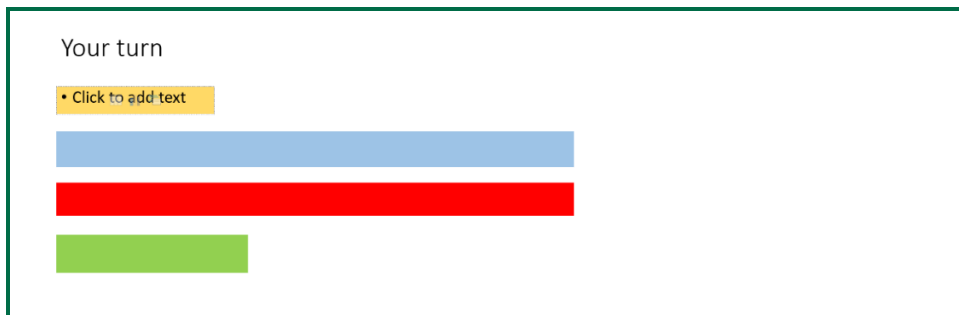
Figure 20a.4: Colour coded email template

Finally, learners themselves expressed that they now feel more confident in communicating via email. Their increased confidence is also evidenced by the fact that some now send emails on a very regular basis and there has been an increase in apologies for absence via email instead of phone calls.

This learner commented on the sessions being difficult but feels progress is being made:

'I still have diffculties but I am suceeding'

Another learner commented on the sessions being difficult but worthwhile. They also appreciated more individual contact with their teacher:

'I stil have difficulties but I am suceeding. This experience is helping me in writin and reading… to have communication with the teacher when reviewing and correcting the practices outside of class'.

Learning from this project

Throughout the project, our aim has been to promote and support diversity whilst ensuring that all learners can fully take part in their courses. Before the first lockdown many of our ESOL learners were disadvantaged by not having the digital skills or language needed to communicate via email.

Scaffolding activities and perseverance over time has resulted in more confident email users as highlighted in Figure 20a.5 below. Equipping learners with these language and basic email skills has also resulted in more confidence to engage with their ESOL sessions via email. One learner suggested that it got him to think more in English utilising more language skills more of the time and not only in class time:
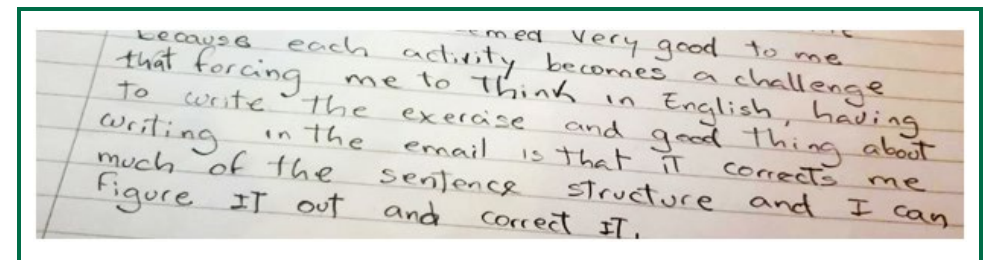
Figure 20a.5: Written feedback from a learner

Another learner spoke about how they utilised help from others and used Google translate to help them achieve the tasks. This shows how the learners have become determined to succeed in a task and feel able to independently achieve.

We have learnt that by equipping learners with these language and basic email skills, they gain the confidence needed to engage with their ESOL sessions via email. By integrating email communication into the class time and using it as a springboard into the session, learners are encouraged to refer to the email in class. This allows teachers to rectify any technical or language issues there and then, and learners agree that this allows more thinking time in English. Learners also feel valued and are more able to adopt the new language form or technical skill.

Similarly, strategies to optimise the use of class time, e.g. using email to flip learning and creating materials which maximise learning, have proved invaluable. For example, we used a colour coding strategy to reinforce the structure of emails, impacting learners' ability to develop their writing in the distinct topic-based paragraphs mentioned in previous section.

Communicating with the teacher via email was seen to be a very positive channel sought by many learners and feedback from the questionnaire showed over 80% felt happy or excited to just receive an email from their teacher. This channel has also motivated many to work harder to improve. In Figure 20a.6 we have an example of a string of emails written between the learner and teacher, which kept going until the work was correct. This also highlights how using email can be useful in building collaborative relationships with learners so that they see the teacher as supporting both their learning and independence in learning not just in class time.

Example 1: 1st March sent in response to session about writing about a new job and describing a new friend, st has not written about this but has produced a set one maybe used previously in class for a different topic.

Mr xxxx Hi how are you doing? I hope you are well. We are going to out the Hull we have a party this weekend on Monday at 2:00 pm . I'm happy to do be coming to my party this is the addresses Whitby YXXXXX. You making barbecue if you come in

Example 2: 1st March sent in subject line and with a main message asking if I had got the first message sent previously

Do you get my message let me know please

Example 3: 1st March – sent in subject line as teacher had not yet replied

I'm xxx teacher I send you my message if you get about my friend

Example 4: 1st March– sent in subject line again/ message cut short because in subject line

Mr xxxxxx Hi how are you doing? I hope you are well. We are going to out the Hull we have a party this weekend on Monday at 2:00 pm . I'm happy to do be coming to my party this is the addresses Whitby Yxxxxxx. You making barbecue if you come in

---

Example 5: 2nd March - after class and phone call and directing to question done in class

Hi

How are you ? I hope you are will .

Last week I started new job . I got a new friend at work . She's 21 years old and she has a short hair and black hair ,beautiful eyes .She live in the town nearly my house she live alone . She is from Poland . She has a nice car . She is student at Hull college . She go work after class. She is so cute and so friendly , helpful .I'm happy with her .

See you soon take easy all the best

Figure 20a.6: string of emails written between a learner and teacher

The timing of this project and coming through a second lockdown has highlighted the fact that the college system relies on learners being able to use email to communicate no matter what they are studying. In order to equip our future learners with these skills, the need for a new type of induction programme which allows ESOL learners to fully take part in college has now been recognised. Departmental action plans for next year include the introduction of a short IT course to be delivered to all ESOL learners prior to the courses commencing, so that learners have these skills before they start on their course.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-10/7-20a/**

20b. EXPLORING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING VOCABULARY RETENTION IN ESOL LEARNERS

New College Durham

Trauma can seriously affect memory, making the ability to learn a new language even more difficult. What can we do to help those affected? Our project looked at ways to reduce anxiety and strategies to help our ESOL learners remember how to use vocabulary confidently and accurately.

Summary

New College Durham is an FE college serving Durham city and the surrounding area. We offer a range of diverse courses including ESOL classes for adults and 16 to 18-year-olds.

We have noticed that many of the ESOL learners have problems retaining knowledge, often manifesting in poor retrieval of vocabulary or little progress being made in spelling work. Learners can become frustrated as they perceive their progress to be slow, and they are keen to move on to further study or employment but feel hindered by their poor language skills. This in turn can impact on confidence and self-esteem so it becomes more than just a language issue. Our project looked at strategies to aid retention and recall in conjunction with a selection of mindfulness strategies to improve language outcomes and learner confidence.

Rationale

Over the first national lock down, many ESOL staff attended CPD sessions run by the British Council looking at the effect of trauma on learning. (British Council, 2020). We know that trauma can have a negative impact on brain function (van der Kolk, 2014) and it follows that this can lead to poor learning outcomes for particular groups of learners.

A significant number of the learners we work with have experienced trauma of some kind. We work with both adult refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, many of whom have fled war.

We have seen groups of learners not making the progress we would expect, often regardless of their own educational background. This can lead to feelings of frustration for them, and a lowering of their self- esteem and confidence.

We felt inspired to explore this area and see if we could introduce strategies into our teaching to strengthen the learners' memory function, and thereby support them better in their learning journeys. Initially, we looked at general memory, but as the project progressed, we realised that this was too broad. We therefore narrowed it down to vocabulary retention with a particular emphasis on spelling, as we identified this as an area which most of the learners had weaknesses in.

Approach

Ready to learn

- Identified strategies to help learners feel safe and secure before starting the project. (Delaney, 2016)
- Worked with a mindfulness coach, conscious of the need to avoid adverse reactions amongst those who have experienced trauma.
- COVID-19 restrictions led to adapted approaches and staff selecting those they felt comfortable with.

How we learn

- Keen to encourage learners to learn more about how they learn/what works for them.
- We constructed a simple questionnaire which reflected on past learning experiences both successful and less so.
- Learners identified the ingredients of a successful learning experience for themselves. Staff reviewed this information to inform their approach.
- A similar questionnaire used at the end to explore their perceptions of vocabulary retention from both online and face-to-face classes.

Approach 1&2

- Entry Level 1 class focused on spelling and breaking words up in their constituent syllables.
- Pre-Entry Level class focused on spelling target vocabulary using the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method.

Other approaches

- The following strategies were also used to practise and reinforce new lexis.
- Using pictures to help remember difficult spellings e.g. apple
- Visualisation to help personalise the meaning of a word/concept.
- Recognition of words within words e.g. for got ten.
- Word patterns e.g. dropped , slipped.
- Choosing their own vocab lists.

Evaluation of progress

- Specific assessments were planned at key points in addition to weekly revision. Term 2 - summative assessment of vocabulary retention across both terms.
- Specific assessment criteria around vocabulary and spelling included.e.g. spelling accuracy, choice of vocab in context, range of vocab.
- A range of assessment activities - cloze, multiple choice, correct the spelling, free writing and speaking tasks.

Next steps

- Embed mindfulness strategies from the start of the new year
- Establish a departmental garden as a safe space
- Build in questionnaire and initial activities exploring personal vocabulary strategies into induction.
- Build vocabulary development and assessment in more systematically and link to building confidence and independence.

Figure 20b.1: Project approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

In response to guidance from experts in the field, the team has extended the already extensive pastoral offer to include mindfulness exercises for all learners. The welfare offer has been particularly important this year with the stress caused by the pandemic. Staff have become more confident at conducting mindfulness exercises and have forged a relationship with a mindfulness coach in order to practise this safely. Mindfulness exercises at the start of classes set the right tone for learning new vocabulary and focussing on spelling.

The project has provided the opportunity for the team to focus on trying out different strategies to teach spelling and vocabulary. We have had training as a team, and individuals have also worked on their own strategies, researching areas of interest as part of their CPD. Staff have used new approaches and have been open to new experiences and methods and this is something that we see continuing in the future. Staff got creative, using flashcards with home drawn pictures which they encouraged students to post around their homes to great effect. There is no conclusive evidence as to which approach was most successful, and learners seemed to prefer a variety. The key was to try out different approaches to find what worked for the teacher and the learners.

Over the lockdown period when classes were taught online, in contrast to the first lockdown classes from March 2020, the team maintained a focus on spelling and vocabulary in an attempt to continue with the progress made in this area.

Rather than adopt one practice activity we found that looking for opportunities to recycle in as many different ways as possible proved most effective. They were used both as assessment and practice activities, designed to focus on:

Spelling: spot the mistake, word jumbles

Meaning in context: choose the best word, cloze activities

Grammatical use: freer writing tasks

There has also been a more reflective approach taken to assessment, considering how we assess vocabulary across different levels. Should we use the same approach and criteria for Entry Level 1 and Level 1 or are different elements more important at different levels?

We found that a more mechanical approach worked better at lower levels, using scaffolded approaches like gap fill texts to help the students reproduce the required words.

At higher levels, a free writing approach worked well as it allowed us to assess the students' ability to select vocabulary to suit the context.

We have also found that, in addition to weekly spelling assessments, many of the practice activities we have been using provide learners with far more formative feedback helping them to explore their understanding and use of new items more fully.

Reviewing and questioning the effectiveness of our existing practice has proved stimulating and has given us the impetus to try out new things as we adapt our teaching to a more blended approach.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The biggest change to organisational practice has come about through the increased focus on welfare that we have. We have formed a relationship with a social enterprise in Durham, which has the aim of supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. As a result of the benefits we have seen from increased welfare focus, we have worked with the SLT to identify some space to start a gardening club.

The college is building raised beds and a paved area for the ESOL learners, and the social enterprise has provided us with seeds, tools and a mini greenhouse so that we can offer learners a chance to work outside and grow their own fruit and vegetables (see Figure 20b.2). This has proven benefits for positive mental health and by getting support from the college; the welfare element of what we do has been recognised and is being actively promoted.

The ESOL team has always had an ethos of sharing best practice, but this project has led to deeper reflections on teaching practice and more professional discussions within the team and a willingness among staff to try something new.

During the project, we used a recording sheet to track our activities. This was open to the whole team and could then be discussed at weekly team meetings. This proved to be very useful and generated more professional discussions and provided support even when we were not able to share physical space.

My little tomato is growing healthy. 🌱 🍅 It has enough water and sun. However, give me some more good advice, please. ♡

Figure 20b.2: Learner with his tomato plant

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The overall results from assessments in term 1 show an increase in achievement in spelling, writing and speaking outcomes. We used range and appropriacy of vocabulary as assessment criteria in written and spoken tests and spelling as an assessment criterion in written tests.

We saw a dip in achievement in term 2, following the period of lockdown. What is interesting is that learners were quite clear on why they were more likely to remember the meaning and spelling of words from term 1, and the meaning only of words from term 2 as can be seen in the results from the second questionnaire (Figure 20b.3).

I think from class better than online

Teacher explaining very good

I can remember words more and learn new words when I learn face to face

Is it easier to remember words from class or online classes?هل من الأسهل تذكر الكلمات من الفصل أو الدروس عبر الإنترنت؟
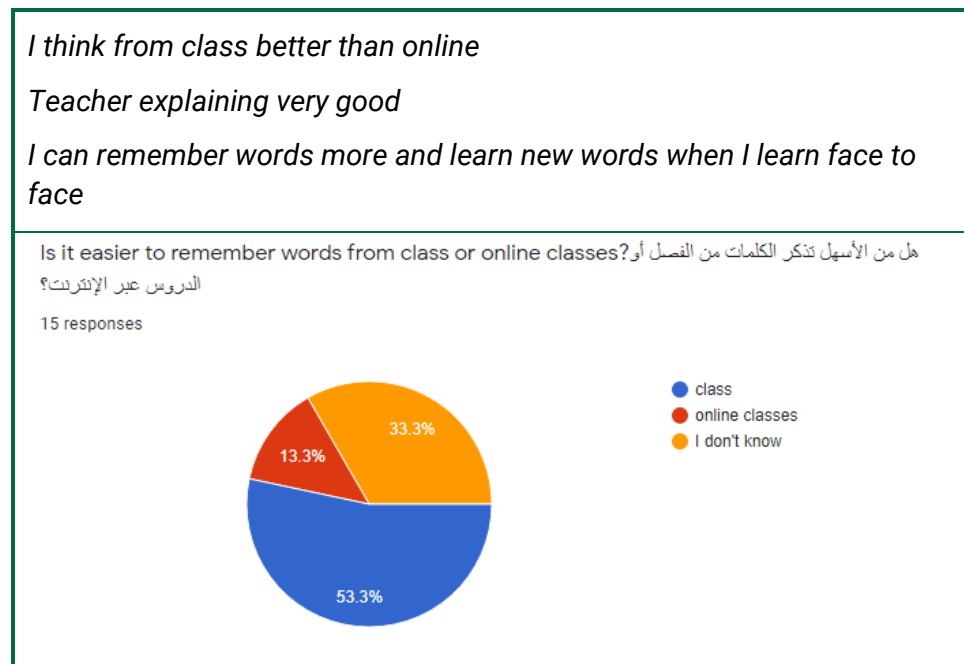
15 responses

Figure 20b.3: Questionnaire responses

It is also worth noting that we did not have the opportunity to carry on with mindfulness activities during lock down, and this might also have been a contributing factor to a dip in achievement.

However, we were able to see that those learners who carried on using the spelling strategies we used together in class during lock down still continued to make progress. Learner S for example has found 'breaking words down' a very useful strategy and has been enthused by the impact it has had on her progress (Figure 20b.4).
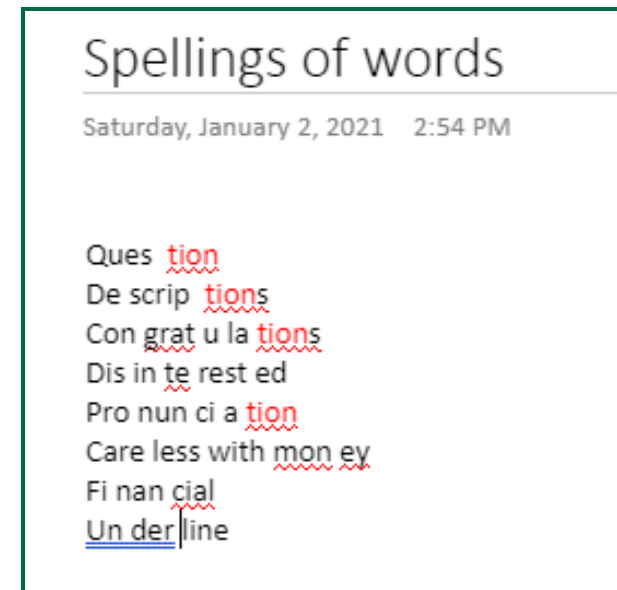
Figure 20b.4: Spelling strategy

Those learners who did not use the strategies made less progress and the progress was not secure, so they were unable to reproduce the words independently in a freer piece of writing as we can see in Learner Y's case study.

Attendance was 91% for term 1 (face to face) and 86% for term 2 (online) and this is also a possible contributing factor to the dip in achievement.

Learning from this project

Although the project took place in extremely challenging circumstances, and it may not be possible to say definitively what the impact of the lockdown was on the work we were doing, we are still comfortable with the following conclusions.

We can say that using a consistent and focused approach to learning vocabulary with built-in practice activities allows the learner the best chance to transfer the item from their short term to their long-term memory. Most approaches seemed to be successful, but learner buy in by way of them choosing the vocabulary items was really important. When that happens, the item can be retrieved even several months after learning. On the other hand, without focus and consistency, this does not seem to happen as easily, and learners are not as secure in their learning. It is interesting to note that 'look say cover write check' was found to be effective in the mechanics of writing the words, but not so much in the retrieval of the vocabulary item, so using it plus an approach focussed on meaning and context is more successful in helping the students to really know a word.

We also found that we had the best results when we were face to face with learners. We cannot say for certain, but it seems that the work we were doing on mindfulness allowed the learners to approach their learning in a more positive and relaxed frame of mind, which seemed to be better for learning to take place. This is corroborated by feedback from learners who told us that being in class focused their attention more and that they found learning vocabulary more difficult "when I think of a lot of thing" and "when we don't use it much in class". They also felt that the chance to "…practise in my class with my friends" was a key advantage of face-to-face sessions. With this in mind, we will be looking at how we can replicate the opportunity to explore the meaning and use of new words more collaboratively if we continue with a more blended offer.

Asking learners to reflect on their own learning experiences before asking them to choose a strategy to help them remember vocabulary more successfully proved effective in many cases with some learners like Learner S getting a great deal out of the experiment. Raising the learners' own awareness of how they learn, introducing them to strategies that might help them to move items into their long-term memory and then asking them to reflect on what worked well for them, reinforced the importance of learners taking more responsibility for their learning, in line with other college initiatives.

Finally, we learnt that no one is ever too old or has been teaching too long to try new things. Some of us felt a little ridiculous when we started introducing mindfulness activities into class, but the positive response we had quickly overcame any feelings of embarrassment, and we fully embraced the approach.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-10/7-20b/**

20c. LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: HELPING ESOL LEARNERS TO ACCESS REMOTE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Wakefield College

Our project is an exploration into overcoming language, digital skills and socio-economic barriers to increase engagement and success for ESOL learners in online and blended learning models, preparing learners to be successful and thrive in their lives in the UK.

Summary

Wakefield College is a large Further Education college offering a range of courses from Pre-Entry Level through to higher education and professional qualifications. The region has a high demand for ESOL provision and the college has a strong ESOL department which delivers qualifications from Pre-Entry to Level 1 to both full-time 16-to-18-year-old and part-time adult learners.

Our research project aimed to address the issues that ESOL learners were having with remote learning and explore how our teaching could be adapted to help learners successfully participate in a blended learning model. We discovered that all levels of learners are able to engage with online learning if it is approached in the right way. It has opened up a whole new world of possibilities, not just for learners but also for staff who have had to adapt and upskill to meet the needs of learners when remote or blended learning is required. Additionally, we have learnt the importance of accurately assessing both the digital skills of the learners, and the key vocabulary and language for digital skills, and that these are so intertwined they are almost impossible to separate.

Rationale

The movement to remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus for staff and students to develop skills and knowledge around technology at a rapid pace. For many students, this has created a new set of opportunities to study an agile, individualised and industry-informed curriculum that accelerates progress towards their chosen destination. This 'new normal' is an exciting approach for those working in the sector. However, we as a team have recognised that there is perhaps an inequality in accessing this approach for ESOL students.

Many of our ESOL students have found engaging with remote learning to be problematic due to language barriers affecting their ability to access unfamiliar technology and online platforms. Many of these have complicated set up processes which require an understanding of key terminology to proceed. This has hindered many ESOL students in fully engaging with the developed blended learning available. Our aim is to 'level the playing field'.

Approach

IA

- To reflect the wide variety of abilities in our classes we developed an Initial Assessment (IA) based on the ETF digital skills assessment
- Identified processes and language needed to access the digital tools
- Trialled different versions, methods of delivery to ensure that it was fit for purpose across all levels.
- The team then trialled different approaches to respond the IA results
- A log was kept, allowing staff to share ideas, ask for suggestions etc.

Approach 1: Virtual classroom	• To engage younger learners in remote learning we trialled the use of avatars in a virtual classroom. • The approach tried to replicate the classroom learning environment as closely as possible.
Approach 2: Interactive PowerPoints	• Used interactive PowerPoints with different levels and age groups. • Trialled as indepedent study modules and within online classes. • Reviewed results, reflected on how they work best e.g. work well as a continuation of the virtual classroom to support asynchronous learning. • Led to development of Language for Online Learning tool.
Other approaches: in response to IA results	• Team members explored the use of different approaches • Embedding digital skills & vocabulary in each lesson • Use of Teams & class notebook • Interactive games/worksheets/websites.
Evaluation of progress	• The team reflected upon and evaluated the usefulness of the resources and different approaches feeding back through out. • Adaptions were made e.g. IA redesigned on a number of occasions to effectively target the skills we needed to track. • Decided on next steps.
Next steps	• Use the lastest IA version at the beginning and end of the courses. • Embed digital skills throughout course to revisit previous learning. • Include digital induction in staff handbook. • Offer Digital Skills Introduction course to new learners.

Figure 20c.1: Project approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This research has had an impact on almost every part of the department's professional practice. The digital skills initial assessment (IA) can be used not only as an initial assessment tool but also as a way of measuring progress on the course. This will then inform further teaching, learning and assessment. The digital skills IA will be an important tool going forward as IT is embedded further within the provision. This will result in improved progression opportunities for our learners, both within college and into employment, and has already improved retention rates due to learners being able to continue studying with us even when they have moved out of the area.

Perhaps one of the biggest impacts that the research has had on the teaching staff is an increased awareness of the importance of continually challenging their own assumptions of the learners' capabilities. Angela commented:

> *"I made certain assumptions about how the students would be able to use these [interactive PowerPoints] not taking into account difficulties such as following links and navigating away from them, then not being able to get back in".*

This was a recurring theme throughout discussions and led to the re-evaluation of the IA and the creation of different formats.

Additionally, it was recognised that Pre-Entry students are equally as capable of learning online as Level 1 students when given the support required. AJ, a temporary agency staff member, said of the Language for Online Learning resource:

> *"[I] was so grateful to have it available as a resource at the time... I think even the Pre-Entry learners grasped most of it."*

Also, when a student is confident in using one type of technology, they often do not realise that these skills are transferable and are reluctant to try other platforms. This led to the creation of the 'how to' guides in the Language for Online Learning presentation, which can be used as both a pre-learning activity and as reference material throughout the course.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Collaboration has been important to the project from the beginning, as the whole teaching team were involved from the start. The staffroom, our usual area for collaboration, was out of use due to social distancing. Creating a shared document to interact with each other and discuss ideas, in addition to monthly meetings, was beneficial to collaboration and gave all members of the team a clear focus. Team members were able to record any issues they came across to be discussed and reviewed with the team. We were also able to interact with each other via the comments section to give advice/ideas. The shared document and meetings also enabled temporary members of staff and new members of the team to have input into the project and collaborate effectively. We also noted that shared documents encouraged informal interaction, characteristic of being together in a staffroom, in a digital setting. The example below is a screenshot taken from one of our collaborative documents, illustrating how the team were able to interact with one another as the project progressed.
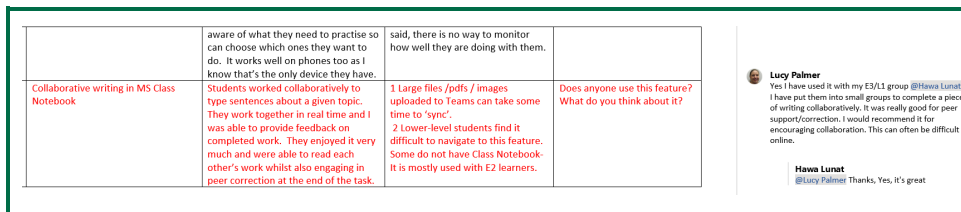
Figure 20c.2: Screenshot from collaborative document

Prior to monthly meetings, the shared document was updated with actions to be completed before the meeting to ensure that time was spent productively. Having a member of the teaching team as the Project Coordinator also proved to be an asset, keeping up communication and driving the project forward. The need for this role was not initially anticipated and not part of the original proposal; however, it is clear that the team valued a member of the team stepping up and resulted in the whole team taking active roles in the project.

A video is being developed to showcase what has been learnt during the project. The intention is to share the video with other curriculum areas across college to support their students who may be struggling with similar issues. The project has also been shared with the Senior Leadership Team who are keen to replicate the successes of the ESOL team throughout college.

It has been decided that the blended learning model will continue within the department when social distancing is over. Enabling our learners to improve their digital skills has an incredible impact both on their learning and personal development and it is important to continue building on this success. The blended model combines online lessons with face-to-face sessions and self-directed study to create a programme of learning tailored to the individual and harnessing the best of both approaches. The team are enthusiastic and excited about this opportunity to update their teaching practice to a model which is suitable for the 21st Century, a prospect that would have seemed unfeasible just 12 months ago.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

All staff undertaking the project have noticed the impact that this style of working has had on the individual learners. In particular, MB, a Pre-Entry student, illiterate in his first language, contacted his tutor at the start of the term asking for access to a computer to complete his studies. Receiving a college device and learning to use it has been life-changing for this learner. For example, according to his online maths teacher, in the first few lessons, he wasn't able to mute/turn on the camera/end the call or use the chat function. His maths teacher spoke to his ESOL teacher about this, and they agreed to do a video call so that she was able to demonstrate the features step by step.

The result was:

> *"twelve beaming faces on the screen, desperate to learn, and thrilled they were getting a chance".*

After this intervention, MB was a regular attender at his online maths class, and gradually became more and more confident with his digital skills. His teacher noticed that he was often on the phone a lot at the beginning and end of sessions and when asked about it he told him that, "he was helping other students to log on and take part". His tutor went on to say:

> *"his confidence has not only grown in his digital skills, but it seems to have really given him the boost that he needed, ...*
> *He is able to use, and explain to others how to use, a range of features in Teams, which enabled us to have some really productive lessons during lockdown 3".*

Utilising personalised learning has enabled MB to progress so much, in his own learning, and as a supporter of his peers too. As Wozniac (2020) states: "*Personalized learning can give each learner the opportunity to learn effectively and efficiently based on his or her own assets of skills, knowledge, and abilities, supporting a student-centered pedagogy."*

Another example of the power of personalised learning came from the use of the virtual classroom, in which avatars seemed to capture the interest and imagination of the younger learners, leading to increased engagement in activities, particularly when learners were given the opportunity to use their own avatars.
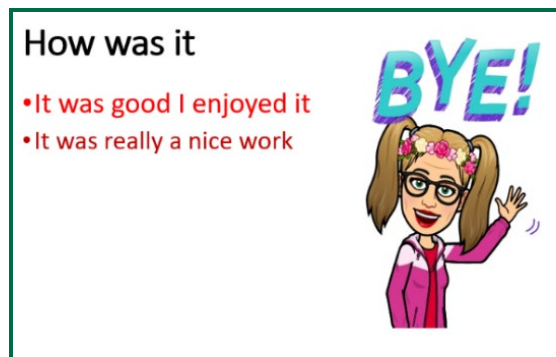
Figure 20c.3: Student PowerPoint slide using her own avatars

One student, MK, started to create her own PowerPoints in the same style as the interactive PowerPoints but using her own avatars to give the answers to the tasks set (Figure 20c.3).

A comparison of the IA results from the beginning to the end of the course highlighted increased confidence in digital skills for most learners (11 out of 14). However, we also noticed a significant drop in the use of certain keys such as shift and ampersand. We realised that perhaps some of the questions on the IA were not testing the skills as efficiently as we had hoped. This led to redesigning the IA to include specific questions to address these issues and increased the amount of vocabulary we wanted to check the comprehension of.

Feedback from teachers was that we needed to check comprehension of key terms and how to use them. As evidenced by the question in Figure 20c.4, we wanted to ensure that this tested their digital skills knowledge, and not just their English language skills or ability to use a translator.

Next year, we will be using this version at the beginning of the course and again at the end of the course, after the skills and vocabulary have been embedded throughout.
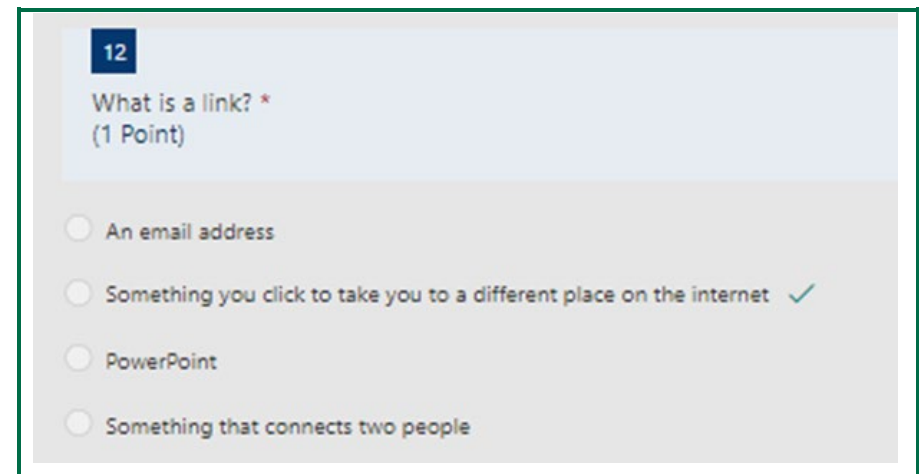
Figure 20c.4: Question testing comprehension of key terms

Learning from this project

Being able to provide some students with devices to learn online was a massive benefit, although the college does not have enough equipment for all learners at the present time. All students had access to a smartphone, and therefore resources needed to be accessible from a smartphone. Although not ideal, many students managed to continue their studies in this way. Additionally, if students gain confidence with embedded digital skills now, they will be able to access the IT facilities in the college library with increased ease in the future. Students will become more and more used to the processes until they become proficient.

Mostly, learners have responded well to being given more autonomy and independence in their learning. However, there still exists a mindset (especially with the young learners) that learning can only occur in a classroom where the teacher is delivering the lesson face to face. When asked for feedback on how to improve online lessons, one student, LK, expressed, *"They can't be. Online lessons are impractical in my opinion."* The same learner didn't value asynchronous online learning in the same way as synchronous online learning. Going forward, it may take some time for the blended learning approach to become the norm and for learners to meet the challenges of independence and autonomy that it requires. This has also challenged our assumptions that younger learners might adapt more naturally to online learning than adult learners.

Using a Microsoft Forms initial assessment gives a good indication of the digital skills a student already possesses, as well as checking comprehension of the key vocabulary needed for successful online learning. It also identifies any gaps in knowledge which need to be addressed before language learning can take place. It is quick and easy for teachers to administer and evaluate and straightforward for students, even at Pre-Entry Level. The IA has been designed to test whether a learner can use the relevant skills, providing a more accurate result than the student's self-assessment of what they think they can do.

The Language for Online Learning resource includes information which often needs revisiting, allowing learners to access the guidance whenever it is needed. It includes keywords, linked to a glossary, as well as how-to guides for accessing all platforms the learners need to be able to use to successfully engage in remote learning. As the resource is a large file, it cannot be sent to external email addresses easily. The resource can be broken down into smaller sections, to make it more accessible to the learner or kept whole and put in Teams as a reference material. There is flexibility for teachers to adapt it to meet the individual requirements of their learners.

One of the biggest take-aways from this project is a renewed passion for innovative and creative approaches to teaching and learning. We were not expecting this; however, having the freedom of the project to explore created a safety net against the perceived risks of creativity in our pedagogy. As busy teaching practitioners with conflicting demands, sometimes it is convenient to rely on tried and trusted methods. The project has forced us out of our comfort zone, and into our 'learning zone'. (Senninger, 2000) We are excited for the journey ahead, where we will continue with a blended learning model, not because we are forced to by the constraints of a pandemic, but because we want to and it is what is in the best interests of our students.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-10/7-20c/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 11

Mentor: Kirsty Powell

21a. Haringey Adult Learning Service
21b. Islington Adult Community Learning
22a. Macclesfield College
22b. Education and Training Collective

PHONICS / APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY FOR MATHS AND VOCATIONAL LEARNERS

Kirsty Powell (Mentor)

The teams at Haringey ALS, Islington ACL, Macclesfield College and Education and Training Collective were open-minded and worked creatively to find solutions to the problems they saw their learners having.

Haringey Adult Learning Service extended the work of their OTLA 6 project using phonics to support their English classes. All lessons were delivered online. They discovered how the use of audio and embedded phonics can help their ESOL and Functional Skills English learners to be more independent and make progress in reading and writing.

Islington Adult Community Learning have a new way of working which should lead to many more adults being able to read fluently and spell with confidence by the time they complete their courses. They tested the use of That Reading Thing, a linguistic phonics literacy intervention for teens and adults, in one-to-one sessions with Entry Level 2 literacy learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, both online and face to face. It demonstrated that adults with reading and spelling challenges made more progress using this approach than they would normally see in a group class context.

Macclesfield College gained new insights into the best ways to support learners studying Functional Skills maths and to raise their confidence, competence and achievement in this subject. They worked with learners to identify what presented the challenge and barriers when completing Functional Skills maths questions. They then developed strategies to overcome the barriers with learners and make these strategies available to a wider audience.

Education and Training Collective demonstrated the incredible progress learners can make with their reading and spelling when English and vocational teams work collaboratively. They built on work previously undertaken by English and maths teachers using phonics-based approaches to improve learners' English skills in OTLA 6 and extended their work to include vocational teachers and their learners. Vocational teachers at the college were introduced to phonics-based approaches and were encouraged and supported in using them to enhance their learners' vocational literacy.

Collaboration, amongst teachers and with learners, was at the heart of these projects and it was my great pleasure to work with the teams as they carried out their action research. Their determination to listen to their learners and make appropriate adjustments, to ensure the best possible learning experience in their organisations, was wonderful and will be of benefit to not only their learners, but to the wider sector. I hope that others will enjoy hearing about their work as much as I did.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-11/**
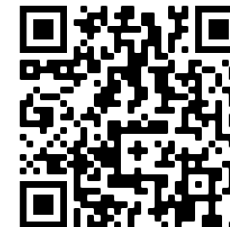
21a. USING AUDIO AND EMBEDDED PHONICS IN ONLINE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS AND ESOL CLASSES

Haringey Adult Learning Service

This project aimed to extend the work of our OTLA 6 project (HALS, 2020), using phonics to support our English classes. All lessons were delivered online. We found that ESOL learners and Functional Skills English learners benefitted from the use of audio and embedded phonics in the classroom.

Summary

Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) is a Local Authority service for learners aged 19+. The service runs programmes in the areas of Functional Skills, ESOL, Well-Being, Career Development and Family Learning. Since March 2020 all learning has taken place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All learning offered is mapped to the priorities of the Local Authority.

HALS took part in an OTLA 6 Post-16 Phonics project. The intent of the OTLA 7 project was to use audio as a key tool to further embed phonics into our Functional Skills English lessons and our ESOL spelling and grammar workshops.

It was also hoped that good practice in this project would be shared with a partnership organisation, Islington Adult and Community Learning Service.

The project lead (who also teaches Functional Skills English) collaborated in this research with an ESOL tutor and a volunteer who assists with ESOL lessons.

Rationale

Our OTLA 6 project utilised phonics approaches to address under-performance in our Functional Skills English lessons, and spelling, punctuation and grammar were identified as particular barriers to success. Designed to build confidence, study skills and grit in learners with low literacy levels, the project secured improved achievement and engagement. However, as the project was relatively time-limited, there were limitations on the number of tutors involved and, therefore, there was room for further development in terms of the impact across the service. However, an unanticipated finding was the high level of engagement, interest and achievement from ESOL learners and, therefore, we wanted to build on this and continue the good practice identified in OTLA 6.

COVID-19 has entrenched existing inequalities and created additional barriers for learners with low level literacy skills. Many of our learners, across Functional Skills English classes and ESOL classes, struggle with reading and spelling and also have poor digital skills. These difficulties can negatively impact many areas of their lives and can often be a barrier to passing their courses and progressing. These are the issues that we wanted to address.

Approach

The majority of the lessons were delivered online. This brought many challenges such as access to devices, connectivity issues and poor digital skills for the majority of the cohort. However, HALS started teaching online in March 2020, prior to the project starting, so tutors and some learners already had some experience of learning online.

Early on in the project we identified *The Drop-in Series* by Frances Woodward (2021), a set of decodable readers for adults, that formed the basis for the majority of the teaching and learning in ESOL lessons and some Entry Level lessons. These readers are very simple stories for adults which are usually used in structured and sequential phonics lessons but we found them useful in our embedded phonics and mixed-methods approaches.

They were used:

- in class to read for meaning and decode unfamiliar words
- for independent study to listen and track text and to underpin pronunciation for learners with additional primary languages
- as homework to write sentences using words from texts which all contained the same sound such as /ae/ in 'say', 'cake', 'table', 'pain' etc
- in subsequent lesson spelling tests based on words and sounds from text
- in ESOL lessons for writing stories inspired by the audio.

The use of audio was central to this. The readers were made into audio using PowerPoint and learners were asked to listen and read along with the text in their own time. This approach proved so popular that learners asked for it to be applied to other resources. For instance, the Entry level 2 spelling list was broken down into sections and audio was added.

Teachers used phonics approaches as a springboard for improved reading, spelling, writing, language acquisition and to achieve accreditation in Functional Skills English. The different approaches included One-to-Many word sorting and word stretching from Post-16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit (ETF, 2021b) and others that had been developed by HALS during OTLA Phase 6.

- One-to-Many word sorting activities were key. For example, after reading a text, learners would be tasked with finding all of the words containing the <ea> grapheme and sorting them into a table according to the sound they made in the word. This helped learners to notice the different sounds that are commonly spelled <ea> such as 'br**ea**d', 'gr**ea**t' and 'to r**ea**d'. This process was used for many other graphemes, including <ough>.
- Word-stretching activities helped learners to build their vocabulary and notice patterns for spelling. For example, 'fun' became 'funny' and then 'funniest' and 'dirt' became 'dirty' and then 'dirtiest'.

The English and ESOL teams worked together from the onset of the project to provide a two-pronged approach to delivering phonics. In English classes, phonics was embedded from the initial assessment stage and continued throughout the teaching of courses. A spelling diagnostic was introduced in the first week of teaching. It was a test based on 'difficult' words such as homophones and those containing digraphs or silent letters. Results of tests identified which graphemes to concentrate on.

Phonics was applied based on need and not imposed on learners who did not have spelling issues. To this end, flipped learning was used partially in lessons for some learners, whilst others concentrated on phonics spelling and reading strategies.

In ESOL lessons, a greater emphasis was put on pronunciation and reading fluency and the audio resources helped to model good practice in this. This was used in conjunction with resources to support the learning of spelling through phonics activities like sorting the various spellings of a sound. See Figure 21a.1 for our lesson on ways of spelling the sound /oe/.

Digital learning was embedded throughout, with learners expected to use links to websites, such as Edmodo, in their learning.

Learners enjoyed these activities and said they found them useful. The image below shows part of a lesson evaluation form.

ESOL SKILLS FOR LIFE AND WORK – ENTRY 3

Working with vocabulary lists – Learner Evaluation

Name: H

Date:21/9/2020

What did you like about the lesson?
The lesson guided me to understand better the words syllables .
Breaking dawn the words make it more easy to pronounce and spelling .

Sorting task

Look at the words in the box below (taken from the story). They all contain the long 'O' sound. Sort these words according to the spelling (for example- just o, o-e. ow and oa). The examples in blue have been done for you.

| 1) home | 2) road | 3) knows | 4) groans | 5) so | 6) Oh |
| 7) alone | 8) no | 8) COVID -19 | 9) whole | 10) boat | 11) grows |

-o-	o-e	-ow-	-oa-
so	home	knows	groans

Now write 3 sentences using some of the words from the box. Post your answers on Edmodo.

1.

2.

3.

Figure 21a.1: Phonics activity – sort by grapheme

A holistic approach was also taken in the English department where learners were encouraged to think not just of the sounds in a word, but also what the word meant, what its purpose was in the text, and also to think about how the spelling of a word impacts on its word class.

In class, phonics was delivered alongside grammar activities and other spelling strategies such as 'i before e' and 'silent letters'. Phonics was embedded into most lesson activities. For example, after reading through extracts or doing spelling tests, the teacher would always ask the learners what they noticed about the spelling patterns. In a lesson, where learners were practising writing out the numbers from one to ten, they said they found 'six' and 'ten' easy to spell (because they were phonetically predictable). They also noticed that 'five' and 'nine' both contained the /ie/ sound spelled using the split digraph <i-e>. Making these links aided their spelling. All learners said that 'eight' was the hardest to spell, but they recognised that it was a homophone with 'ate'. These strategies also served as a springboard to other things such as:

- enhanced digital literacy as learners were regularly asked to use emailed hyperlinks (for example)
- better grammatical awareness
- improved knowledge of homophones

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The teachers involved in the project have a better understanding of strategies that help their learners, particularly:

- who benefits from phonics approaches
- how phonics can be embedded in lessons
- the benefits of audio for language acquisition and spelling

In the process of the research project we also discovered the benefits of writing activities which are inspired by stories or things that are meaningful to the learners. You can see acrostic poems based on learner names in Figure 21a.2.

A poem
By NL

No matter what happens
I will never complain
No matter who stands on my way
A day always start again

Blessed and lucky

Enthusiastick to learn new things

Never stop is my motto

Easy-going and kind in my way

Do better is my creed

Energy and positive attitude

To think before to judge

Touchy and

Absent mind somethimes

1- Family - time - love.

2- Subject: Flogerta.

3- Life - children

3- Elegant - wealth. - flower.

Good plan!

Full of love.
Love family. favourite
Orchids my favorite flower. UK spelling - favourite
Games with my kids.
Elegant
Remember the positive things.
Time is wealth.
And live a life filled with love !
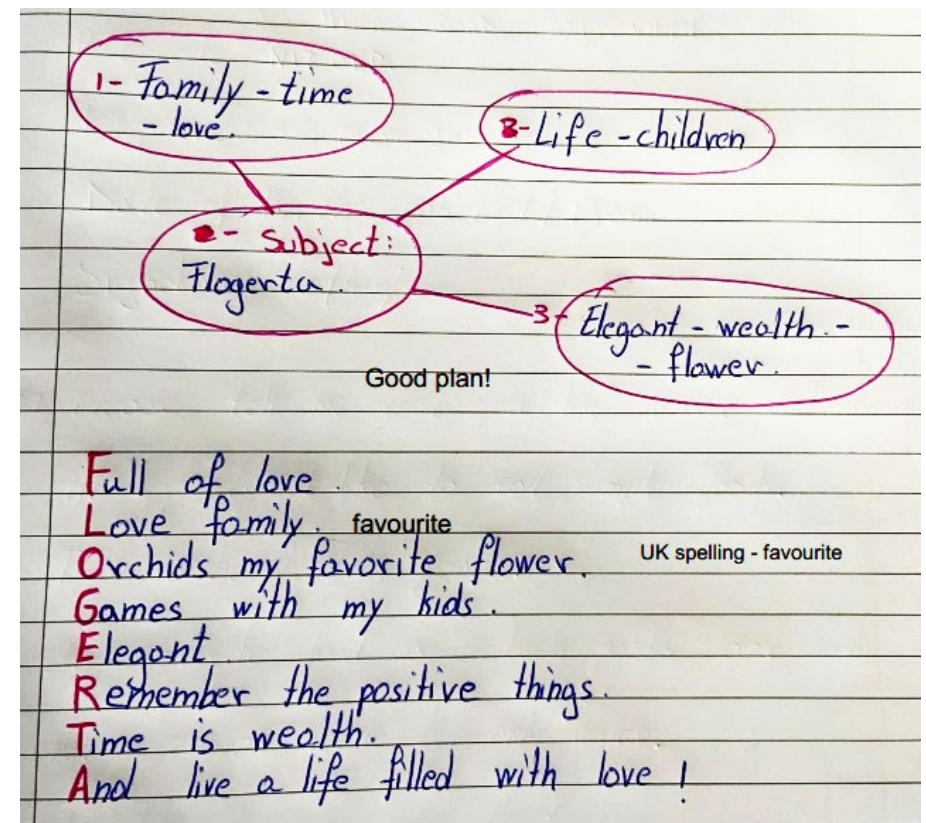
Just a simple man.
One it is love life.
who   loves
Stronger than a tree
Ethics and generous.

Figure 21a.2: Acrostic poems

The teachers also have a renewed understanding of the importance of adult learners having access to independent learning so they can learn at their own pace and access developmental resources. Digital resources (links to websites) and audio tools have been invaluable. These were discovered due to the sudden, necessary move to online learning but, nevertheless, they are learning points that we will carry forward even if we move back to face-to-face teaching.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The anticipated collaboration with Islington ACL did not take place due to the constraints of the pandemic. However, within our own organisation cross-curricula working between the ESOL and English departments did take place as a result of working on the project. This is a significantly positive outcome of the project because of the diverse backgrounds of learners attending courses. In essence, English classes are made up mainly of previous ESOL learners. In a class of 14 learners, it is not unusual to have 10 learners with a different primary language. Therefore, when effective collaboration takes place between the two departments, learners benefit from two distinct skill sets.

The project lead held regular monthly meetings to discuss the progress of the project and also delivered joint training sessions. Initially the training sessions were open to all staff. However, later training sessions were targeted at ESOL tutors. The reason for this was twofold: interest in the project from ESOL tutors was greater and the size of ESOL provision at HALS far exceeds the English provision and therefore the need was greater.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners were very enthusiastic about audio. They said:

> *"I can listen and practice when my children are in bed."*
>
> *"It helps me pronounce the words and then I can spell them."*

Three of the four learners in the Entry Level class had English as an additional language, so words had to be decoded. For example, in a lesson where we were looking at split digraphs, a learner questioning the meaning of the word 'fake' led to a discussion on 'fake news'. This showed how using a phonics approach to decode words can be empowering. The learner chose to use this word in a sentence and, although the spelling and word order is unclear, she felt confident enough to tackle the complex concept of 'fake news'. This is also a good example of how phonics works with an understanding of 'adult literacy as social practice' (Papen, 2005). The phonics activities led to real-world discussions, rather than just being spelling drill activities that learners may have found boring.

The audio Entry Level 2 spelling lists were divided into sections and turned into audio PowerPoints. The learners not only found the words easier to spell but, as context was added in the case of homophones, they also gained greater understanding of the meaning of words. The audio decodable readers were also used as writing prompts. The Entry Level 2 Functional Skills writing paper contains lots of instructions which learners felt overwhelmed by. They found it easier to write after using the decodable readers as a prompt. All learners achieved their Entry level 2 writing exam on their first attempt. Writing took place in every session using decodable readers with the result that learners were less intimidated by the writing exam. See Figure 21a.3 and 4 where the learner's fantastic progress over time is evident.
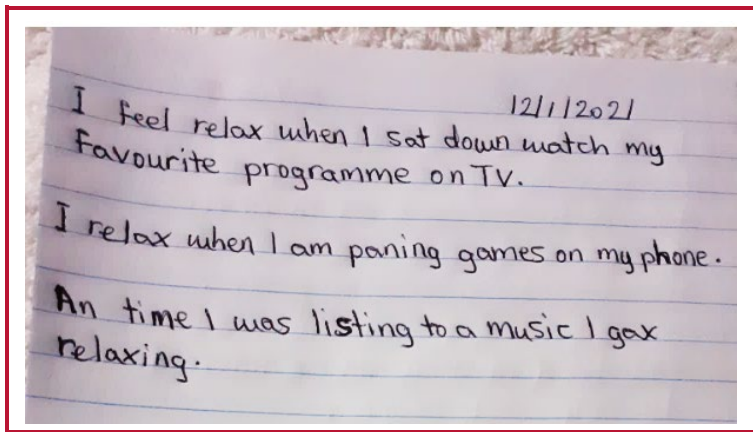
Figure 21a.3: A learner's work - beginning of year - Entry Level 2

Figure 21a.4: A learner's work - end of year - Entry Level 2

In English lessons, the use of phonics strategies was taught alongside word classes and learners were encouraged to think about a word's 'function' in a sentence. For instance, the words 'bought' and 'brought' both contain the same phoneme and grapheme <ough> but they are also both irregular verbs which added greater depth to the lesson.

ESOL learners found rhyme quite liberating because they were able to discover a wealth of new words which have the same sound at the end. Language acquisition was a key outcome from the project and increased confidence in learners' spoken as well as written abilities. An example of one learner's poem can be seen below.

Figure 21a.5: One learner's poem

Learning from this project

A key finding of the project is that phonics approaches, when delivered strategically, can have a very positive impact on learners' spelling, reading fluency and language acquisition.

Learners benefit greatly when phonics is embedded into their regular curriculum. Phonics delivery does more than just help learners spell words. This is crucial otherwise phonics can be imposed on learners that do not need it. This is also emphasised in the Post-16 Phonics Toolkit, (ETF 2019, p.15). Tutors need to see phonics as a valuable tool that can be used, as opposed to yet another subject to teach, (ETF 2019, p.13).

The sharing of phonics resources that work is important, as tutors may not have the time or the confidence to make their own. However, the biggest challenge is to find websites that refer to graphemes rather than letter names.

Two excellent resources for this are
https://www.clarospeakweb.com/phoneme/ and
https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english which includes both audio and video pronunciation from British English speakers.

Using audio as a teaching tool gives learners agency over their learning. It was initially thought that audio would be a good tool to use online as it provided repetition of sounds. However, it emerged that learners liked audio because it gave them greater access to learning.

Audio also helped learners with concept checking. Retention can be an issue with learners with low levels of literacy and they found audio PowerPoints could be listened to again to consolidate their learning.

Going forward, we will be consistently using audio and embedding phonics into our practice and we now have a bank of phonics resources and approaches that we can use. This will also be useful for personalising learning. For example, in the future we would feel comfortable knowing when certain resources and approaches may help address the challenges a particular learner has, even if they are studying Functional Skills Level 2, for example, rather than an Entry Level qualification.

As a result of the successful outcomes of the project, HALS have also now created a new course. It is a non-accredited course for people who have significant challenges with reading or spelling but have a good level of spoken English. The number of learners on the course doubled in the first six weeks and quickly reached capacity so we are hoping to be able to extend the provision to support even more learners in the future.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-11/7-21a/

21b. DID YOU FINISH THAT SANDWICH? USING STRUCTURED SEQUENTIAL PHONICS WITH ADULT LITERACY LEARNERS

Islington Adult Community Learning

This project tested the use of That Reading Thing (Millar, 2020), a linguistic phonics literacy intervention for teens and adults, in one-to-one sessions with Entry Level 2 literacy learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, both online and face to face. It demonstrated that adults with reading and spelling challenges made more progress using this approach than we would normally see in a group class context.

Summary

This project had an initial aim of developing a range of phonics-based resources using the ETF Phonics Toolkit (UCL/CCC, 2019) but the COVID-19 pandemic forced a re-evaluation both in the project and the way that we delivered the lessons for learners studying Functional Skills English at Entry Level 2.

I am a Curriculum Manager and literacy teacher at Islington Adult Community Learning, the adult learning department within Islington Council in London. We serve the multi-cultural inner London borough with a range of adult learning programmes including ESOL, English, Maths, Family Learning, Digital Skills and Employability. We have approximately 2000 enrolments per year and deliver with a range of partners and from a range of community venues throughout the borough.

I trialled the That Reading Thing (TRT) phonics programme initially face to face in one- to-one sessions with a number of my learners, all at Entry level 2, some with formal diagnoses of dyslexia but all with spelling challenges that seem to be consistent with what I recognise as dyslexia.

I had first encountered TRT at the launch of the ETF Phonics Toolkit but it didn't seem to be compatible with the class-based delivery model that most organisations use at Entry Level for literacy learners. The pandemic made it impossible to meet as a group so it was an ideal opportunity to trial using TRT and TST (the related spelling approach) with the appropriate learners.

Rationale

We wanted to support these learners to make progress with reading and spelling and to feel more confident in their abilities.

Many of our adult learners have significant literacy difficulties, such that their level of reading and spelling seriously impacts their everyday lives. Most of the learners I use TRT with had stronger reading than writing skills, and all avoided writing if they could help it. Some had created their own coping and masking strategies, for example using voice notes instead of WhatsApp.

We wanted to see how our learners progressed using TRT and TST in one-to-one sessions, in comparison to regular group classes.

It had long been a frustration as a teacher of Functional Skills Entry Level 2 classes that learners with spelling challenges (some with diagnosed dyslexia, some not) did not thrive in class settings. I have always taught in London and my classes were often a 50:50 split between learners that I think were dyslexic and second language learners who definitely were not.

The learners in most Entry Level 2 groups were all quite different in terms of their prior knowledge of phonics strategies for reading and spelling and therefore a completely phonics approach would not have been appropriate for the whole group, but I knew that for these dyslexic learners to make progress they would need some structured way of attacking spelling.

Spelling and reading improve at a similar rate during the early levels of TRT making the method suitable for these dyslexic learners.

Approach

The launch of the ETF Phonics Toolkit provided a clear structure for using phonics with our learners and TRT is underpinned by the same linguistic phonics principles. However, it was only when we were not allowed to meet as a group during the COVID-19 pandemic that I was able to put it into practice and see the progress that learners made.

My time with the learners using TRT was determined by the various lockdowns during 2020 and 2021. I first started using TRT in hourly one-to-one meetings in a community centre in Islington in October 2020. From the end of the Christmas term in December 2020 we were unable to meet in person. Of the group of six learners in this study four were able to get online and classes continued for them. The other two didn't have the skills or hardware to get online so I didn't meet them again until May 2021, although we stayed in touch using phone, SMS and WhatsApp.

Delivery of the sessions followed the TRT programme, albeit my learners needed a noticeably slower pace than the young people for whom it was developed. TRT is tightly structured so a learner takes in only a little of new information at each of the 30 levels and the words get a bit more complex with each level. The starting level includes multisyllabic words like 'upset', 'rapid' and 'fantastic' so adult learners do not feel patronised by the vocabulary.

The programme allows learners to progress as quickly as they can until they get stuck, then the teacher uses consistent prompts to help them become unstuck in that moment. The hope is that they internalise the prompt as a tool for reading and spelling unfamiliar words.

When we went online, I had to develop resources that could be shared on screen via Zoom but some of the activities were not possible (primarily using 'puzzle pieces' for the learners to build words) owing to software restrictions on our laptops. These kinaesthetic activities were certainly missed online but learners appreciated the opportunity to continue their studies even in this restricted form.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The takeaway for me as an Entry Level 2 literacy teacher has been unlearning everything I had been trying with these learners. No more clever mnemonics (which I now understand adds pressure to working memory), no more 'helpful' shortcuts to spelling. What made the biggest difference to my learners is adherence to the prompts thus ensuring learners were consistently practising saying the sounds associated with the graphemes they were seeing (for reading) and breaking words down into their component syllables and sounds for spelling.

I also learned the value of being consistent in asking learners to say the sounds and not letter names so that they stopped the habit of using only visual strategies and instead engaged both their ears and their eyes for spelling and reading.

Learners that previously had no real plan or tools to help them read or spell were now very quickly able to attack words and have a fighting chance of spelling them correctly, regardless of a word's length.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Our usual delivery model at this level is one or two classroom sessions per week with relatively small class sizes (10 typically) held in a community venue such as a library. We would usually follow the Functional Skills curriculum and I would normally do some class-based phonics but keep it very general as certain things would not be relevant to all learners in the group.

However, following the success of TRT I am proposing a change to the delivery model for Functional Skills Entry Level 1 and Entry Level 2.

We will now offer TRT one-to-one sessions for selected learners that have spelling challenges to run alongside the normal classes. We will fund these sessions as Additional Learning Support rather than teaching.

Two colleagues at Islington ACL have taken the TRT training course and see the value of the approach and are incorporating it in their practice. One colleague said they "found it easy to follow and probably, with a bit of practice, looks to be very effective". Another fed back that "even after one session, [their learners were] beginning to get it." One is incorporating phonological awareness activities alongside TRT due to her learners' needs.

I also delivered an online inset day session to the whole staff team which was well received and raised awareness of dyslexia and memory-friendly strategies to support spelling.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

TRT begins with an initial assessment to determine at what pace you should proceed through the course. It consists of three pages of word lists, increasing in complexity. There are 15 words on each page and the learner reads the words as the teacher records their responses, stopping if they make three errors in a row. None of my learners managed to continue beyond the first page. I re-did the assessment with all six of the learners some weeks into the course to check on their progress, because one learner still doubted whether he was getting better.

Figure 21b.1 shows the learners' progress using TRT. It struck me that when using my previous spelling strategies (such as words within words and mnemonics) I would not have seen such fast progress.

I noticed that the strategy most of these learners had when faced with spelling a new word was to look up and to the left, as if trying to 'see' the word or to create a blank canvas where the word may appear. All my learners have a bank of words they can spell depending on their

experiences. Most have family names they can rattle off easily, addresses, some learners that work have complex vocational vocabularies and some have words associated with hobbies or interests.

Learner	Date / session of 1st assessment	Number of words read correctly	Date / session of 2nd assessment	Number of words read correctly
M	23.11.20	7 out of 15	10.5.21 3rd session	15 out of 15 + 9 out of 15 on the 2nd page
P	12.2.21	6 out of 15	10.5.21 7th session	14 out of 15
C	16.3.21	2 out of 15	10.5.21 6th session	14 out of 15
B	23.10.20	7 out of 15	7.5.21 10th session	15 out of 15
E	9.11.20	1 out of 15	20.11.20 3rd session	10 out of 15
N	16.11.20	4 out of 15	7.5.21 10th session	13 out of 15

Figure 21b.1: Learner progress using TRT

Learner B knows how to spell the names of all the racecourses in the country but was delighted to find that the 'th' in Bath could help him spell Smithsonian (as in the museum!) I noticed that any words outside of their bank of familiar words were disconnected from the rest of the language. They had simply memorised strings of letter names. TRT starts to convert

the sounds they hear into letters and gives them a strategy to turn the squiggles on a page into sounds.

Learner	Description	Number of sessions	Comments
Learner B	Older, retired, male learner. Undiagnosed dyslexic. Has attended literacy classes previously at various times. Never writes, reads paper regularly for betting and news.	10 sessions	Always met face to face. Unable to get online between Christmas 2020 and May 2021.
Learner N	Female, not working. Home schooling her daughter for a period. Has been told previously she is dyslexic. Undertaking other courses and finds studying and writing a challenge.	10 sessions	Initially face to face, went online from February. Had a period in December and January when her housing was disrupted and unable to attend classes. Came back face to face in May 2021.

Figure 21b.2: Learner profiles.

Learner B said to me very early on in the classes that he didn't think he would ever be able to write a sentence. A few weeks later he wrote (and spelt perfectly) the sentence 'Did you finish that sandwich?' and included the question mark correctly. He was absolutely delighted, took a picture of the board to show his family and has agreed that I can buy him an exercise book so he can keep a weekly diary.

Learner N is doing a mentoring course and needs to write short essays. Her spelling is a challenge, but she also gets confused by full stops and capital letters and says that thinking about spelling and sentences means she gets everything confused. Her confidence in her spelling has now improved and, perhaps because this has freed up working memory, it has allowed her to work on her punctuation. She recently managed to correctly spell and punctuate the sentence 'I hate this job. I want to quit.' She is much more confident and says she is now able sometimes to help her Year 5 (aged 10) daughter with her homework.
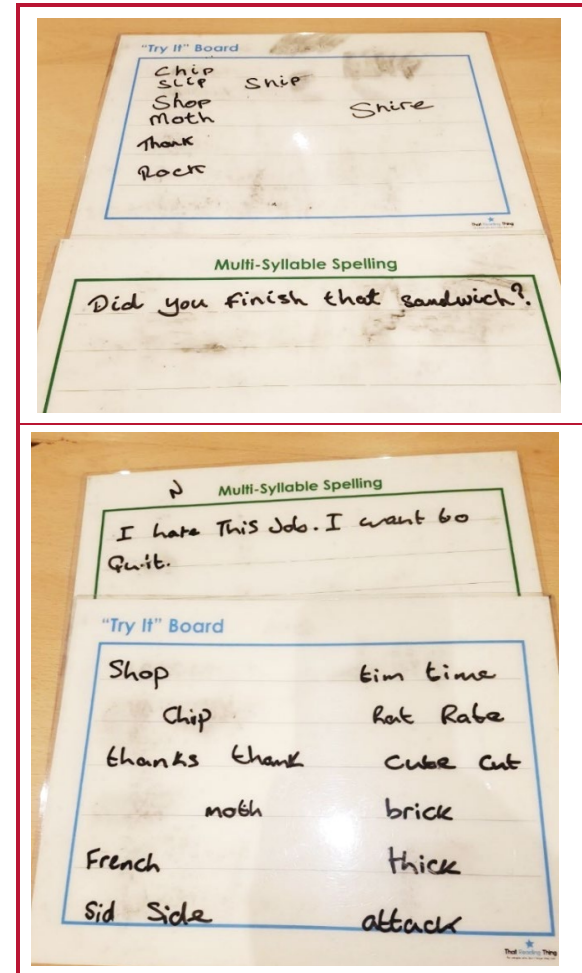
Figure 21b.3: Example sentences from Learner B and Learner N working at TRT Level 5, 'sh/ch/th'.

Two learners also sent me some text they had written, one for another course they were doing and one for a report at work. Both texts demonstrated some issues with grammar and punctuation that you might expect at Entry Level 2 but the spelling was excellent (see Figure 21b.4).

Learner N Writing

Sir Captain Tom.

I first heard of the war veteran on the news who had served in the British army in Indian and the Burma campaign during the second world war, on the run-up to his 100th birthday during the covid -19 the amazing Achievements by walking for the NHS and Raising 32,795,065 and received a knighthood from the Queen. you are an inspiration and inspire me and peoples all over the world thank you for all your hard work.

- received a knighthood
- mad honorary colonel of the British army
- raised millions for the NHS

Learner E work report

A disability customer came in with 2 carers. There were sitting down On the gym equipment. I approach the carers saying that they can't sit on the equipment because of the covid-19 and it says on the terms and conditions. he was arguing he didn't want to listen to what I will say. he said he want to speak to the manager and I said I am the manager but he still didn't want to listen to me. I took him to Megan and she told him about the terms and conditions and then he started to listen he went back to the gym and applied by the terms and conditions.

Figure21b.4: Learners' writing

I would also highlight learner M who had previously tried many times to improve her spelling with little success but had done so after only three hours with TRT. She has a long way to go but was encouraged by the improvement.

Learning from this project

I am completely converted to using TRT as a one-to-one tool to improve spelling at Entry Level 1 and 2. Alongside the usual literacy classes I think it will allow learners to address their main challenges and enable them to progress into better jobs, help their kids at school and make smarter choices in the betting shop. Adult literacy is about so much more than passing exams and these examples remind us of the importance of literacy for social inclusion.

I have certainly found that the pace I need to work at may be different with my older learners than the TRT programme recommends, but they need more recap and reassurance that they are improving. They would see more of a tangible improvement if they were also attending group classes at the same time because they would be putting their new skills into practice with peers.

The model of running one-to-one sessions alongside group classes is one that I will champion and look forward to monitoring next year. I certainly feel that these six learners I have worked with would struggle with the new Entry Level 2 Functional Skills spelling assessment without the intervention of TRT.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-11/7-21b/**

22a. INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES TO HELP LEARNERS SOLVE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS MATHS QUESTIONS

Macclesfield College

This project was designed to support learners studying Functional Skills maths and to raise their confidence, competence and achievement in this subject. The aims of the project were to:

1. **Work with the learners to identify what presented the challenge and barriers when completing Functional Skills maths questions.**
2. **Develop strategies to overcome the barriers with the learners and make these strategies available to a wider audience.**

Summary

The project, which focused on language barriers in Functional Skills maths, was delivered by Macclesfield College. Macclesfield College is a provider of Further Education, Higher Education and skills training; serving the Cheshire East area and beyond. The project was led by the head of maths and English with involvement from the Functional Skills maths teacher, GCSE teachers and the one-to-one intervention teacher.

One-to-one sessions were delivered to learners over a period of six weeks. These revealed common areas of concern amongst learners. Over the course of the six weeks a range of strategies were trialled and developed with the learners and those with the most impact were then used in classes. The project reported an increase in confidence among the learners who adopted the strategies and a positive response from the teachers involved. In the majority of cases, there was an increase in achievement rates for those learners using the strategies.

Rationale

The reform of Functional Skills mathematics has brought an additional challenge to the qualification. Questions in Functional Skills require a good command of the English language, even more so since the reform. Many learners struggle with reading the question and decoding a mathematical operation embedded within the question.

In house self-assessment and review identified achievement in Level 1 Functional Skills maths as an area for improvement. Despite good and outstanding teaching and a robust planning and assessment cycle, learners were not succeeding at the desired rates. This project was identified as an opportunity to explore the reasons behind this lack of success.

The aim of the project was to give an insight into how learners perceive questions, identify the real barriers to achievement and develop tools to overcome them.

It was hoped there would be a positive effect on the learners taking part in the study and that they would gain confidence and realise their mathematical knowledge is not necessarily their stumbling block.

We aimed to offer them a variety of support approaches to help them to move forward. Support would be personalised and could be either focused around maths, reading or comprehension (or a mixture of all three).

Approach

- We began the project by asking learners to complete a questionnaire that examined their views on maths and what they found challenging about the Functional Skills exam. The results of the questionnaire were useful and identified a common concern amongst all learners. Word problems seemed to be the issue, with all learners identifying word problems as one of the areas that caused them problems at school or, in a previous year, at college.
- Learners identified that the number of words in a question is a barrier to them so a way of breaking a question down would be useful.

- Initial questioning was followed by a session that explored strategies with the learners. The questions given in each session were similar, to allow learners to get to grips with the strategies. Learners explained what they had difficulty with and collaborated with the project lead to develop strategies that would help them.

- The project lead and learners studied a variety of mechanisms designed to make the question more accessible. These included: highlighting, annotating, drawing images, storyboarding, posing questions, breaking a question into parts / steps, ticking off elements as they were completed. Learners were provided with pens and highlighters as appropriate.

- These mechanisms and strategies were trialled in subsequent weeks. Initially these sessions were face to face but, due to the effects of COVID-19, some sessions were delivered using Zoom or MS teams. Learners were able to explore all the strategies but, in every case, certain strategies were proving most popular. Learners seemed to prefer the strategies of underlining key information and ticking off elements as they were completed. Additionally, using diagrams to represent time also supported learners in adding amounts of time (see Figure 22a.1).

- Over the subsequent sessions these strategies were refined, working closely with the learners to ensure they got maximum benefit from using them.

- Learners were given a set of two questions each lesson and asked to recall the strategies. Once they had recalled them, they were asked to highlight what they thought was important in the question. As they completed parts of the question, some learners needed to be reminded at every step of the problem to tick elements off, other learners were competent to do this independently.

- An additional session was included that took out the language/ words to allow learners to focus solely on the maths. This was added in response to learner feedback.

- An exit questionnaire captured learners' feelings and views after the intervention.

Figure 22a.1: Using diagrams to represent time

- The same process was followed with a small group to examine the effect of the strategies within a group situation.
- The project lead then demonstrated the strategies in several classes. The class teacher was able to continue to utilise the strategies and techniques.
- The strategies were also employed in one-to-one sessions.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The process of completing the action research has had a notable effect on the teaching, learning and assessment practices of all members of the team. By working collaboratively with learners, the strategies developed had a much more impactful result, as the learners themselves were able to articulate what it was they needed and select from a suite of mechanisms and strategies that they could trial themselves.

The feedback from learners was extremely positive and, because they were involved in the process and had ownership of the strategies, they were much more engaged. This sensitivity to capturing authentic learner voice and being influenced by it has been a strength of the project and something that will be further developed within the department.

The project lead, having a science and maths background, was very outcome focused and wanted to know the reasons why the strategies worked. Initially the project lead wanted all findings to be proven and to include control groups. This tightly controlled approach was supressing the natural evolution of the project and restricting the action research, which is a valuable process in its own right because teachers and learners are given more ownership and encouraged to be responsive in terms of what is making a difference for them.

Working with a mentor allowed the project lead to be more reflective and this created opportunities that may have been missed had they taken the purely scientific route.

The benefits of following an action research model have allowed the project lead, an experienced maths teacher, to be open to trying new ideas and working more collaboratively with learners.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project lead is also the head of department and is used to observing colleagues as part of their role. The action research model allowed the project lead to work more collaboratively with staff and demonstrate the strategies to classes. This was a valuable way of working and one that the department will adopt as a positive way of working together. This peer-to-peer delivery allowed the class teacher to see the strategies working in his own classroom. Seeing his learners react so positively to the strategies has encouraged him to adopt them in all lessons. In a similar way, the one-to-one teacher was also able to observe and then adopt the strategies.

Seeing how enthused both the project lead and the learners were was infectious and motivated other members of staff to buy in to the project.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learner feedback was positive throughout the project with learners completing the six-week one-to-one programme commenting as follows:

"I used to feel quite lost but now I actually do understand [Functional Skills maths questions]. I feel that if I saw them in an exam, I would get the answer; whereas before I didn't." (DS)

"Underlining helps me see the maths and ticking helps me break it down – it's not such a big issue for me" (PL)

Learners stated they had increased confidence in topics they previously couldn't answer. In PL's final session she said:

> *"When I went to my lesson last week, I didn't even ask for help. I was doing my ticking. I got all of them right. I didn't need to ask for help but I do still need a bit of reassurance." (PL)*

She was working on percentages which was a topic she mentioned as one that challenged her.

Learners who experienced the strategies in the class situation were equally as positive:

> *"Ticking off helps you know what you've done - you don't add things twice" (CP)*

They feel that their knowledge will go with them into the exam:

> *"I feel like I won't feel nervous when I go into the exam – I feel like I've done a lot more questions." (DS)*

This learner was originally referred to the project as they were struggling to pass. After the six sessions, they passed their Functional Skills exam.

One learner in a classroom setting really identified exactly why the strategies helped him.

> *"[It] simplifies the question – turns it into maths instead of English in my head. So many words – for me I need to turn the words into maths – this really helps. Ticking stops you forgetting – I can say to myself - hold up a second have I done this bit?" (OK)*

The strategies were demonstrated to two classes and, interestingly, the learners were more responsive in the class where the project lead had previously taught several learners. The learners who had not met the project lead before were more discriminating of the strategies but ultimately saw their value.

For some learners the strategies gave them a focus, something to work towards. The strategies broke the problem down:

> *"The method helps – it makes sense – stops you doing it twice. Plus, it's a relief you've done it." (KM)*

The majority of learners increased their scores and went on to pass the Functional Skills exam. Some learners had been failing repeatedly so this was a milestone for them in their college life.

The learners were enthusiastic about their one-to-one sessions and could see the value of the project. There was only one instance of absence over thirty-six sessions and the learner was quick to rearrange a new session. One learner admitted they had not wanted to pass as they were scared of going onto GCSE and the challenge increasing further. Having passed their Functional Skills Level 1 exam after two years of trying, they are now working with their class teacher on GCSE concepts and have said:

> *"I'm going to give it a go and smash it." (CH)*

The learners also began in a small way to start to see the need for the words in the question. The class teacher worked closely with learners to explain the need for contextualisation within the question:

> *"The response after they've answered the question is that it was a lot easier than they thought and why do they have to use so many words. I've always explained that that's how maths is in real life; rather than just being asked what 15x24 is, it might be there are 24 plants in a row and 15 rows so how many plants are there altogether?" (MW)*

Learning from this project

The strategies and mechanisms were successful because they came from the learners. The project lead and teachers involved acted as facilitators to enable the learners to recognise what they found difficult and what would help them. As they were so heavily involved, this had the greatest benefit. Teachers as professionals naturally want to 'teach', but in this process, the teacher needs to facilitate, coach and enable.

Teachers involved in the project not only utilised the strategies but, in some cases, further developed them in collaboration with learners:

> *"I've tried to get them to not skip the long-worded questions that they see as difficult by covering up the question with a mini whiteboard and then revealing the question line by line (less daunting) and then underlining the key information as you did. Then exactly as you did it, write down the maths to be done, do the maths and then tick off the parts of the question answered afterwards."*

The one-to-one teacher observed a definite increase in confidence but highlighted the fact that the strategies are a tool. Without a fundamental knowledge of the core concepts the question is still insurmountable.

> *"It seems that when the students are focussing on the key information, they are more able to break it down into manageable steps rather than if they just take the question as a whole. Using this method appears to give them more confidence as, to them, they're making the question easier in a way. Although some students can underline the key information, it still doesn't help them as their conceptual knowledge is weak e.g., adding side lengths to find area. As long as they have a sufficient understanding of how to 'do the maths' then using this method seems to help answer longer and more confusing worded questions."*

The project was a success because those taking part were able to be sensitive to learner voice and there was a real emphasis on digging deep to discover what the learners needed rather than having a pre-conceived recipe for success.

Our aim was to discover where the barriers were in answering Functional Skills maths questions and to develop strategies to overcome those barriers. We have not only found ways of doing this but have also given the learners increased confidence and resilience when tackling Functional Skills questions.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-11/7-22a/**

22b. PHONICS IN THE VOCATIONAL CLASSROOM
Education and Training Collective

This project builds on work previously undertaken by English and maths teachers using phonics-based approaches to improve learners' English skills in OTLA Phase 6 (ETF, 2020a). We extended our work to include vocational teachers and their learners. Vocational teachers at the college were introduced to phonics-based approaches and encouraged and supported in using them to enhance their learners' vocational literacy.

Summary

Redcar and Cleveland College, part of the Education Training Collective Group, operates in an area of social deprivation with lower-than-average academic performance. Our learners, like many FE learners, struggle with literacy which frequently inhibits progress in their subject specialist area. Additionally, learners often have low self-esteem, a history of underachievement and many barriers to learning.

This report discusses approaches the project team used to build on previous work, extending the project to vocational teachers seeking to improve their learners' vocational literacy. The English team worked with vocational teachers enabling them to gain skills, knowledge and understanding of phonics-based approaches to use with their learners to enhance, not only their literacy skills but, importantly, their confidence and self-belief.

As a result of the project, vocational teachers introduced phonics-based approaches into their teaching practice, leading to improved learner performance. Additionally, they extended their own skills and confidence in embedding literacy practices.

Rationale

Our intention was to address several significant issues:

- As one vocational teacher stated; "poor English skills is the biggest barrier holding our learners back". Therefore, we wanted to enhance vocational learners' literacy skills and limited confidence through introducing phonics-based approaches. Many of these learners have poor attendance at English sessions, are reluctant to engage in activities and sometimes display inappropriate behaviour. They often fail to understand the relevance of good literacy skills and over-rely on teachers or Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). They are generally reluctant to use vocational terminology both orally and, especially, in written work, which further inhibits progress.

- We were aware that many vocational teachers lack confidence, not only in supporting their learners' literacy skills, but in their own literacy abilities. By introducing them to phonics-based principles and practices, and supporting them throughout the project, we intended to enable them to confidently embed literacy into their teaching so they could support learners more effectively and improve their practice.

- Through encouraging and supporting increased collaboration between the English and vocational teams, we intended to ensure learning was relevant to learners' needs, whilst strengthening relationships between the teams which would be mutually beneficial.

- Lastly, partaking in the project would support the team's personal and professional development, encouraging them to recognise and undertake educational research as part of their everyday teaching.

Approach

- We followed an Action Research process (McNiff, 2017):
- We reviewed learning from OTLA 6 (ETF, 2020a), selecting a project team of English teachers and vocational teachers from Early Years, Hair and Beauty and Sports Studies. We later included Foundation Learning and the English Progress Coach, as engagement from some vocational teachers was limited.
- An external expert, Tricia Millar, provided specialist training, introducing vocational teachers to phonics-based approaches and their potential for improving learners' literacy. Tricia provided support throughout the project.
- Vocational teachers then observed experienced English teachers using phonics-based activities. This was reinforced by a buddying system with English teachers continuing to support vocational colleagues.
- Vocational teachers gradually introduced phonics-based activities into their classrooms, often with the English teacher present to support them. Shared observations and meetings continued with vocational teachers gradually gaining confidence.
- Activities were multi-sensory: Words were broken into syllables, with learners encouraged to say them aloud. Learners next wrote the syllables onto individual whiteboards in separate word boxes of one grapheme per box, pronouncing the sounds as they wrote, aiding

recognition of grapheme-sound relationships. They were encouraged to identify parts of the words spelled correctly, building confidence with the realisation they perhaps only needed to improve limited areas. We saw recognising success and building confidence as crucial in motivating learners to continue with the activities.

Activity: Word stretching

Word stretching activity: write each grapheme /d/e/n/t/i/s/t/ on a separate small sticky note. Give a set to each learner or pair of learners. Ask them to build the word 'den'.

Change den to dent; change dent to dents; change dents to dentist – think about the sounds as you're moving the sticky notes around. It works best if learners are saying the sounds as they're working. Have them write each word after they've built it. How would they write 'dentists'?

You can do this type of activity very early on with emergent readers and writers using graphemes and phonemes to build familiar words.

How many words can you make with these 8 sticky notes?

den, dent, dents, dentist, dentists
end, ends, send, sends, sent
net, nest, test, tent, tents, tests, nests, nets
tin, tint, stint, stints, tints, tins

> **Note:** double letters like zz, ll, and ss each go on one sticky note rather than two because they are each a single grapheme.

qu also goes on one sticky note even though it represents two sounds.

Figure 22b.1: Word stretching activity

g	ar	d	e
n	t	r	ow
el	f	er	ti
l	is	al	ci
i	c	o	m
p	o	st	ar
s	a	v	b
b	e	c	ue
able	d	b	i

Figure 22b.2: Grapheme tiles

- Grapheme tiles and sticky notes were used to support word building. Learners moved the tiles to form whole words which reinforced grapheme-sound relationships. Picture matching activities enabled learners to understand the meaning of words as well their spelling and pronunciation. Exit tickets and learner interviews were used to gain learner feedback.
- New words were slowly introduced with teachers linking new to previous learning. Learners began to recognise spelling patterns, letter sequences and useful prefixes and suffixes, using examples from the Phonics Toolkit (ETF, 2019) as a model. They were also encouraged to keep personal glossaries of key words appropriate to their learning.
- Teachers kept reflective journals to review progress and regularly assessed learners' work to gauge progress.
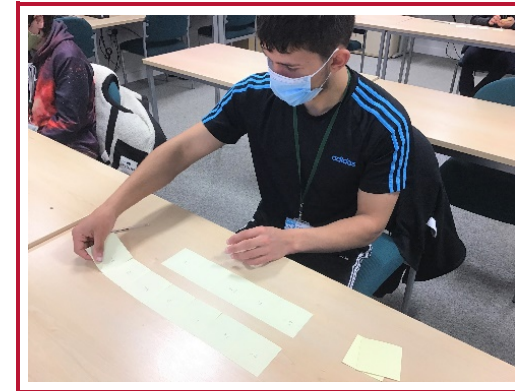
Exit ticket

What I learnt from this activity

....

What I did not understand:

....

What I need to know:

....

Figure 22b.3: Exit Ticket

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Most of the vocational teachers were unfamiliar with phonics-based approaches, not having encountered them in their education or teacher training. They initially struggled but appreciated the specialist training and ongoing support they received. They admitted to making a slow start but grew in confidence using the strategies more frequently as an integral part of their teaching sessions. As one teacher stated; "it's good to go out of your comfort zone and be open to new learning". This positive attitude is an essential element of continuing professional development and one the project management team sought to foster.

Several teachers indicated learning new approaches gave them deeper insights into learners' feelings when confronted with new and challenging material and activities, as this was exactly what they were having to do. They were increasingly aware of the importance of avoiding cognitive overload (Sweller, 2010) and gradually building learners' knowledge and understanding to reinforce learning. This has increased teachers' knowledge of their own and learners' learning processes.

The majority felt using phonics-based strategies should be part of every teacher's practice and appreciated the value of taking time to work on spelling and reading issues, rather than pressing on and largely ignoring the problem, hoping the English team would address it later. This meant they no longer saw teaching of spelling, reading and writing as stand-alone activities or the responsibility of the English team, but as worth integrating into their sessions to promote learners' vocational literacy development. One teacher, in particular, stated he had improved his pronunciation of vocational terms, making the sounds clearer to learners, which helped their spelling.

Teachers believed they had increasing confidence and enthusiasm for teaching, taking part in a research project gave time and space for reflecting on practice and identifying future actions. Additionally, they developed toolkits for supporting learners, actively seeking and listening to their feedback which improved working relationships, increasing learner involvement in the project.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

In the hectic world of FE, it is often challenging for colleagues from different teams to meet and work together effectively. Striving to build collaboration and open up channels of communication was a major aim of this project.

English team members, experienced in using phonics-based approaches, provided ongoing support to colleagues. Following initial phonics training, they invited vocational colleagues to visit their classrooms to observe how they embedded phonics activities. They met regularly with vocational teachers, providing advice and guidance. Additionally, English teachers have visited vocational teachers' classrooms to both observe their phonics practice and support learning, which has been mutually beneficial.

This shared practice, although time-consuming, has been integral to the success of the project, enabling vocational teachers to grow in confidence whilst still having support at hand when necessary. Significantly, the process has not been one-sided, as both English and vocational teachers have encountered new teaching strategies and classroom management approaches, gaining insights into how learners can be effectively supported. Learners, too, loved seeing their vocational teachers taking on the role of student. This was particularly apparent when Natalie (Project Lead) worked with Lee, demonstrating phonics approaches while he looked on and adopted the learner role.

Team members engaged in both sharing and developing resources and reflective activities, further increasing their professional development and mutual respect. Teaching sessions were planned to reinforce learning, with learners actively encouraged to recall their phonics learning from previous sessions. Team members have become working colleagues, gaining

valuable insight into challenges each team faces and how these could be overcome.

The team worked closely with LSAs and Progress Coaches who reinforced individual learning, providing any necessary ongoing support. The team valued this, recognising the importance of teachers and LSAs working effectively, thus consolidating work from our previous OTLA 3 project (ETF, 2018a).

Without this active collaboration, continuing support and ongoing encouragement from the English team it is unlikely vocational teachers would have engaged so actively in the project.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

As in our OTLA 6 project, there was concern vocational learners may be unwilling to engage with phonics. Many learners had previously openly expressed their dislike of English and reluctance to attend sessions. The majority lack self-confidence, have had chequered educational histories and many barriers to learning. Aaron, for example, was quite open in stating that he initially hated English and would leave sessions if he thought the work was too hard for him. He is now one of our shining stars, gaining many skills and qualifications and is only too willing to share his learning and enthusiasm for English with others.

Figure 22b.4: Kirsty's Talent for Writing award

Another major success story belongs to Kirsty who has undergone a transformation since coming to college. She initially lacked self-belief, was withdrawn, extremely anxious and reluctant to put pen to paper. After working with phonics-based approaches over the last two years, and receiving support, she is hardly recognisable as the same individual. She has grown in confidence, actively contributes to lessons and, above all, enjoys her literacy work. So much so that she has

now won a national Talent for Writing Award and her work is to be published in a Young Writers' Anthology.

Learners generally enjoyed the activities provided and now see them as an integral and important part of vocational sessions. Foundation Learners, for example, have demanded more challenging work from their teacher, a very different attitude from the beginning of the project. Early Years learners have shared their new learning with colleagues in placement, enjoying being able to demonstrate their enhanced understanding of phonics. They too asked for more information resulting in Rebecca (Deputy Project Lead) leading an additional information session for them. Sports Studies learners, who need to learn complex terminology have also benefitted:

> *"Discussion really helped my understanding and was made simpler to take in and remember".*
>
> *"The thing helped me the most is when we used post-it notes to break the spelling down…made me able to spell the words more easily"*

It is especially pleasing that learners now utilise their new learning in other classroom sessions, recalling and applying earlier learning from phonics-based activities. Their teachers encouraged them to do this and it has paid dividends with learners now applying previous learning to new experiences. They are much more willing to 'have a go' at spelling new words and more open to constructive criticism. This is especially aided by developmental, supportive formative feedback from their teachers.

Teachers believe phonics activities have helped learners' concentration, as they have become more active classroom participants, often supportively challenging each other – especially true of Sports learners who enjoyed an element of competition.

Learning from this project

Despite numerous challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, college closures and engaging learners in online learning, we believe we have made

significant progress, enabling learners to make progress not only in English, as evidenced by examples of learners' work but in their vocational studies too. Additionally, vocational teachers are developing their ability to introduce meaningful English activities into their sessions.

Key learning points include:

- The importance of building on and enhancing project work previously undertaken, ensuring it continues to be used in the organisation to the benefit of all.
- The value of including a range of colleagues and subject specialisms in project work. The project has led to greater collaboration between teams, enabling teachers to actively engage in research, thus enhancing their personal and professional practice. This provided fresh insight into learners' needs, enhancing learning and cross-college collaboration. It was unfortunate some vocational teachers failed to significantly engage with the project; an opportunity relished by some. This may be attributable to the consequences arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, but more likely from vocational teachers' perceived lack of English skills, their unfamiliarity with phonics-based approaches and lack of confidence in using them. They did not have the same knowledge base as the maths and English teachers who took part in OTLA 6 and needed a great deal more support.
- These realisations clearly indicated further work is necessary to enable vocational teachers to build their skills and confidence. Consequently, a new coaching approach was piloted later in the project with the Project Lead working closely with a Foundation Studies teacher. This was particularly successful and will be a model to take the project forward in the next academic year.
- It has become increasingly apparent that introducing and embedding phonics-based approaches requires time and commitment to enable the approaches to become part of both learners' and teachers' practice. This is evident from the learners whose long involvement with phonics-based approaches has led to newfound confidence, increased

enthusiasm for learning and greater self-belief. They not only actively engage in learning activities, but now support peers struggling with the new, unfamiliar approaches. Similarly, teachers, who began using phonics-based approaches in our previous project, now successfully mentor their vocational colleagues further enriching their professional development.

- It has been challenging to tackle learners' entrenched spelling habits but, by persevering with the strategies, they are improving and showing less reliance on others. Learners are slowly developing their strategies, gaining confidence in using and correctly spelling vocational terminology, rather than using simpler, non-vocational words.
- Significant learning includes an increasing awareness of the need to build learners' confidence, recognise their successes and ensure they receive the positive formative feedback so integral to their continuing engagement with the phonics approaches.

We recognise there is much more work to be done to enable vocational teachers to enhance their ability to support learners' literacy development. This must be done through planned, regular, on-going support, similar to that which has paid dividends with our long-term phonics learners. We intend to continue our work in the next academic year to firmly embed and enrich the achievements we have made to date.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-11/7-22b/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 12

Mentor: Lesley Littlewood

23. North Yorkshire County Council
24. Novus - HMP Liverpool
25. Newcastle College

FEEDBACK / TARGET SETTING

Lesley Littlewood (Mentor)

It has been an absolute pleasure to mentor the three OTLA 7 projects over 2020-21.

Although the projects had a common theme, Feedback and Target Setting in Diverse Contexts, their diverse backgrounds made for different interests and challenges.

Communication became a major challenge for each of the projects with the onset of COVID-19.

North Yorkshire County Council investigated how they could reach learners who could no longer access classroom-based learning and lacked digital solutions. Their project aimed to provide access to learning for those forgotten learners. It required creative thinking and methods of reaching their learners.

Novus / HMP Liverpool originally intended to link reflections on learning to improving target setting in English and maths, but they also used surprising and unexpected responses from learners and tutors to develop a blended approach to classroom teaching. They found successful ways to communicate through the use of in-cell telephones.

Newcastle College intended to study and develop rich feedback within the classroom using the tool of gamification. The project set out to assess how gamification can develop the teachers' activity toolkit and create fulfilling, deep and rich feedback which empowers the students. They were pro-

active in developing their technology and on-line communication, which in turn helped their teams to develop their own skills.

The enthusiasm and dedication of the Project Leads, Deputies, and their teams made for some outstanding conclusions and outcomes for action research.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/otla-7-cluster-12/**

23. SUPPORTING HARD TO REACH ADULT LEARNERS IN THE COMMUNITY

North Yorkshire County Council

How do you reach learners who can no longer access classroom-based learning and lack digital solutions? Our project aimed to provide access to learning for these forgotten learners.

Summary

North Yorkshire is the largest rural county by area in England. It comprises diverse communities characterised by contrasting forms of both affluence and deprivation with Scarborough being amongst the 20% most deprived in England (affecting 39,000 people) as indicated in the English indices of deprivation (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019).

The impact of COVID-19 highlighted the barriers to learning for a high proportion of adults due to the lack of online access along with a deficiency in ICT skills. This additional barrier impacted on learners' access to provision and their ability to learn. We therefore needed to plan to address this and remove *"elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capability, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence"* (Vygotsky, 1978).

During the 6-week project we would concentrate on a non-accredited course focussed on maths and English to engage learners and use other methods including non-digital delivery to remove barriers and build confidence. We planned for this to lead into further accredited learning where appropriate.

Rationale

The focus of our project was around finding ways to engage and motivate learners who are most vulnerable within our provision. The unprecedented move to online teaching had been successful for many but there were a significant number unable to engage online. Our project was to support these 'forgotten' learners who faced the biggest challenges to continue to engage in learning. We recognised the need to approach these learners with a more holistic offer and targeted support without the added pressure of doing tests or exams. We expected these to be our lowest level learners and include those with limited access to ICT. We were very aware that we needed to overcome significant barriers. *"Motivating digitally excluded citizens to engage with the digital world can be difficult. To do this successfully requires compelling 'hooks' for each person, and each organisation"* (Citizens online, 2020). We decided that our 'hook' would be the one-to-one support predominantly using phone contact initially and interventions would be based around learner interests.

Some of the outcomes we hoped for included:
- increased levels of engagement and retention of learners through regular pastoral and teacher support
- better opportunities to improve confidence through 'learn to learn' type activities
- progression of learners to accredited courses in maths and English where appropriate
- provision of basic digital skills where ICT resources allowed

Approach

Preparation phase:
- worked with Learning, Guidance and Support Officers (LGSO) to identify learners who were unable or unwilling to engage online and had a preference for classroom-based learning. In total 76 potential learners were identified, 47 for English and 29 for maths.
- made initial contact with all learners to gauge interest in joining the project and to identify their learning needs, their barriers to learning and

how these could be addressed. 12 English learners and 14 maths learners completed the initial assessments which provided a wealth of information.

- created learning journals during this initial interaction so each learner could state their goals, reflect on sessions and assess their own progress. This replaced their usual online assessment. Learners completed this throughout.
- English learners were not able to proceed past this phase due to lack of teacher phone access.
- allocated each learner a subject specialist teacher and shared contact information shared.
- reviewed initial contact information which provided a useful insight into learner cohorts for Maths and English: shared at the interim dissemination event. When asked about learning needs 33% of learners identified themselves as Dyslexic and only 14% identified no health or related issues.
- amended learner journals to reflect key findings from interim review. We removed the question that asked about learner interest as most feedback had been none. Teachers sought this information through conversations once a relationship was formed.

The course proceeded as follows for maths learners:
- arranged weekly one-to-one meetings with the learners by phone
- meetings were by phone, email or posted mail
- identified and agreed targets at the outset.
- learners worked through the activities provided and completed their journals regularly, reflecting on work completed and any changes required
- tracker was updated regularly to review progress of learners
- some learners were unable to engage in the project and bespoke resources were posted to them along with LGSO contact details for follow-up

- identified opportunities for ICT support: some learners moved to using Zoom for group meetings in addition to one-to-one support.

Follow-up and reflection at the end of the 6-week course:
- sought learner feedback on their experience
- offered learners accredited learning at end of initial 6 weeks and all learners have progressed to accredited learning
- identified opportunities for ICT support; some learners moved to using Zoom for group meetings in addition to one-to-one support
- reviewed outcomes for all learners engaged in project
- completed post course interviews with case study learners
- reflected on missed opportunities and approach going forward given likely continuation of online learning

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

At the beginning of the project, we produced a learner journal to be used during initial contact with learners. This included set questions around the information we would need to positively engage and support learners. There was a focus on personal interests to generate enjoyment and motivation, which would increase attention and perceived value of learning. (Hidi & Renninger, 2006)

While collating data, we noticed that learners had not completed open questions, particularly around hobbies and interests so we decided that type of information was best collected during learning sessions when trust and confidence had increased. Reflecting on these data findings, we quickly adjusted the journal to highlight information on specific requirements only.

All staff were keen to support learners and had a clear knowledge of how they could access appropriate learning opportunities. Learners were added to a tracking spreadsheet with all appropriate information and monthly discussions allowed us to share information and decide on the best course of action.

Assessments, usually completed on an online site, were replaced with self-assessment questions in the reflective journals. Teachers used this information to set individual targets with the learners and set stretch and challenge activities. This ensured that learners could continue to work around their individual needs and the teacher could continue to build confidence and work at an appropriate pace.

Teachers and curriculum managers accessed a range of training courses to support our project. These included engaging and motivating learners, monitoring and evaluating progress, creating meaningful targets and developing better engagement. This supported work with all learners and were accessed by teachers and managers.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This project provided an opportunity to support the confidence of learners in accessing appropriate learning. The LGSO's were able to identify those who were vulnerable due to lack of ICT skills in an ICT world as everything moved online. curriculum managers for maths and English led the project and collaborated closely throughout, jointly completing monthly update reports and holding meetings with staff involved.

We have had a closer working relationship with Learning, Guidance and Support Officers and this has helped to identify learners who would benefit from the project. LGSO's identified additional learners throughout the project and highlighted that many had additional needs. Some of these learners had accessed classroom-based provision previously and were known to staff. One teacher was able to work across both curriculums to provide the initial contact for all learners. It was evident that the first intervention with learners was key to establishing confidence and allaying any concerns learners had about inclusion in this project.

Our contact with another provider highlighted the difficulties of working in our large geographic rural area as they had been able to hand deliver resources with their own learners. Many of our council sites were

repurposed for COVID-19 related activities, preventing return to classroom-based delivery and we used postal services to ensure that resources were available to learners.

The methods we have used to contact and support learners will be used in the future for learners who cannot attend classroom-based learning and lack digital skills. We will also continue with a 6 week non accredited programme in the classroom for low level learners to engage and build confidence.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

There were 12 Maths learners who completed the 6-week intervention programme. 11 out of 12 (92%) learners used this as a stepping stone to accredited provision.

Figure 23.1 summarises all learners initial assessments.
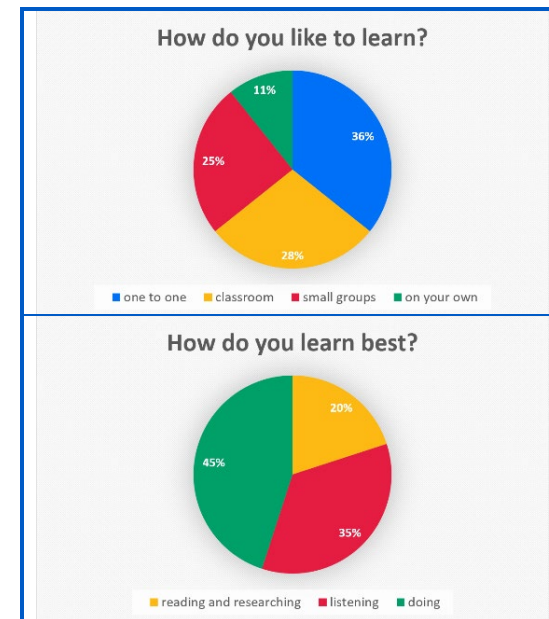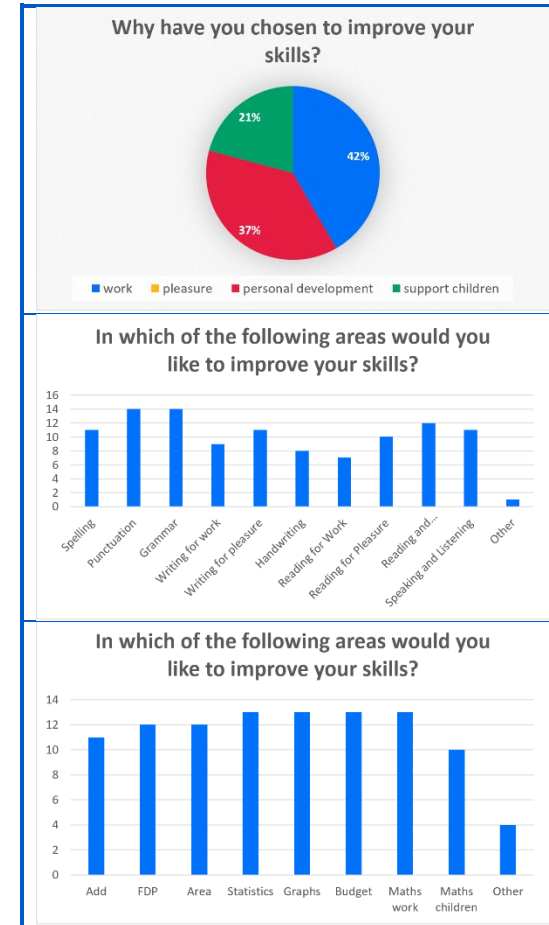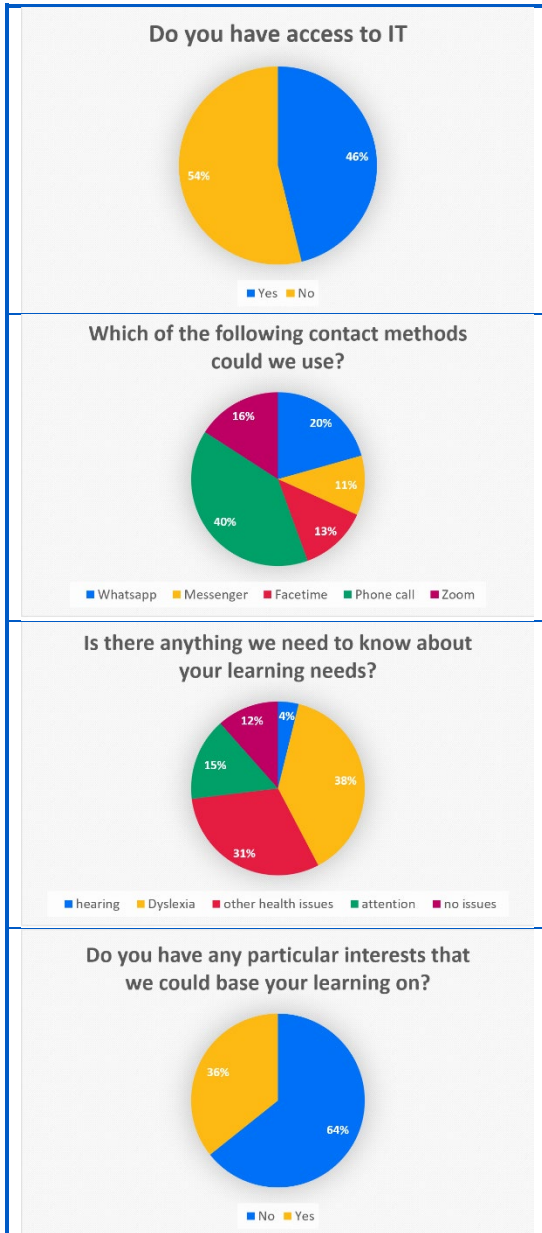
Figure 23.1: Breakdown of Reflective Journal Initial Assessment Information – based on 26 responses

Those of particular interest are outlined below:

Case study 1 (AA) – A refugee learner had previously accessed provision, achieving level 1 maths but had withdrawn due to no ICT access and lack of confidence in online learning. He gained confidence and purchased a laptop which created an opportunity to complete an online maths qualification needed for future career aspirations in social work.

AA – *All worked completed on time and well*

Case study 2 (BB) – An entry level learner who struggled to attend due to childcare issues. Her preferred way of working was using 'paper and pen' and she depended on the teacher for wider advice and guidance as reflected in end of course feedback. She has now been accepted on an Open University business studies and management diploma and is also doing equine psychology with a view to setting up her own business.

BB – *I can't thank my teacher enough for being so helpful and knowing he is always there if I need any information and very informative*

Case study 3 (CC) – An Entry Level learner who was motivated to learn to support her children and her own development. Although she had access to ICT she lacked confidence in joining an online learning environment. She recognised her increased ICT skills and now engages online and feels much more confident to support own children. This learner has moved to an online maths course following the initial intervention.

CC – *I'm very pleased with how the course went I'm able to see progress myself which has given me a confidence boost. My tutor made me fill comfortable and determined*

Case study 4 (DD) - This learner had completed classroom-based delivery in the past but had no ICT access so was unable to complete any online provision. His main motivation was for return to employment. He continues to access one-to-one support using phone only and reflects that this works well for him. He is actively seeking employment and wanting to complete more maths.

DD: - *I want to continue with this method of learning especially as I have to wait till my ankle gets better. I am happy with the way Liz and I work on the telephone. Obviously, I would like to be in a classroom situation before an assessment is taken.*

I do want to progress to higher levels.

Learning from this project

What went well:

- **Learner Engagement**

Staff worked well to identify learners who would benefit from this provision. The initial contact created a positive experience and allowed learners to share their preferences for learning. Staff advised on appropriate opportunities and set targets. We carefully chose staff with advanced empathy skills, relevant experience and excellent communication styles ensuring retention and progression.

- **Addressing rural isolation**

  Many North Yorkshire learners are socially isolated. This project allowed learners to engage which supported their wellbeing along with their learning.

- **Increased learner confidence**

  The learners used the reflective journals to give feedback and interview transcripts capture evidence of learners' belief in their own skills and improved self -confidence. This outcome from the project was one of the most powerful for these learners enabling them to see past any barriers to learning.

- **Learner progression**

  92% of learners who completed the 6-week course have progressed into accredited learning. Some have taken this a step further and focussed on future career development.

- **Learner achievement**

  Learners recognised improved digital confidence and subject skills. Staff flexibility ensured engagement from the outset. The project improved learner experiences and outcomes along with softer underlying skills. All learners who progressed to Entry Level 3 have achieved and learners who progressed to Level 1 and Level 2 are on track to achieve by the end of July.

Even better if:

- **Staff ICT kit**

  Lack of council-approved teacher ICT kit meant that we couldn't engage with all the learners that were signposted to this programme. This was a missed opportunity and is being addressed for the next academic year.

- **Digital poverty - learners**

  Our data highlighted that English learners had a higher rate of digital poverty than maths learners. Provision of ICT kit to learners without access would have ensured inclusion and engagement of all.

Summary statement

The investment of time and resources in providing one-to-one informal interventions through a 6-week non accredited programme has been extremely successful. The focus on individual contact and support has ensured engagement, retention and inclusion for our most vulnerable learners. This method has encouraged the majority of learners who completed the course to springboard into accredited learning and given them the confidence to take this further into developing future career aspirations.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/otla-7-cluster-12/7-23/**

24. DO THEY WANT TO LEARN WHAT WE ARE TEACHING? LEARNER FEEDBACK IN PRISON EDUCATION

Novus - HMP Liverpool

While this project originally intended to link reflections on learning to improving target setting in English and maths, it also used surprising and unexpected responses from learners and tutors to develop a blended approach to classroom teaching.

Summary

The education department at HMP Liverpool provides a range of education including Functional Skills English and maths to men in a category B and C prison. As a local remand prison, HMP Liverpool has a regularly changing cohort of prisoners. This level of change and flux is reflected in the learners we teach.

Project 24 aimed to improve target setting by encouraging learners to reflect on their learning and feel confident in independently identifying strengths and weaknesses. It was hoped that the act of helping learners with their ability to reflect could be linked to discussions about targets and that learners would be able to choose goals relevant to their course that would also be inspiring and meaningful to them.

Stakeholders involved in Project 24 include learners, tutors and education managers across Novus as well as in HMP Liverpool. Prison staff involved with activities management and Ofsted may also benefit from its findings.

Rationale

In September 2019, HMP Liverpool's education department had an Ofsted inspection which identified that "target setting was weak in most lessons…Tutors …did not set clear or challenging targets to inspire prisoners to progress and achieve their full potential." (Justice Inspectorates, 2020)

It was also noticed by tutors that in many English and maths lessons, learners rarely reflected independently on their learning and were often reluctant to admit when they did not know something. Learners did, however, respond positively on the occasions when they were given the opportunity to reflect on their learning.

Project 24 intended to link opportunities for learners to reflect on and take ownership of their learning with setting individual targets that were meaningful and motivational.

Plans were made to introduce a range of reflective activities to English and maths lessons to allow learners to openly identify the learning they could remember as well as areas that needed more practice. It was hoped that learners would be able to set their own targets based on the topics they had decided they needed to improve on. This would lead to targets that would be more likely to inspire and motivate learners and spark a sense of interest and ownership.

Approach

The activities that took place during the project had to be significantly adapted due to restrictions imposed on education at HMP Liverpool due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project's original proposal was based on classroom learning where tutors would have discussions with learners and easily trial a variety of reflective practices and build on these to establish more inspirational targets.

Throughout the project, learners were restricted to in-cell education. This meant they were working independently through workbooks and paper-based tasks. While tutors could telephone learners, in-person communication was difficult and, when it happened at all, was conducted through a small window in a locked door.

One reflective practice that was trialled was the use of exit slips. Learners were asked to respond to quick questions about what they had just studied, identifying strengths and weaknesses. The exit slips used a range of questions, complexity of vocabulary and levels of specificity. Due to COVID-19 outbreaks over the year, there was limited access to wings to deliver and collect the slips. However, it was still possible to gain some useful information from the responses that were received.

Figure 24.1: Exit slip

When it became clear that the scope of the project would need to change, telephone interviews were implemented to record learners' reflections. Questions were chosen to find out how much leaners could remember about their most recent work and how they felt about it as well as what they wanted to work on next. The responses to these interviews were analysed for trends and provided some interesting data about learners' attitudes to English and maths education.

The attitudes of tutors towards target setting were also reviewed through a survey. This looked at how tutors felt about targets and why they thought Ofsted has asked for target setting to be improved.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

One of the first things that became obvious during the project was the importance of building relationships. The lack of face-to-face contact with learners directly impacted communication which made it harder for learners to know exactly what was expected of them as well as the benefits of engaging with the research.

The main learning from the exit slips was that detailed and relevant reflections were provided when prompted by more specific and detailed questions. Fewer responses were received to simple questions such as 'What was easy?' It is possible that this is because they were aimed at lower-level learners who have had more difficulty understanding the relevance of the activity. When responding to a more direct question such as 'What do you know now that you didn't know before?', learners referred directly to the topic of the work they had just done. This suggests that tutors should be careful in their choice of language and deploy strong coaching skills when questioning learners to get the most useful responses from their learners.

The results of the staff survey around target setting were interesting. Whilst the staff responses were perfectly valid in regard to target setting, they showed a clear difference to Ofsted's feedback. The tutors' responses seemed to concentrate on results: *"to ensure learners make progress", "...to improve teaching and results for our learners...", "Targets are often not SMART"* whereas the Ofsted feedback could be said to focus more on a love of learning. These responses were considered as a group and ideas were gathered to improve the relevance and meaningfulness of targets by tying Functional Skills objectives to learners' real-life aims.

The tutors' group discussions allowed for development in professional practice, especially the evaluation of practice and to build positive and collaborative relationships. Some of the information from the project

exposed areas for improvement which certainly challenged established models of practice and beliefs about target setting.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Responses to the interviews showed that 64% of learners were unable to identify a new target that was relevant to their course. Learners would typically focus on the next course they wanted to do (such as plastering) or say they didn't know and would refer to their tutor. This suggests that learners see the act of learning as something being 'done to them' rather than something they can be actively involved in and make decisions about. This raised questions about how, as an organisation, we could motivate learners to take ownership of their learning. These questions were taken back to learners through a survey on the prison communication system so that ways to better involve and motivate them in English and maths could be established.

This survey provided a range of responses with most learners stating their current motivation comes from a desire to better and improve themselves. This suggests that there is a significant amount of intrinsic motivation in the learner population to be tapped into. The men at HMP Liverpool want to learn. Do they want to learn what we are teaching them?

Tutor focus groups discussed the problems caused by learners obliged to pass Level 1 in English or maths before studying vocational courses or gaining prison employment which prevents lower-level learners accessing activities of their choice and limits equal opportunities. A blended learning model might encourage learners to study English or maths while doing vocational qualifications or paid prison work. This would lead to a more diverse range of learners studying English and maths.

When men were asked how their motivation and involvement could be increased, the most common response was more communication and discussion with their tutor. The new classroom model will allow opportunity

for a collaborative approach to learning which builds on the motivation that is already present.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Evidence of the positive effects of motivated learners who already take ownership of their education can be seen through case studies followed throughout the project. These show learners who were able to communicate with their tutors despite being unable to meet in person. They did this through notes on the work that they did in their cells.

These learners were able to identify when they felt confident about what they had just learnt and this enabled them to build on their learning.
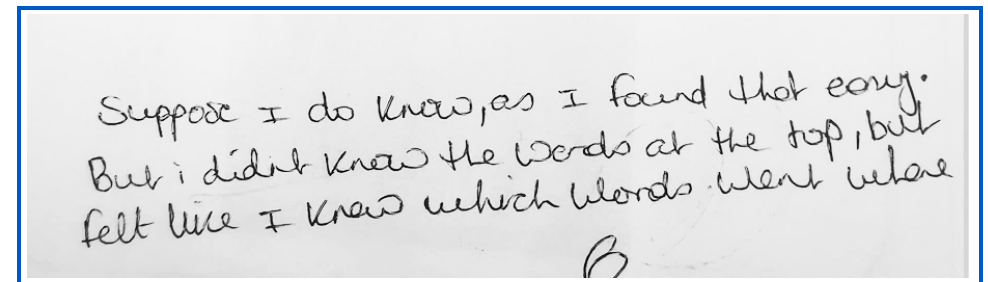
Figure 24.2: Learner note - "Suppose I do know, as I found that easy. But i [sic] didn't know the words at the top, but felt like I knew which words went where."

As they have achieved success, they can achieve further success and are therefore motivated to continue. This contrasts sharply with the 68% of learners participating in the telephone surveys who were unable to identify any new learning from their last workbooks but is positive evidence to suggest that men can make use of reflecting on learning when encouraged.

The case study learners felt safe to admit when they did not understand something, possibly because they were not surrounded by peers and knew that only their tutor would be seeing their comments. Throughout the in-cell learning process necessitated by COVID-19, much has been made of how

much better teaching and learning will be when classroom practice resumes. However, the case studies have shown that there is something to be said for the safety and freedoms allowed by in-cell learning and this has been echoed by comments from other learners in the telephone conversations: *"...he had progressed much better working in cell rather than a classroom...he previously used to copy answers as he did not want to admit to not understanding things in front of peers..."* Surprisingly, the survey of all learners also revealed that over two thirds who expressed a preference wanted to continue in-cell learning even when it will no longer be necessitated due to external circumstances or combine it with classroom sessions.

These case studies also showed learners who were curious about what they were studying, asking questions and engaging with the materials. *"[Is] it a cilent [sic] d if not why is it spelled like that[?]"* This curiosity would be an ideal platform to build meaningful and relevant targets following discussions with tutors.

Learning from this project

While this project has undergone necessary changes in focus, it has highlighted the importance of the motivation and involvement of learners in their study of English and maths.

Most men at HMP Liverpool have intrinsic learning motivation but this has not always translated into being engaged in their current course. Consideration should be made to combining men's needs and interests with their English and maths learning whether that is using these to create relevant and real targets or increasing engagement through teaching the subjects alongside vocational courses or paid prison jobs.

Learners' lack of ability to identify targets specific to their course shows that tutors need to offer support and clarity about what they can achieve. Learners cannot be expected to choose targets without a true understanding of their meaning or relevance to their lives. When classroom

teaching resumes, tutors should hold regular, collaborative discussion about targets and use learners' personal needs to support them to choose goals they will be motivated to work towards. The language used to help learners reflect and identify gaps in learning should be specific and should relate to it.

As with learning, reflecting on learning works best when it takes place in an environment where a learner feels safe. A safe environment is essential for learners to learn, reflect and identify targets effectively. Consideration should be made for all learners to feel comfortable when talking about their strengths and weaknesses, not just those who are confident speaking in front of peers. A blended model that combines classroom and in-cell teaching and learning would provide learners with flexibility and safety.

This project encourages tutors at HMP Liverpool to prioritise collaborative discussion between tutors and learners which will make learning and targets relevant for men as well as building flexible teaching models that cater for a variety of learners' needs and motivations.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/otla-7-cluster-12/24-novus-hmp-liverpool/**

25. GAMIFICATION AND CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Newcastle College

This project intended to study and develop rich feedback within the classroom using the tool of gamification. The project set out to assess how gamification can develop the teachers' activity toolkit and create fulfilling, deep and rich feedback which empowers the students.

Summary

This project started off as two projects, one focused on how feedback was developed within the classroom to encourage student autonomy and the other angled towards using game mechanics to motivate students.

This merging of projects was ideal for our organisation, a large FE inner city college. We realised there was a theme occurring within our staff reflections that feedback felt 'meaningless' and students didn't engage with the process. We had to consider how we inspire our staff to become more proactive and reinvigorated, especially with the ever-changing hybrid delivery models of continued imposed lockdown measures.

Rationale

Our project intended to develop engaging and meaningful feedback and decided to use gamification as the tool to help with this. We felt this was important for three reasons:
- to introduce feedback approaches which could be applied within blended delivery
- to develop staff CPD to support students
- to challenge a 'fail mentality' evident in students having to re-sit a core subject.

We had to consider what would be effective in hybrid delivery because originally our project intentions considered multiple forms of feedback and was heavily reliant on face-to-face delivery. This focusing in of the research was responsive to our colleagues and students who felt the disconnect between online learning and the class meant a lack of continuity in topics and feedback. Our rationale then became to engage and develop that immediacy to get rich learning experiences back in the classroom and we chose gamification as the vehicle of this change.

Approach

We broke the project into a cycle similar to that of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984).

Phase 1: Conceptualising/trialling

The two project leads found activities and approaches that would fit into the gamified feedback approach, including:
- card sorting activities that could you used in a variety of level challenges
- 'Collaborate Boards' (Nearpod) where learners could share their ideas in either work or image form and instant feedback can be given from teacher and peers
- polls
- 'Draw It' (Nearpod) – a useful tool for annotation of texts
- 'Time to Climb' (Nearpod) and quizzes – gamified quizzing in the class where the students could pit themselves against each other.

We intended to use this phase to encourage our staff and students to lead the research and feed back which concepts would work. Instead, due to COVID-19, we only tested immediate feedback approaches which allowed our project to be manageable in the circumstances. We used Nearpod, an online interactive student engagement platform, to support our hybrid delivery model.

We were moving our practice from 'here's everything you don't know for your grade' to one of 'here is where you are on your journey' and staff and students tackled learning as an experience or 'level' rather than an end goal task. This shift in learning dynamic transcended digital delivery and started integrating within classes and teams as an expectation. One student noted, "my classes feel more energised lately". They also seemed to become more independent in a home learning situation with feedback such as, "I don't need my teacher for this".

Phase 2: Reviewing and finalising

The leads invited staff who would 'buy in' to this process to help lead and develop the research. Activities were then trialled in a range of classes. The reason we wanted a spread of vocational aspects and ages was to allow us to tackle some perceived challenges of gamified feedback. It was felt this would only work with more artistically inclined students so picking a spread of staff and cohorts to deliver gamified learning to allowed us to see if these initial thoughts were warranted.

Phase 3: Implementation and experimenting

The project team delivered our proposed activities to the students. We wanted this to be with the students and encouraged them to shape the project as our intention was to empower the students and not merely impose 'sanctions'. For us to be able to evaluate, we carried out student polls using Likert scales on approaches, learner voice activities and polls to see which activities were perceived successful.

Phase 4: Feedback and reflection

This led to collection of data and deciding next steps. Immediate feedback from learners enabled us to choose approaches that resonated with our classes. From the results of the tally chart, we focused on tracker bars, timed competitions and classroom roles. From here, we then looked to our own classes to assess whether the approaches used have made a

quantitative improvement to the class and used other teachers to support our findings.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

We knew the gamified feedback approaches described above would require staff development. We felt our staff might be sceptical about gamified feedback due to the many adjustments they were already making especially with the technological 'boom' that March and the lockdown created in the education sector. However, instead of this being a barrier, lockdown seemed to have a motivational effect on our staff. They were excited and open to new concepts, especially techniques that would tackle the student/teacher divide on digital platforms. This educational 'reset' led to our teams being proactive in self-led CPD and actively experimenting in the classrooms. This shift in staff perception wasn't just within our team; we were lucky enough to deliver cross-curricular CPD around gamified learning and found many teams and areas excited by the process. Some examples of comments from the training are found in Figure 25.1.

Topics referenced in discussion	Supporting Quote	Thoughts and considerations
Self-development Awareness Onus on student progress	"I think I finally get where I'm going wrong and what I can do about it"	Students can be empowered via gamified feedback to develop further- adding to the students' toolkit and being explicit about their skillset is motivating.
Factors of stress Barriers to learning progress	"I don't like the competitions as they stress me out… I do feel like I'm progressing though"	Activities need to be adapted and pitched to suit the class- should be seen as a range of tasks rather than a set approach.
Awareness Onus on student Self-driving factors	"my students are really showing awareness of the tasks they're doing…it's	Students can be driven in a behaviourist manner with just the ideals of 'points' and self-driven improvement.

	almost like a self-reward for getting more points"	
Barriers to learning Branding of tasks	"I don't get it…my students don't like games"	The branding and term 'gamification' may be off-putting – emphasis on toolkit adaption than a new gimmick.
Independence Onus on student	"I don't need my teacher for this"	Students can feel empowered to take their own learning in terms if gamified feedback if applied effectively
Independence Onus on student	"I like choosing what's going to help me the most"	Confidence from this can allow students to pinpoint development points.
Engagement Onus on student Tracking/feedback	"lessons seem more fun recently since we started using the trackers"	This process may engage stimulation parts of the brain and also be seen as a 'new' method and thus engage students via novelty.
Engagement Confidence Onus on student	"I don't feel confident enough to pick what I don't know- if I knew that, then I'd pass"	Students need ample support in gamified feedback; requires teachers to be facilitatory in their roles.
Engagement Staff and student buy in	"my classes feel more energised lately"	New approaches and engagement can lead to exciting classroom dynamics; especially if previous power dynamics are challenged.
Staff and student buy in Engagement Continuity of programs Further research	"this has so many applications to vocational classes…could we map this across"	Gamified feedback could be a consistent approach across curriculum and be researched as further study.
Adaptation of tasks Engagement Continuity of programs Further research	"This would work well with students with different learning needs…. how does it fit with students with issues such as sight etc?"	Toolkit can be adapted to meet different learner and student needs.

Figure 25.1: Quotes from students and staff with comments

The change in staff behaviour and openness to technology led to a change of student perception and an adjustment of power dynamics within the classroom. Resit classes which had been taught using a didactic, teacher-led approach became a collaboration between staff and student which further created a change in how planning and assessments occurred within classes. Assessment planning moved towards a 'skill developed' approach for instance, an experience point system. In this example, an experiential point system is a mechanic found in role playing games- starting a learner or 'player at 0, with tasks giving experience points which equate to a level/mastery of the subject.

Staff are adapting and redesigning their approaches within a classroom. Staff engagement with gamified feedback is going beyond the methods trialled in this project. Staff are working interdepartmentally, such as an LDD and English project, to create approaches and resources that fit their learners' needs. Colleagues are showing ownership of the techniques and a playfulness to trying new approaches within the classroom.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Although our project intended to focus on the learner and how they engage with feedback, it has been a wonderful benefit to our project that staff and departments seem motivated to develop and engage new technologies with one another. As stated in the previous segment, the enforcement of online delivery benefitted us greatly as it changed staff mindsets to one of experimentation and engaging with new approaches. This can be seen in staff being proactive in CPD sessions where sharing best practice was the focus. Previously, teachers' delivery model of lecturing to students encouraged learners to behave passively in classrooms. The use of new approaches seemed to invigorate the staff who took the onus of creating their own ideas and began actively sharing documents and approaches with other teachers within these sessions. This can be seen in Appendix 6 as well considering ideas such as classroom charts for points and 'de Bono Hats' (de Bono, 1992) for roles within classrooms.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Gamified learning has led to an improvement to the students' work both in a quantitative manner of scoring/attendance and qualitative feedback from the students' experiences. Here is an overview of the results of the study thus far:

- *Classes show higher levels of 'success' via measures.* The classes reviewed for this project showed increases in attendance, notably online engagement and have achieved better standard testing results. For example, one class of adult Level 2 learners showed an average of 20% improved attendance online and have more students through their qualification then compared to a similar class last year.
- *Classes show proactivity in their own learning.* Creating a learning experience with ample gamified learning has put the onus on the learners. Learners feel motivated due to constant commentary on their progress and feel they can successfully evaluate where they are achieving. This, coupled with student access to gamified tracking and progress (such as level design, scoreboards), means the student is in competition with themselves and appears more driven to improve.

Quantitative measures:

Attendance: The classes that engaged most with gamified feedback had the biggest increase/maintained level in attendance, especially within online lesson delivery. As a hypothesis, those who engaged well with the project had classes that tended to attend more and more regularly. This was seen within the apprenticeship provision and the creative art classes; however, certain provisions, such as heavily ESOL based classes did not seem to be affected by gamified learning principles as activities such as ClassDojo are regularly integrated within their learning experience.

Results: We have seen some students make progress that might be related to gamification; for example, a student demonstrated a 15% increase within his functional skills writing assessments via working independently with gamified feedback. (We used Nearpod, timed activities and student-led open-ended questions for this). In mini assessments and Functional Skills, like for like comparison of classes at this point are showing a general increase in results from the same time last year despite a prediction results would be lower due to on/off lockdown regulations. In conversing with the staff and colleagues, this is perhaps due to the two-fold effect of consistent praise/awareness of their current standing as well measurable actions for the students to engage and develop. It could also be noted that these new approaches themselves may be the invigorating factor as discussed in the previous segment.

Qualitative measures:

"I finally know where I'm at; I'm not a failure, I got this"; a quote from one FE resit student that resonated with us during this project when collecting feedback from students and staff. By redeveloping the feedback, the class itself feels 'different' and more student led. Many students commented that the teacher was *'there to support them'* and not merely *'going over the same topics from school'*.

Student Quotes

"I like choosing what's going to help me the most"

"lessons seem more fun recently since we started using the trackers"

"I don't feel confident enough to pick what I don't know- if I knew that, then I'd pass"

"my classes feel more energised lately"

Figure 25.2: Student Quotes

This was a welcome consequence of the project; the students experienced a method not seen in their school which created a platform for a fresh start, a fresh FE English and Maths. Students stated they felt 'a reason for being in the lesson' and that 'everything was to make them better'; a departure from the sometimes-perceived fail mentality resit classes can create. Not only this, but students in learner voice activities knew what their current progress was and had suggestions on how they could improve. This was an improvement over the passive nature of some resit classes.

Learning from this project

Even better if:

- *Considered the strands of project at an earlier date.* In reflection, although we designed our first part of the cycle to be a filtering process to focus our research, it was probably too large scale to filter multiple activities as well as multiple forms of feedback. If we considered just one strand of feedback, as we did within the project, then perhaps our class selection and move to class trials would have been smoother.
- *Retrospective consideration of COVID-19.* The wealth of knowledge and skillsets we were developing within our project are just the beginning. It would have been ideal to have more time to develop these further in contrast to more time dealing with all the issues of working in a large college during COVID-19.

Knowledge taken forward:

- *Features of immediate feedback.* I think we, as colleagues and a college, are really developing strength in our immediate feedback and how we can make the process more engaging. Moving forward, it would be interesting to apply these theories to more extended feedback models.

- *Strength of gamification in English and maths.* At this point in our action research, teachers are hitting their stride with using gamified learning within English and maths where we are seeing growing strength and confidence in using the strategies. Moving forward, it would be interesting to apply these principles and see if they fit in other segments of the educational setting; does gamified feedback transfer to vocational learning or non-FE based settings?
- *Skillset applied to a training procedure.* As colleagues and a team we are gaining skills in adapting existing tasks and methodologies and applying them as gamified feedback. Moving forward, is this something that we can create and design as a toolkit? Is this something we could create as an induction toolkit or help develop with our teacher education provision?

Where can I find out more about this project?

- You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/otla-7-cluster-12/7-25**

SHAPING SUCCESS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (MATHS)

Research Group Lead: Gail Lydon

Mentors: Dr. Lynne Taylerson

                                     Paul Stych

                                     Sarah Richards

ACADEMIC AND PRACTITIONER-LED RESEARCH, WE CAN LEARN FROM AND INFORM BOTH

Gail Lydon (Research Group Lead)

The impact of low maths skills

Our work in post-16 education interfaces with some of the least-advantaged individuals in our communities. Within these groups are many with low levels of numeracy making them more susceptible to losing jobs, receiving lower wages, poor health, etc. (National Numeracy, 2021). The practitioners sharing their OTLA 7 research are sharing their passion for supporting their learners to develop these life changing skills. There are many themes reflected through the maths research projects. Here I share a few thoughts with you.

The power of reflection

In May 2021 I read a research review by Ofsted (2021d) which had over 200 references and it is a fascinating read. The following month, June 2021, I had the pleasure of reading the reports of the maths OTLA 7 projects, equally fascinating but taking a very different approach. These reports are a frank and open consideration by practitioner researchers of their own practice. They shine a different light on maths practice in post-16 education in England. I choose the words 'frank' and 'open' deliberately because the researchers have shared their reflections in powerful and honest ways, sharing their experiences, concerns, disappointments, and learning.

Some of the most exciting aspects of the practitioner research have been down to looking at known strategies and applying them in new ways and I think there are some powerful messages for all of us who care so much about the learning taking place in our classrooms and workspaces.

The teaching of maths is a complicated activity, and it appears even more complicated when we are faced with the plethora of approaches being recommended in our sector and in schools. But there is something aligning

in the OTLA 7 practitioner research and the academic research – **small changes can make a big difference!** Finessing our practice rather than wholesale change is the way to go.

Small Changes make a big difference

Solihull College and University Centre's project enabled students to engage successfully in online learning between their maths lessons. They changed *"homework"* to *"preparation"*, consulted with their students and adapted tasks. Class norms changed; students expected one another to prepare; they enjoyed the lessons more, worked harder and results improved.

Academic versus practitioner-led research

I think there is value in all research if the data, approach, and reason for the research is transparent. For some, academic research is more rigorous than practitioner-led action research, partly because of what is seen as the subjective nature of practitioner research, but it is important to note that academic research too must be read with an open and questioning mind. This is epitomised in a research study (Schweinsberg et al, 2021) where 180 co-authors used the same data to test the same two hypotheses and came up with 29 different results. Reflecting on the study, Schweinsberg states:

"Our study illustrates the benefits of transparent and open science practices. Subjective analytical choices are unavoidable, and we should embrace them because a collection of diverse analytical backgrounds and approaches can reveal the true consistency of an empirical claim."

From the very outset our reason for researching needs to be clear to both ourselves and our readers. As per Schweinsberg et al, our practitioner research must embrace our analytical choices, as long as we are aware of and share why we are making these choices.

We can build our research and develop our own ideas by reading and learning from what others have done. However, as Dana (2016) states:

> *"The real world of schools and classrooms are not controlled settings, rather they are wonderfully messy and complicated places, making broad-scale implementation of any practice derived in a controlled setting inherently complicated. "*

We must look for the **diamonds and golden threads** – we must not lose sight of our own common sense and the practical wisdom we and our colleagues have developed.

Diamonds and Golden Threads

The Sheffield College's project set out to investigate if a more nuanced approach to undertaking weekly electronic diagnostic assessments prior to attendance at a weekly GCSE Mathematics Resit class improved learner motivation, confidence, and their learning experience.

"Interviews with learners and staff have been a rich data source. The challenge was to identify the diamonds and golden threads".

Teachers make a difference

We teachers have no control of the baggage our learners bring to our classrooms, but we need to be aware of the baggage – **it's about more than the maths!** What we can do is be the best we can. Hattie (2003) suggests that what teachers do accounts for about 30% of the variance in learner achievement. This is huge! I believe that practitioner research is a way to be the best teachers we can be. We must interface with both academic and practitioner-led research.

It's about more than the maths

Bishop Burton and Riseholme College's project took a holistic approach to Functional Skills (FS) maths. They developed a blended learning environment that helped to give learners the confidence to risk being wrong and created a hands up culture where a comfortable classroom allowed deeper thinking and discussion around misconceptions.

"I think the biggest thing we have learnt throughout this project is that it is not just about the maths. We are all adaptable and resilient, but it helps when we know that we are not alone".

What next?

I hope that the OTLA 7 reports will be widely read and discussed by the sector and by academic researchers. I also hope that the researchers involved in OTLA 7 will return to their reports and reread them in the future in the light of new and evolving research in and on the sector.

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 13

Mentor: Dr. Lynne Taylerson

USING TECHNOLOGY

Dr Lynne Taylerson (Mentor)

It was inspiring to me to see how the research teams in this cluster met the challenges and disruptions of the switch to remote working and then to learners returning to the classroom with collaboration and innovation.

These projects demonstrate that inclusive, engaging digital learning is 'not just about technology'. Though innovative use of digital tools certainly underpins their new strategies, building learners' digital confidence, developing maths resilience and ensuring equality of access to digital devices and systems are also key themes.

In all four projects, the need to invest time encouraging learners to share more about their learning experiences and wider lives outside education paid dividends. The sharing of work, leisure and home life experiences built learners' confidence and trust in teachers.

Early relationship-building groundwork encouraged learners to provide honest feedback on their experiences, challenges and concerns building more cohesive relationships with and between learners. Dispelling a 'fear of being wrong' and building a 'hands up' culture helped teachers draw out misconceptions and anxieties that learners had regarding maths operations and testing. Learner voice and teacher collaboration underpins the success of these projects; that can be seen clearly in the learner work and testimonials shared in these project reports.

Another stand-out feature is how collaborations with learners and between teachers increased participating teachers' confidence and their motivation to experiment and innovate. This in turn increased teachers' satisfaction in their role as educators.

Bishop Burton and Riseholme College took a holistic approach to Functional Skills maths. They developed a blended learning environment that helped to give learners the confidence to risk being wrong and created

a hands up culture where a comfortable classroom allowed deeper thinking and discussion around misconceptions.

The Sheffield College set out to investigate if a more nuanced approach to undertaking weekly electronic diagnostic assessments prior to attendance at a weekly GCSE Mathematics Resit class improved learner motivation, confidence, and their learning experience.

Basingstoke College of Technology investigated digital learning and the effectiveness of learner-led digital activities. This included not just what software works best, but also which methods and approaches engage learners most successfully. They have used technology with their learners for a number of years but aimed to refine it, with promising results.

The College of West Anglia started with an aim to develop their team's ability to deliver remote learning for 16–18-year-olds studying Maths. As the project progressed their research aims evolved, and they report here on their research into maths anxiety and misconceptions.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-13/**

26. INTRODUCING TECHNOLOGY FOR FUNCTIONAL SKILLS MATHS

Bishop Burton and Riseholme College

> **It makes us happy when learners give a wrong answer!**

This project gave us the opportunity to take a holistic approach to Functional Skills (FS) maths. We developed a blended learning environment that helped to give learners the confidence to risk being wrong and created a hands up culture where a comfortable classroom allowed deeper thinking and discussion around misconceptions.

Summary

The purpose of the project was to explore how we might increase engagement and help learners gain wider employability skills, whilst preparing them for their exams and helping them progress to GCSE level with confidence in their maths knowledge.

Whilst both Bishop Burton and Riseholme campuses cater to a wide variety of learners, Riseholme has a strong agricultural presence in the Lincolnshire area and is one of the main destinations for school leavers coming from farming backgrounds: Bishop Burton's agricultural presence is strong in the apprenticeship sector with learners coming from all aspects of the food industry, from field to fork.

This project helped to raise confidence in both maths and technology use and develop digital skills to help increase learners' employability skills as well as prepare them for progression through the FS levels, onto GCSE and (for apprenticeship learners) gain their full qualification and, for some, progress into higher education. Linking maths to the learners' vocational subjects helped them to see the relevance of the maths and this was very much valued by learners.

We developed highly effective digital and remote learning approaches that helped to support our learners through the pandemic, giving learners access to learning that would otherwise have not been possible. These remote/ blended approaches also helped learners' well-being by making them feel part of a community, whereas they may have been cut off and struggling alone otherwise.

To do this, we used:
- an online learning platform called Century which enabled learners to access ready-made assignments and topics called 'nuggets'.
- videos and presentations which aimed to guide learners through their learning journey
- Microsoft Teams
- Microsoft Forms
- worksheets
- one-to-one Teams meetings
- on-demand tutorials

We took a holistic approach to ensure that the academic, emotional and mental well-being of our learners was being taken care of during one of the most demanding and unusual years in recent teaching history.

The use of technology increased significantly during lockdown, which created new challenges but also innovative ideas and methods to maintain engagement.

We have monitored and compared two different groups of learners over the last year; apprentices who are all 16+ and working in the food industry (from agriculture to butchers and slaughter men), and general further education learners who are attending full time BTEC courses on agriculture, animal care, equine, health and social care, and cookery to name a few. The

FS learners also consisted of foundation learners and so represented a wider learner population. We have all had a steep learning curve but, hopefully, have ended this academic year with more positives than negatives.

Rationale

There is evidence that embedding maths into a learner's wider programme of study has a positive impact on learner achievement:

> *"For learners on the fully-embedded courses, 93 per cent of those with an identified numeracy need achieved a numeracy/maths qualification, compared to 70 per cent for those on nonembedded courses. On the fully embedded courses, 23 per cent more learners achieved numeracy qualifications."*
>
> (Casey et al., 2006:5)

These maths skills are gained in schools and then at college with an emphasis on the importance of Functional Skills maths as a valid and relevant qualification. There is not, however, a consistent embedding of technology and the use of technology within FS maths, despite the fact that most Level 1 and Level 2 FS maths exams are conducted online.

We thought that developing a clear understanding of the use of technology as a part of FS maths learning would not only give learners confidence in their online exams but would, in turn, increase their success rates and add a new employment skill to their repertoire.
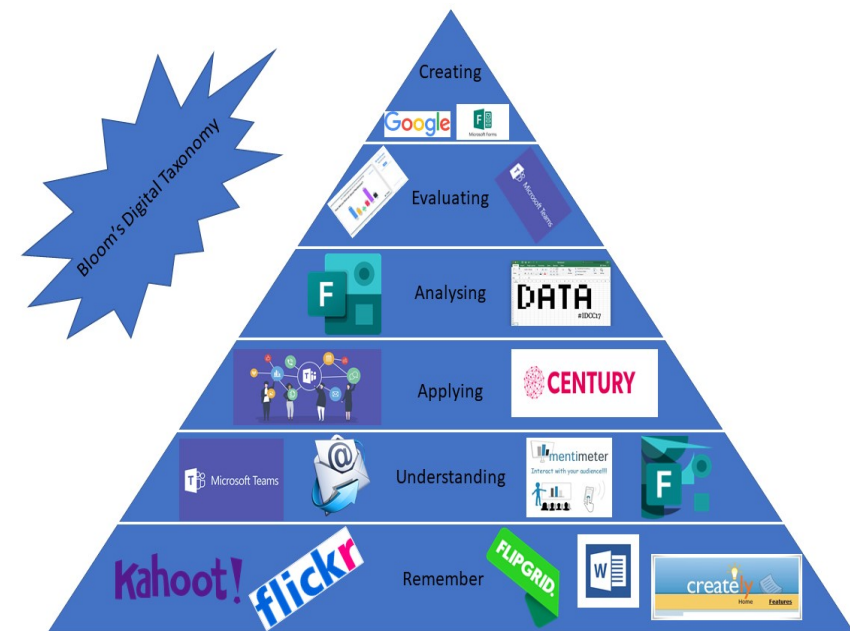
Figure 26.1: Bloom's Digital Taxonomy (Churches, 2008).

Approach

OTLA Activity Outline
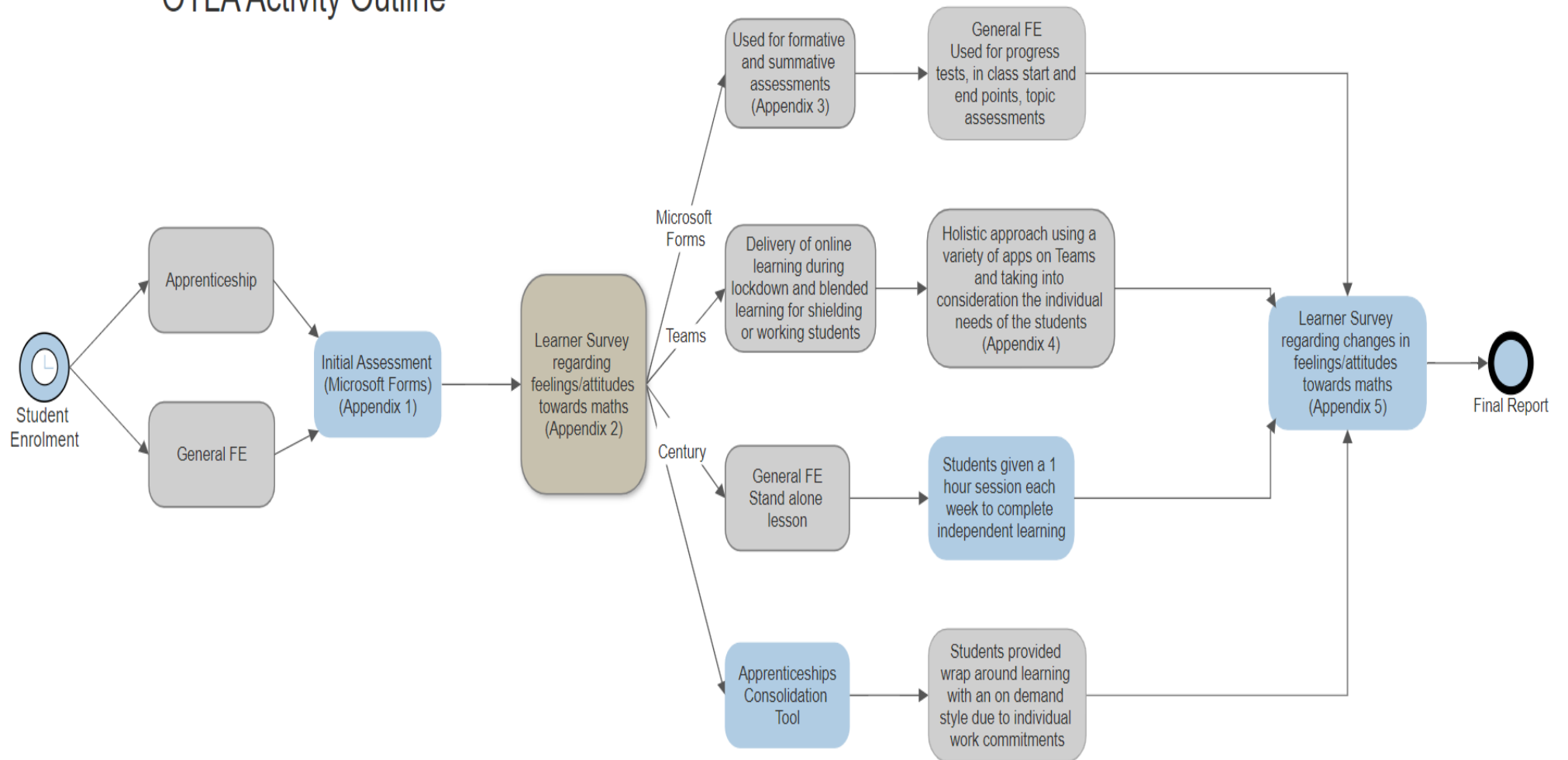
Figure 26.2: Project Approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Full Time BTEC Learners

Prior to the project starting, the country had been in a full lockdown due to the pandemic. During this time, we had used some online approaches but not fully across all our teaching.

During the first lockdown, we used Zoom to communicate within the department and all communication with learners was done via email and post. Learners were attending face-to-face sessions until the second lockdown when they were put into online sessions through Teams according to their timetables.

This change in teaching and learning was to be expected but did not come without its challenges. Digital poverty meant that not all learners had access to laptops or the internet. This was quickly resolved by the IT department loaning laptops to learners and the provision of internet dongles from a mobile phone provider which alleviated those in need.

The second challenge was those learners living in rural areas where broadband coverage was intermittent. This required a different approach to delivery, where learners had access to the same resources and lesson preparation as those that could attend the online sessions. This was done by posting out work with return envelopes. We utilised the class notebook on Microsoft Teams so the notebook contained links to all of the starter assessments and end point assessments, in the form of 'memory recall tasks', and 'how to' guides to help any self-directed study. This was combined with access to support through emails and the chat function in Teams.

The adaptations that were made in the changes outlined above enabled learners to use technology more effectively to access learning online and created a blended learning approach that will continue to support learners who cannot access face-to-face learning.

The learners still needed to be assessed, so we developed in-class start and end point assessments that could be monitored and reviewed as soon as learners had completed them. The start point assessments consisted of a series of scaffolded questions based on the topic that was being covered in lesson. This helped to identify the gaps in knowledge and identify any misconceptions. In order to have accurate data, a progress check was done at the end of the topic, this was exactly the same as the initial memory recall task but with different numbers so a direct comparison could be made.

The data collected from these formative and summative assessments would prove vital in the centre-assessed grading process. The learners also worked on an online learning platform called Century. This was easy to move from classroom to online as it was accessed via the internet and not a college-owned piece of software.

Apprenticeships

At the beginning of the second lockdown, online learning had become the 'normal' way of teaching. Both tutors and learners became more familiar with the format and engagement was increased even further. Lessons became more fluent and broken down into smaller segments. Various lesson formats were trialled and it was found to work best if a taught session was followed by tutor-led worksheets, consolidated with a topic area on Century. If any learner was still struggling, a one-to-one Teams session was booked.

As an Apprenticeships tutor, when in college I regularly sat in main course lessons to observe the use of maths within the different curriculum areas. This allowed me to understand what the course tutors were teaching and overlay FS in a familiar format to the learner. For example, in Horticulture courses the area of vegetable beds or the volume of paint required for painting wooden decking for seating areas in gardens, which has become a popular alternative to a patio. This was a benefit to both learners and tutors.

The tutors let me have their scheme of learning and the topics to be introduced in advance and I was able to alter worksheets accordingly. This continued through lockdown. The main course tutor and I blended lessons so that FS and the main course become one subject. An example of this was in Horse Care: Learners had to calculate the weight of feed to give a working horse by calculating 2.5% of its body weight. The main course tutor led the session but when the calculations were needed I led the lesson.

For learners to flourish it is vital that they understand that FS maths is used in all aspects of life and that they know how to apply it. FS maths is not just about maths in a maths classroom.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Apprenticeships

During the lockdown, most learners who had access to a computer had logged on to Century and engaged with the online learning. This was complemented by the taught sessions. These were arranged via Teams for the usual class times, but it was not always possible for the learners to attend, so an on-demand system was implemented.

All learners were made aware that they just needed to send an email and a one-to-one Teams meeting invite would be sent for a mutually convenient time. As some learners were at work during normal college hours, this included some evening sessions. As these sessions were used to reiterate a maths method, they only usually lasted around 30 minutes. They gave the learner individual attention on a topic that they may have been struggling with and allowed them to ask questions that they may not feel comfortable asking in a group setting.

In terms of group sessions, most learners liked to stay away from the camera and mute themselves when in group sessions. When teaching on a one-to-one basis, I have had 100% of learners using their cameras.

Even though not all learners became fully engaged, the class numbers did increase and so did the amount of work produced. Some of the learners still had difficulties accessing suitable IT. This was addressed by the college offering to loan laptops to those in most need. The implementation of this helped improve learner engagement. The online attendance increased by 35% due to it being more accessible to learners who were previously in digital poverty. This, in turn, not only improved topic knowledge but showed learners that they were important. One learner commented on the loan of a laptop; *"Really nice that I'm being trusted to look after it and bring it back and it's a bit above expectations that it was dropped off at my house!"* Employers whose learner engaged in this benefited and were happy to release the learner for several short sessions each week as this did not affect their businesses.

As it became more apparent that online teaching was to be a long-term necessity, more training for both staff and learners on the use of IT in the classroom was needed to ensure the learners had the best possible learning experience. The college laptop was not suitable for interactive, touchscreen teaching, which was preferable when teaching maths. I was able to borrow some more up-to-date equipment which meant that my screen could be shared, and I could annotate the information on the screen using finger touch and a drawing tool.

The feedback from my learners confirmed that they liked this new method more than the flip chart and their comfort with this new style of teaching was also increasing.

> *"I found the one-to-one classes better than a full class lesson. It was easier to understand and fitted in around work".*
>
> (Learner OB)

> *"I prefer taught sessions to Century as I can ask more questions and it seems easier. Also, Century can be slow and doesn't always work"* (because of connectivity issues in a rural setting).
>
> (Learner RS)

> *"I never understood maths at school but now I can see where it is used in the workplace, I now feel confident to help others that are struggling".*
>
> (Learner AE)

> *"I had to work through lockdown so set lesson times meant I could not attend. Lessons on demand allowed me to continue both learning and working".*
>
> (Learner RE)

Full Time BTEC Learners

The full-time courses have many tutors across different units of their course. Learners were expected to still attend in their normal classroom set times. This was divided between taught sessions and Century sessions. Tutors took different approaches to using the online learning platform. Some teachers introduced a topic, then students consolidated and built on their knowledge using the associated learning material (which Century calls 'nuggets' of learning, e.g. fractions), while other teachers assigned a whole course (e.g. Level 1 Functional Maths).

It became evident, where learners had been assigned the whole course, that they were completing tasks that did not necessarily relate to the taught content in class each week, which meant that some learners had to rely on Century to teach them the maths methods they had not yet covered. The data collected showed that, although learners did manage to complete the topics, they did not always have a full understanding of how to apply that method in different situations, where in comparison, those who were working on set assignments that consolidated their learning, showed an increase in understanding.

Top tips!

Century

Do	Don't
Create your own course	Assume that the pre-set course has all the required elements in for your group
Set individual assignments	Use as a first visit to a topic
Create course classes	Use as a replacement for teaching. Use it as a personalised intervention tool alongside taught lessons
Ensure diagnostics are completed first	Overuse in classroom setting. Allow the opportunity for students to work on their individual pathways allowing intervention time for those requiring additional support
Use as a consolidation tool	

Microsoft Forms

Do	Don't
Make sure first and surnames are set as two questions	Use closed questions
Check all answers before gathering results	Underestimate its use
Create deeper thinking questions	Forget to click enlarge button for inserted images
Limit multi choice questions	Forget to click 'required' for all questions

Microsoft Teams

Do	Don't
Set meetings within a reasonable timeframe	Have large groups that all need extra help
Ensure backgrounds are appropriate	Rely on all apps working
Use mute to ensure focus of topic when teaching	Forget to have a backup plan for on screen application
Familiarise yourself with apps before use	Forget to add support staff as teachers
Ask for permission before recording	Assume that others will understand your file order or placement of files

This approach also helped increase engagement and participation and was a benefit to learners' retention of knowledge.

The final change in approach was to look at learner wellbeing. Lockdown had a negative impact on learners due to feelings of isolation and this often had an impact on focus during lessons. During lessons, learners would discuss how they had not slept properly and were missing their friends and family. They described lockdown as 'depressing' and 'like being grounded' with other comments describing their college experience 'we didn't get a prom and now we're not even getting a proper college life'. The learners were missing the social contact they had in class and were feeling lonely and unhappy so we shifted the focus to become holistic and address all of the learners' needs, not just their academic ones.

I feel like I can be wrong and not be judged for it. I'm OK with saying I don't get it. (Student JH)	*Leigh cares if we are OK. She knows when I'm not concentrating because I'm hungry or tired.* (Student AS)
It's not like school. We don't move on until we get it and that helps a lot. (Student LC)	*We had a Disney Kahoot! Because everyone was down. It showed that we were more important than the maths.* (Student AD)

This shift showed learners that they were cared about and helped to build a stronger tutor/ learner relationship. This resulted in an increase in attendance and participation as well as giving learners a platform to showcase the things they had been doing to keep them busy during lockdown.

One example of this was when learners shared the things that had got them through lockdown. Learners showed pictures of their pets, artwork and stories that they had written which gave a new depth to the knowledge already gained through short intervals in teaching when online.

Another example is when the learners showed signs of screen fatigue so a question was posed to the group – what made you laugh this week? Not maths related but necessary to help the learners focus on the positives in their life. Learners shared stories of dogs stealing dinners, siblings singing badly and parents' cooking skills (or lack of). This personal sharing helped to solidify the group dynamics even further.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Microsoft Forms was used to track in class progress. A memory recall activity was given to assess prior knowledge, followed by worked examples, group and individual activities and then a progress check to assess progress made.

The importance of the memory recall and progress checks being similar was so we could accurately monitor start and end-point sub-topic progression. Combined with the whole topic diagnostic and progress test, these assessments of learning gave a holistic view of the learner journey for the academic year.

Learners, in general, made good to excellent progress within the lesson, with over 85% seeing an improvement in their skills. This monitoring of progress showed learners that small steps forward added up to large increases in knowledge. This not only improved confidence but also gave all learners the opportunity to stretch and challenge themselves regardless of their starting point.
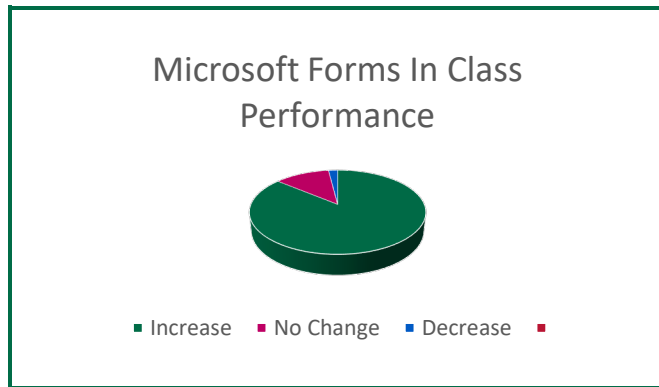
Figure 26.3: Microsoft Forms In Class Performance

Microsoft Forms was also used to deliver Progress Tests to learners during lockdown and to those who were shielding. The comparison between paper-based assessments and online assessments showed almost no difference, with accessibility being positive due to the 'read aloud' feature on Microsoft Forms. The only negative opinions were around internet access and not being able to draw or create graphs and charts. This was resolved through multiple choice options.

Comparative data using Angles in a triangle (Figure 26.4) shows the results of 57 learners' assessments.
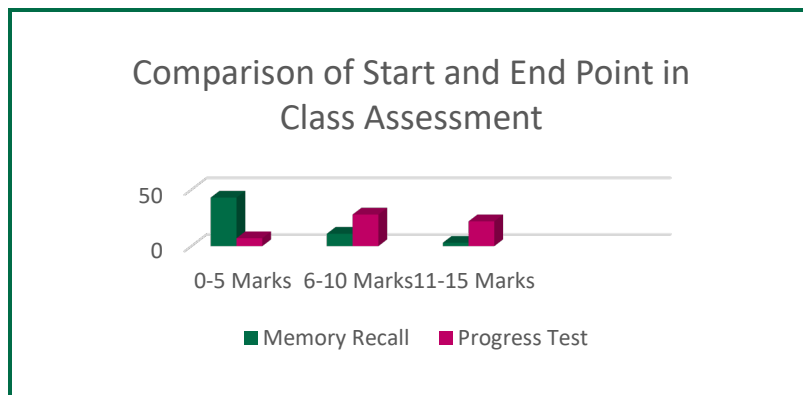
Figure 26.4: Comparison of Start and End Point in Class Assessment

The biggest data collection was done through Century, as this was across all learner groups in the college.

A direct comparison of apprentices and BTEC learners shows that their average score was very similar but, in contrast to this, the confidence levels in learners varied on the lower and upper confidence percentiles with a smaller range at medium confidence. This could be due to apprentices using industry-related maths and being able to see the links or it could be due to age and experience.
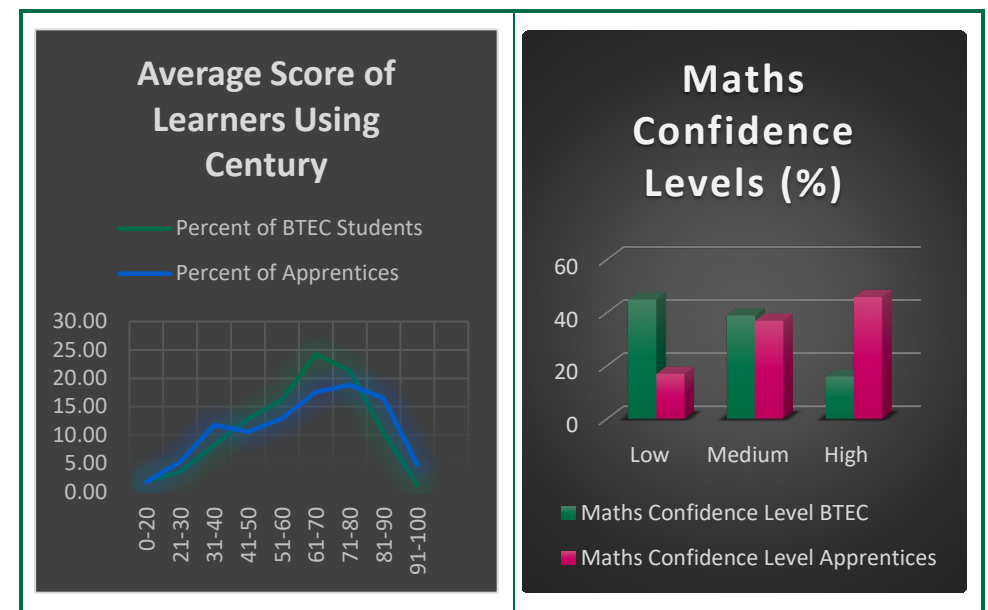
Figure 26.5: Comparison of apprentices and BTEC learners

One example can be seen in Figure 26.6 with the nuggets completed by learner JP, one of the case studies.
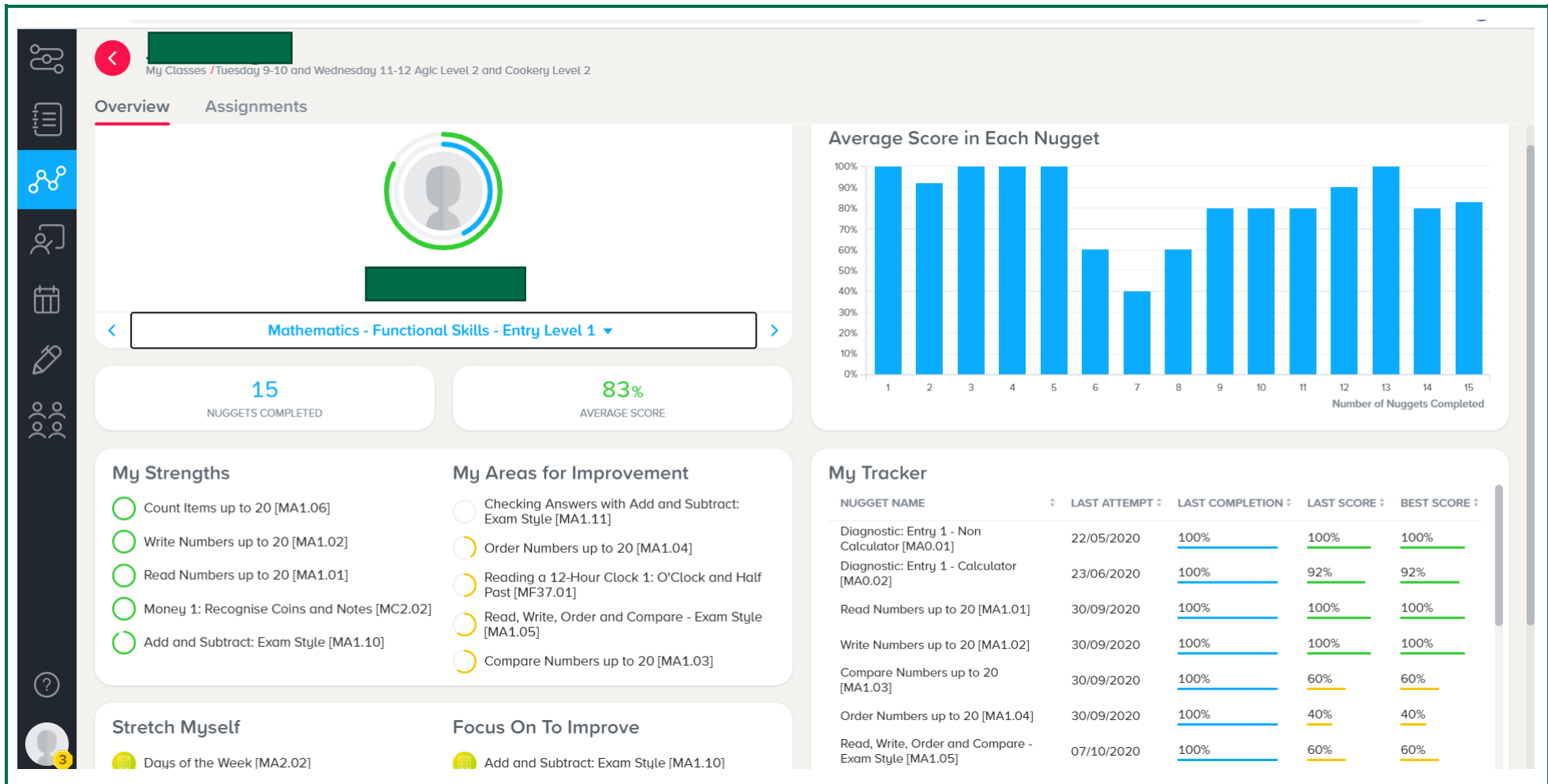
Figure 26.6: Nuggets completed by learner JP

JP started his learner journey at Entry Level 1 with high support needs. He was introduced to Century this academic year where his target grade was Entry Level 2. The dashboard above shows his capabilities at Entry Level 1 which gave him a great base knowledge to scaffold towards Entry Level 2. JP took to Century well and his confidence grew.

As he saw his scores on completion of each nugget (topic, e.g. addition and subtraction) he wanted to do more.

At the initial start point, Entry Level 2 topics were not available on Century so JP moved to the next available level as a personal stretch and challenge.

Below is his Entry Level 3 dashboard.
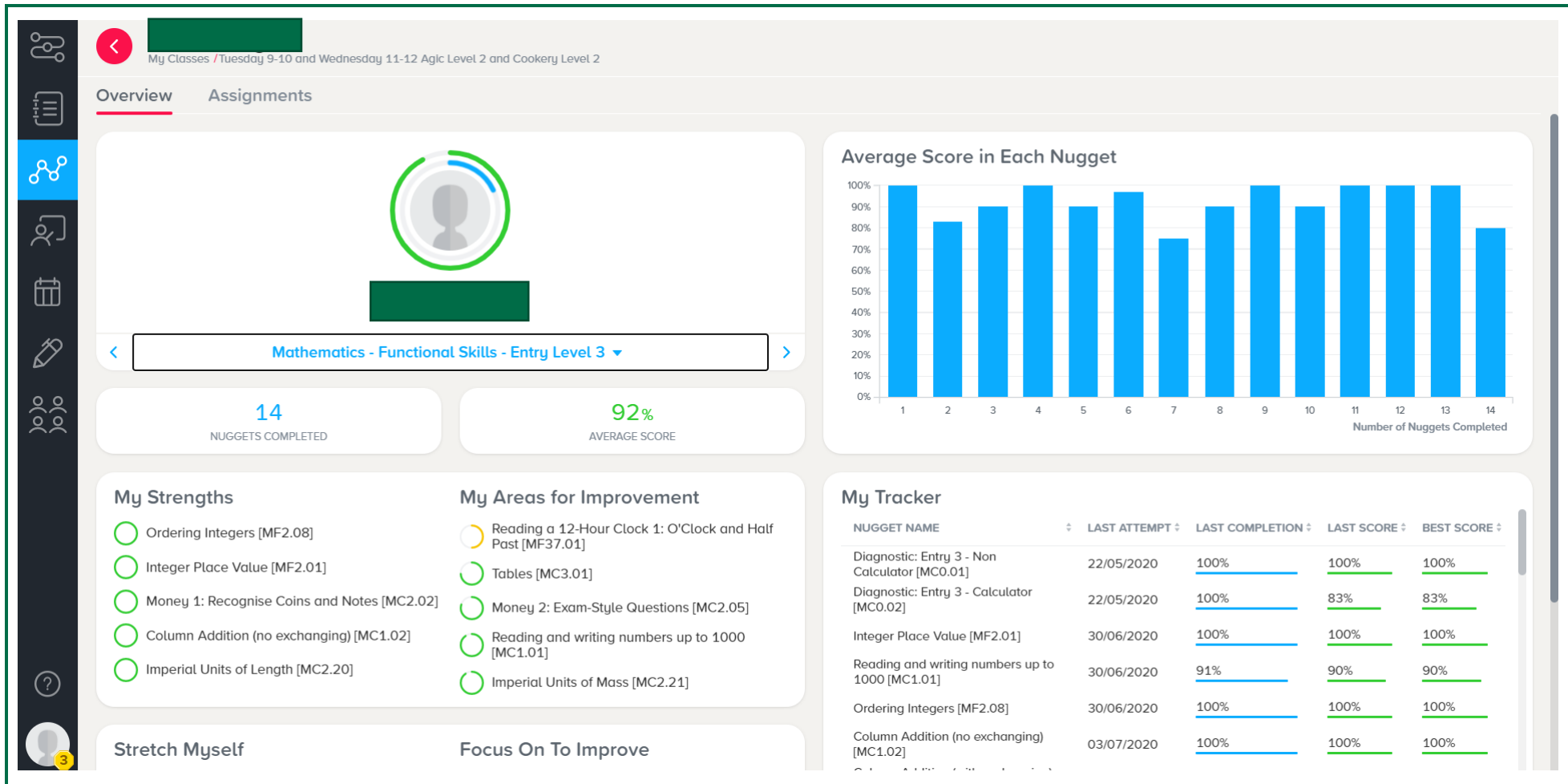
Figure 26.7: JP Entry Level 3 Dashboard

JP passed his Entry Level 2 Functional maths.

The dashboard collates all the data from the individual learner and sets individual stretch and challenge tasks, identifies strengths and areas for improvement.

This data collection does not stop at the dashboard. The tutor can go into each nugget and view every question a learner has completed.

Learning from this project

When in college, all learners and staff have access to plentiful resources. Computers can be accessed with free Wi-Fi. Specialist IT staff are on site if any problems occur, and all learners have dedicated time within their timetable to attend class. In the beginning of lockdown, IT poverty within the apprentice learner cohort became very apparent. Apprentices were not able to access any bursaries, dongles or laptops due to being classed as working. Some became disengaged because of embarrassment in asking for help or admitting that they did not have the necessary equipment. Whilst this was a government decision, the college acted and loaned laptops to those in need. It highlighted the importance of recognising that apprentices are part of the college learner body and face the same barriers as 16-19-year-olds.

Likewise, not all staff were IT literate and only knew how to achieve the basics that were needed within their job role. This was resolved with focused, comprehensive training on online teaching and learning and the appointment of a digital learning technologist for support. It was also the focus of the college annual teaching and learning conference, with digital upskilling being a priority.

Both learners and staff engaged in a steep learning curve. Both parties relied on the help and support of peers. At this stage, main course learners had the option to loan college laptops which gave them an advantage over the apprentice learners. The main upskilling was that staff had to learn to navigate Teams and utilise the applications so a blended learning approach could happen. This had to be cascaded through departments and learners so that everyone felt confident enough to use it for teaching, learning and assessment.

Those members of staff who were quick to understand the technology, shared their knowledge with their colleagues and became mentors and problem solvers which showed the community spirit and cross curricular collaboration. This was especially felt at Riseholme where there is one main office shared by most curriculum area tutors. The Teaching and Learning Champion (TLC) went to every available training session and was on hand to support and guide the whole teaching cohort.

Learner engagement improved as the new way of learning became more familiar. Some learners still struggled to focus when not in a traditional classroom, but some actually performed better with no peer pressure or distractions. As tutors, we found new and better ways to deliver our sessions which in turn gave a much better learning experience for the learners.

Apprentices

The new format for teaching apprentices is working well. They are having shorter taught sessions but can access extra help at any time. Both learners and employers like this format as it fits in easily around a working day.

Employers that need the apprentice working to fulfil orders, which may potentially keep their businesses afloat, can be resistant to them taking set hours out of the working week for study.

An example of this is learner R. He could not attend his timetabled taught session as he had to work. It was arranged that he attend at another time but again had to work and could not spare a full hour. I asked him if he had internet coverage where he works. He told me that he did at one end of a field. He sent me an email from his tractor when he got to the right spot.

I then held a one-to-one Teams meeting with him from his tractor cab. His boss was happy for him to take a small amount of time out of his working day and learner R was happy to be able to gain help on the topic. I followed the session with work set on Century, which learner R completed once he got home from work. Learner R's employer commented *"I can see the benefit of R doing his maths work but at the moment we are too busy to give him the time off he needs. It is fine for him to have a small amount of time, especially if he doesn't have to leave the farm to do it".* Learner R said, *"this way I can keep my boss happy and continue with my learning".* Both acknowledged that without the pandemic they would not be as busy and learner R would be able to spend more time studying.

Apprentice R using his break from farming to join in a one to one session with Karen.

Towards the end of an apprenticeship the learners have already completed all the taught sessions. Some may have attended the same class more than once. This is the time for self-directed study and revision. The sessions are tutor-led but assistance is only to help when the learner is struggling with maths methods. The learner uses all the notes, worksheets and PowerPoints used to revise before the formal exam. Mock exams are set and timings noted. Any corrections that are needed are addressed in the next session.

Learner R now feels comfortable within both the actual and the virtual classroom and, indeed, is often used as peer support to help the newer or less able learners. He stated; *"It's easier knowing I can get stuff done and still be at work. I don't have to stress about it and it's made it better when I see Karen at college because it's not been ages since I was last in."* While this peer support is predominately used to allow learners to vocalise their skills, by showing others how they address a task, they in turn are revising for that task in the formal exam. This is a positive for the learner for several reasons: the revision which will enable them to pass the exam; the confidence to help others without the fear of humiliation; and the translation to the workplace where the learner can offer help with tasks to other members of their workforce. It also helps the learner feel less conspicuous or nervous when completing the end point assessment as they already feel more comfortable speaking to others and explaining tasks.

Now the learners feel more confident in both their abilities and their confidence, they are more likely to ask for help. There are more emails from learners who would prefer a one-to-one session to go over a missed/ difficult topic since being in lockdown and this is due to the accessibility of their tutor through technology. Learner T was asked to undertake a spraying task at work. He calculated the chemicals needed. He wanted to check his calculations so asked for help. A short Teams meeting confirmed that he had the correct ratio and volume of chemicals. Learner T was visibly pleased that he had calculated correctly and was able to apply classroom tasks in the workplace.

Full Time BTEC Learners

The adaptations that were made in the move to online learning helped to empower and enable learners to participate in online learning and created a blended learning approach that will be continued in order to support learners who cannot access face-to-face learning.

Learners who had not engaged in face-to-face lessons due to a fear of failure began to engage, first through the private message feature on Microsoft Teams, then to the main chat and finally in the face-to-face lessons. This new confidence has not only generated a classroom full of raised hands but has enabled discussions, peer support and a positive learning community.

The holistic approach to online teaching considered the learner as a whole person, beyond someone acquiring maths skills, and has resulted in a very positive relationship with learners. In addition, the college is hosting an art exhibition to showcase learner hobbies which is titled **'What got you through lockdown?'**
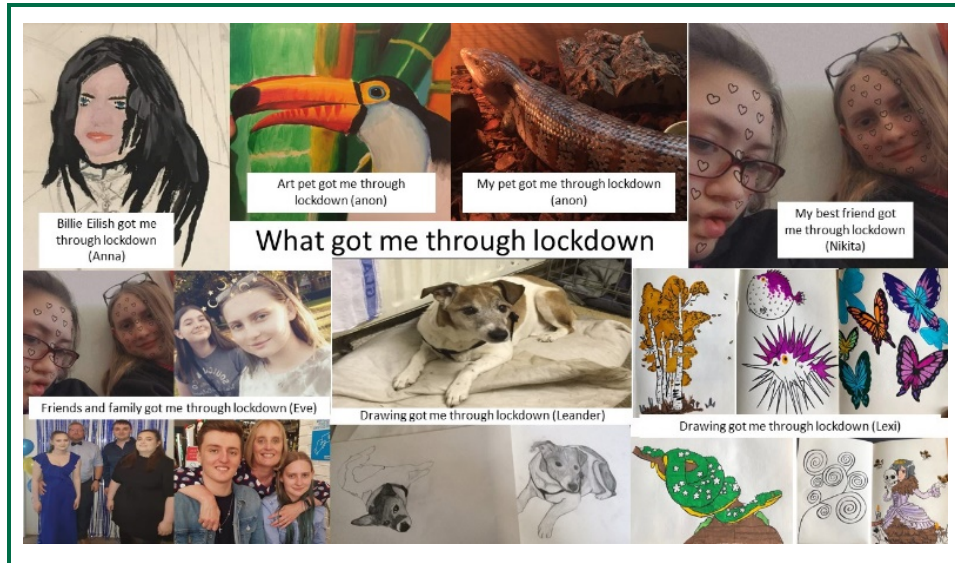

Figure 26.8: 'What got you through lockdown?' art exhibition

I think the biggest thing we have learnt throughout this project is that it is not just about the maths. We are all adaptable and resilient, but it helps when we know that we are not alone.

We are thankful that lockdown gave us the opportunity to fully understand that the holistic teaching approaches, such as blended learning, adaptation of resources to suit the classroom as well as online and a close monitoring of student well-being, yields the best results academically and emotionally. We were capable of not just thinking outside of the box but destroying the box altogether through innovative practice that is student focused.

Top Tips for Engaging Learners Online

1.	Recognise when students are getting screen fatigue	6.	Let them do the teaching! Asking for students to share their methods instils a sense of pride and achievement.
2.	Have a break in learning by discussing hobbies and interests, e.g. pets.	7.	Mix it up! Make use of breakout rooms, interactive whiteboards and quizzes to keep things fresh and interesting.
3.	Sometimes all you need is a Kahoot! to get focus back!	8.	Silence is golden – it's OK to be quiet when students are working.
4.	Mental wellbeing is important. Create a safe environment where students can share how they are feeling.	9.	Ask students to show their understanding using memes in the chat (no rude ones obviously).
5.	Allowing 10 minutes for students to share something they are proud of shows them you care and keeps them turning up to class.	10.	Use the raise hand function for answering questions, then say 3..2..1 reveal! This helps to combat copying and identify misconceptions.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-13/7-26/**

27. A FLIPPED APPROACH TO ENGAGING, SUPPORTING AND BUILDING CONFIDENCE
The Sheffield College

This project set out to investigate if a more nuanced approach to undertaking weekly electronic diagnostic assessments prior to attendance at a weekly GCSE Mathematics Resit class improved learner motivation, confidence, and their learning experience.

Summary

The aim of the project was to identify if the use of technology as a key aspect of the delivery was beneficial to the students and the tutors.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure our new and existing students were able to access high quality learning, the college made three early decisions, namely:

- All student facing virtual learning environments would be hosted on the Google Classroom platform.
- To go 'all in' GCSE to replace the previous Functional Skills/ GCSE mixed model for study programme students.
- Develop a virtual classroom that could be accessed by all GCSE students. This has been a primary delivery tool for the whole of the academic year.

The project had a focus on diagnostic assessment. We sought to determine if using a flipped learning approach, releasing several parts of the session prior to the face-to-face session, would have an impact on the learner experience, confidence or motivation.

The key driver was to work on areas for improvement in maths rather than repeat work students can already do. Feedback on this approach was largely positive with students engaging with the materials and approach.

Rationale

The Sheffield College is a large general FE college. We have a wide student base recruiting from a wide multicultural demographic and age range across the Sheffield City Region. Operating across multiple campuses, our cohort spans all types of provision.

The skills and knowledge required to be successful and attain a Grade 4 or above at GCSE maths are interlaced throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. Nevertheless, the majority of students who enrol at the college have not yet achieved a Grade 4 and the proportion who achieve a Grade 4 remains below the national average for post-16 resits.

The project initially set out to investigate if adapting delivery would improve the learners' self-belief, confidence, and resilience around approaching mathematics. The original project aims were adapted, responding to changes in the delivery model necessary to ensure staff and student safety during the waves in the COVID-19 pandemic.

To scale our ambition to the available time, we narrowed our scope to focus on diagnostic assessment to determine if changes to the delivery had an impact on the learner experience. We worked within the framework of a virtual classroom using a flipped learning approach, releasing several parts of the session prior to the face-to-face session in the expectation students will attempt them before attending the online meeting. We explored whether some simple changes to the diagnostic assessment had any notable impacts on the learner experience, confidence or motivation. We selected the weekly diagnostic assessment, as this was the component that we felt potentially gave the biggest return on investment for both staff and students. The key driver in the revision approach is to work on areas for improvement rather than repeat work students can already do.

The delivery model was based on a second iteration scheme of work, specifically targeted at a resit cohort, modelled on the 'Focused 15' developed by Grimsby Institute (ETF, 2020b). The scheme addressed the 15 topics that account for 85% of the available marks at foundation level. Gaining mastery of just these 15 topics improves students' confidence and this is also reflected in improvements in high grade achievements. In an ideal world, we would have endeavoured to revise all of the learning objectives within the syllabus to build deeper maths competence. From a purely pragmatic stance, as time was limited, we needed to find an approach that built confidence, and hence exams success, within the already busy study programme.

Approach

An early cross-college decision was made to adopt Google Classroom as the delivery platform for all learner-facing delivery including the main vocational programme, tutorial, GCSE English Language and GCSE mathematics. Working on a single platform enabled effective upskilling to be undertaken efficiently by our central e-learning team. This also supported teachers new to the platform and created a lot of informal peer support as we were 'all in it together'.

We responded to this new delivery model with a whole team review of the sequencing efficacy of the existing scheme of work. A refreshed scheme of work was agreed that scheduled the topics in a progressive sequence, building on the skills required to improve mastery of the top 15 topics in an interleaved approach. Interleaving is the strategic revisiting of previously-learned topics as, for example, part of a quick starter activity to ensure students maintain and consolidate skills required to build mastery.

The virtual classroom was designed to have a common 5-step structure (Figure 27.1). Hegarty Maths (**https://hegartymaths.com**), a self-access maths learning website, was incorporated into the learning.

Step 1:	Video introduction to the weekly topic
Step 2:	Weekly diagnostic assessment
Step 3:	Starter activity
Step 4:	Additional activity and materials to illustrate key learning points and stimulate discussion for a weekly Google Meet (Step 4A)
Step 4A:	A virtual workshop hosted in Google Meet
Step 5:	An end-of-session mini exam

Figure 27.1: The 5-step delivery model

Google Forms were used to produce weekly diagnostic and end-of-session mini exams because:
- They can be used to produce self-marking assessments.
- They provide immediate feedback on the topic.
- They provide 1-click hyperlinks links to the relevant topics in Hegarty Maths.

Due to the short length of the project, we elected to restrict the action research to concentrate our efforts on adapting one facet of the approach, we chose Step 2, the weekly topic-based diagnostic.

The approach was implemented and, as a baseline, learner voice was captured from a small cohort including both study programme learners and post-19 learners just before Christmas 2020.

From the pilot group initial feedback suggested:
- The students were all familiar with the concept of independent learning although they all acknowledged that they would not describe themselves as independent learners.

- The sample group were all previously taught in a relatively traditional 'chalk and talk' style but they could see the value of a flipped learning approach.
- The use of learning technology and the weekly diagnostic was fairly well received, as was the use of Hegarty Maths.

Asked how receiving a low score in the diagnostic test motivated them, learners commented:

> "Personally I think oh my god. But then when I join the meet. I think I can achieve this."
>
> "Yeah it does a lot - I know I can do it - why have I got 2 out of 10. I need someone to remind me."
>
> "Sometimes it affects motivation- I thought i knew this but I don't - then you follow the link. The mini exam you get is more correct so its motivating."
>
> "Sometimes I get it and it's a bit demotivating."

The research team reflected on the feedback and, given the additional pressure of a third national lockdown, decided to focus on one small change; to adapt the weekly diagnostic assessment, introducing hinge questions (Cambridge Mathematics, 2020) early in the assessment that adapted the assessment in line with individual learner responses. The rationale behind this was a tutor's belief, partially supported by some learner voices, that the constant low scores would be a demotivator to some of the learners, especially those who were perhaps working at Grade 2 or lower.

Following this intervention, which was undertaken on a pilot cohort, student voice was used to harvest feedback around the impact and effectiveness of the change on learner confidence or response.

Whilst students do not like a low mark, they are far more resilient than we perhaps imagine and can see beyond the simple score.

> "If I get the low mark I am frustrated - reminds me all the things I have forgotten."
>
> "I think it's important to get things wrong early on so that you can work on it and get better at the things you are unsure about. Constructive criticism is really important for us all to improve. You would be happier to see a better score but if those questions are not challenging you is there any point?"
>
> "By doing things wrong you will learn how to do it right , it does affect my confidence but soon I practice and I get it right my confidence gets higher than it was."
>
> "I was partly confident in the beginning, but I am fully confident now. I did crap in my English and maths (at school)."

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

An important aspect of the research was the promotion of practitioner-led action research. Each faculty has an allocated half-day slot dedicated primarily to staff development. Individual staff training targets are, in the main, practitioner-led. When the project was initiated, it was planned to have a more limited initial reach, extending as the year progressed. However, the development of the pandemic meant that the wider roll-out was slower than had been planned. We still intend to use the knowledge acquired during the project to drive further improvement of the curriculum.

Buy-in from the faculty teaching team and the maths tutors from the vocational faculties has been largely very positive; staff were keen to adopt the use of Google Classroom. This was due to several reasons:
- Team ownership.
- The materials were prepared by the team for the team. This reduced the pressure of reviewing aspects of the syllabus at the same time as

producing materials. We used a 'divide and conquer' approach to quickly producing quality resources.

- Being developed by teams, the materials were more consistent and were quality-assured.
- The vocational maths team were able to use materials prepared for them, allowing them to focus on understanding the syllabus.

All materials were populated on a central classroom that will be refreshed annually and cascaded. Teachers made copies for each class they teach, thus allowing for personalisation to meet the needs of the individual classes. Materials and links were added to the college's GCSE Maths Google site which links both internally and externally.

We implemented the 5-step process across all classes, which offered a structured approach to the delivery of a resit model.

There were some challenges:

- Digital access was a challenge for some of the learners where the household may only have one internet-enabled device.
- Our vocational tutors reported they found the 5 steps quite challenging to implement with groups that were predominately students with a GCSE entry grade of Grade 1 and 2. They tackled this by flipping some of the student directed activity back to a more teacher-led delivery.

- Completion of the pre-class steps was inconsistent across groups, with study programme learners less invested in the approach than post-19 learners.
- The initial intention of using the flipped approach to engage and support learners to build confidence was only partially successful, but the project was valuable in helping us refine our thinking and approach to ongoing improvement.

Future development:

- We will introduce flexibility with oversight to allow teachers to adapt how materials are used within the session, whilst maintaining the 5 step approach. This will be essential in our planning as further future COVID-19 waves may necessitate a need to quickly switch to partial or fully remote delivery.
- We will review the induction to ensure that the value around completion of diagnostic assessments is positively framed and regularly reinforced so that it becomes a habit. Whilst staff noted that the completion of the weekly diagnostic before class had proved to be a challenge, especially with study programme groups, the additional planning data it can reveal makes it a worthwhile investment for staff and students. We will therefore give tutors the flexibility to decide how and where they undertake the weekly diagnostic.
- We need to be mindful that flipped learning is still a new concept to many of our learners (and in some cases, staff). Change can cause anxiety; habits need to be formed. A positive sell and teacher enthusiasm and affirmation of the value of the approach are key success factors.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project realised a number of positives, including:

- The opportunity for staff across faculties to collaborate.
- 'Task and finish' groups were able to produce many quality resources very quickly.
- The vocational faculty maths staff were keen to contribute and they will be part of the groups that review and refresh the classroom materials.
- Some staff have also adapted extremely well to the use of technology as a part of their delivery. Attendance and weekly assessment completion data supports the observation that the students in these classes have enjoyed the sessions and participated more. The opposite has been observed in some cases, where tutors have tried to deliver in their usual approach in the pandemic world.
- We continue to share best practice across the team, in team and cross-college CPD sessions and teach meets. In our first meet, two of the maths tutors shared how they utilised Pear Deck as an add on to Google Slides and how they use this to make the Google Meets more interactive.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Interviews with learners and staff have been a rich data source. The challenge was to identify the 'diamonds' and 'golden threads'.

Initial learner voice suggested that:

- Many students understood the concept of independent learning and the value of undertaking the weekly diagnostic assessment.
- The motivated students were prepared to do more out of class but this was less apparent with the lower level learners.
- Analysing the marks from the diagnostic compared to the end of session 'mini exams' demonstrated that in the majority of learners had

an improved grade. Where the marks did not improve greatly, students did comment that it had helped.

Learning from this project

The creation of a virtual classroom was a good return on the time invested. It provided useful data for the teacher and it enabled the students to continue their learning.

The use of an online weekly diagnostic provided useful information but this was limited by the students who did not undertake the work. There were a number of reasons given by learners as to why this was, some of these were logistical around available time and others were more attitudinal.

Staff observation as they administered the modified intervention identified that:

- Most learners did not notice a difference with the adapted diagnostic.
- Learners wanted parity in the number of questions.
- Some learners who were asked fewer questions wanted the chance to have a go at the more challenging questions.

Learner voice captured to assess the effectiveness of the introduction of a branched diagnostic revealed:

- Some learners did not notice any difference or felt it was no more helpful than the original diagnostic:

> *"I don't mind getting things wrong. This is what you need to come to terms with in life. I know I struggle. I underestimate what I will get. So I'm not disappointed.*
>
> *It's how you look at things. You have to try, you have to push."*
>
> *"Personally I did not find it good - I like the fact the answers referred to Hegarty. I prefer the other system. The new system - the feedback - they can't find many of the questions - gaps in the feedback" (with less questions less feedback?)*

- Some learners commented that they were frustrated with a low mark, others were less bothered. The student mindset around the topic appeared to have more bearing.

Whilst the continued use of a diagnostic activity has clear value, we will revisit how and when it is undertaken but we will continue to use it as it provides the learner and the teacher with valuable information about their starting point on a topic. When combined with an end-of-session mini exam using the same format, it can also provide a useful measure of distance travelled in a session.

The response to the 'mark' from the diagnostic varied due to a number of factors:

- How the diagnostic had been pitched to the class by the teacher.
- The learners' programme: Study Programme learners were less likely to complete this work before class.
- Some learners saw low scores as a bad thing, others as an opportunity: Student mindset had a significant influence.

The use of an adaptive or branched diagnostic was seen as more beneficial by study programme learners: Although some felt strongly that they should be allowed to try the more difficult questions, parity between them was important to them. The use of the weekly quantitative totals in pure isolation offered no benefit to the individual teacher but may impact on student motivation positively or negatively, depending how the diagnostic has been presented and sold to the students.

As a result of learning from this research, GCSE maths will continue to be timetabled to a 3-hour slot. However, in future we will need to give the faculties and tutors options to flex how the sessions are delivered. This will encourage teachers to build in time for small group interventions and one-to-one support, as we believe that flexibility supports creativity.

We will also encourage tutors to use the diagnostic feedback to inform session planning and use end-of-session mini tests to enable learners to monitor their own progress and set personal targets. The action research group discussed the fact that the way the rationale, purpose and the importance of the diagnostic is pitched has a big impact.

In future, we will improve the content and delivery of the induction, which is critical to start the new classes off. Renewed teacher buy-in and enthusiasm will be required to ensure that the diagnostics become part of the weekly routine for all parties. The positive benefits of the activity need to be clearly explained to the cohorts in the induction and also reinforced on a regular basis. Learning walks and learner voice will help to ensure that this is working and is being approached consistently across classes.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-13/7-27/

28. USING TECHNOLOGY TO MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE GCSE MATHS LEARNERS

Basingstoke College of Technology

This project's premise was to use an action research approach to investigate digital learning and the effectiveness of learner-led digital activities. This includes not just what programs and software work best, but also which methods and approaches engage learners most successfully. We have used technology with our learners for a number of years but we aimed to refine it, with promising results.

Summary

I am Joe Wydrzynski, the project lead and a maths lecturer at Basingstoke College of Technology (BCoT). We aimed to detail what methods of delivery will be best suited to fully engage Further Education (FE) GCSE maths re-sit learners. Looking at how learners engage in lessons and how this affects their progression is a passion of the maths team and the College. Developing digital learning has been a significant part of the College's development for a number of years.

As re-sitting students, in a vocational FE college with minimal entry requirements, we get a diverse cohort. We wanted to establish the best strategies for digital participation for our learners. We feel that properly planned flipped learning helps define the learner's maths experience at the College and provides a different process than school. Due to the pandemic, we also wanted to ensure effective learner engagement for a potential year of remote learning. Lastly, we wanted to improve digital confidence and competence in the teaching team.

Our research built on the College's decision to introduce an extra hour of flipped maths learning each week and we set out to determine how best to digitalise our workbooks and which method of online assessment would be most suitable.

We focused the action research project on enabling better general digital fluency, wanting to ascertain what works best from a variety of software, increasing our motivation to experiment. We also examined what works in a digitally focussed, learner-led flipped learning methodology in comparison to a conventional teacher-led approach and how each of these approaches influence engagement and achievement.

Rationale

As a leading college in technology, we've been successfully embedding all forms of digital learning. A few years ago, the College decided that in addition to learners having three hours of maths lessons a week, they would have an extra hour of flipped maths learning. This included supervision from non-maths specialists and almost exclusive use of the artificial intelligence (AI) focused maths website, Century. This, combined with WiFi difficulties, meant that these sessions did not go very well.

As a department, it was difficult to regain learners' trust in using technology in maths, especially if they also had a negative experience using maths-based technology at school, with programs such as MyMaths (Dowker, Sarkar, and Looi, 2016). Adding into the equation the challenge of being in the middle of a global pandemic, I thought it wise to focus on how to adapt and refine our use of technology to improve both staff and learner capability and willingness for using all kinds of digital tools/ applications. Our research focus included, but was not exclusive to, how best to digitalise our workbooks and which method of online assessment is most suitable.

The project's focus was always on how to improve success with our demographic of learners, considering factors such as their particular socio-economic backgrounds and previous grades. We decided to make the

project a general betterment in overall digital fluency, rather than putting the focus on a particular tool/ app. The reasons for this are varied but, essentially, this is due us wanting to ascertain what works best from a variety of different software and not wanting to be limited in scope, thus increasing colleagues' motivation to experiment.

Process for assessing and surveying learners

Joe Williams |

Learners take initial survey. Includes questions about taking part in the project and asks for permission to use learner data and feedback.

Conventional teacher-led session

Digital learner-led flipped session

Take online Google Form assessment on lessons topics.

Learners from conventional teacher-led lesson take specifically designed survey

Learners from digital learner-led flipped lesson take specifically designed survey

Project lead then analyses the data and makes assumptions in reports.

Figure 28.1: Project approach

Almost all learners who previously did not achieve a Grade 4 at GCSE maths, will sit GCSE again at the College. A very small percentage take Functional Skills (FS) qualifications. This impacts engagement and strategies for resource management, as learners who may have just scraped a Grade 1 will be doing GCSE again. We wanted to ensure that their learner experience is the best it could possibly be.

Activities

As is common with the nature of action research, our activities have evolved and changed throughout the year. At the beginning of the project, we had an ideal of what 'teacher-led learning' entailed and what 'learner-led flipped digital learning' would involve.

Teacher-led learning is essentially what happens in an average GCSE maths class. A teacher lectures from the front of the class, presenting a variety of topics at their discretion. Learners have access to a paper workbook. The teacher might wander around checking learners' work and possibly go through some model answers on the board. The lesson may then include a plenary exercise or assessment at the end of the lesson.

Learner-led flipped digital learning is the opposite in many regards; it is somewhat asynchronous but always occurs with a teacher present. The teacher informs learners where to locate resources and then can spend the rest of the lesson supporting and working preventively. Learners take the lead on their learning, dictating the speed (timeframe suggestions are provided) and order and are also given some freedoms on work presentation. Tutoring can be identified via videos and slides.

Answers are often located digitally, sometimes timed, so the teacher can spend time really focusing on either stretching some learners' knowledge or spending that bit more time those who are struggling. Whilst often heavily structured, the learner-led element comes from learners not having everything directly presented in a lecture to them and instead independence is encouraged. Towards the end of a session, the teacher would then have learners take an assessment (Nouri, 2016).

At first, we used learner sets (that are split by previous GCSE maths grade and vocational area) and embedded differing teaching and learning techniques to see what was most effective in our lessons. For example, one group had a standard teacher-led maths lesson whilst another group completed the exact same work but with resources digitalised. The group that had the resources digitalised worked via a laptop in a more learner-led digital approach. Both groups then completed the same assessment upon completion of learning.

Later in the year, especially when moving to remote learning, we switched to almost all learners having a teacher-led digital lesson. When appropriate, these sessions became learner-led for particular topics. This developing pedagogy did alter our feedback focus too.

One word of warning I would offer for those who are intending to take part in a similar project, do be careful about the initial week when you introduce new technology. You will read further ahead about an issue I had at the start of the project. Start simpler than you might first intend and slowly build fluency.

Assessment

We focused on both summative and formative assessment, to help evidence the research outcomes. This focus would enable us to see if the interventions we had made helped the learners to make progress in their maths learning. The plan has always been flexible, so if a particular group simply cannot perform with a learner-led approach, we switched instead to a teacher-led lesson and left the learner-led approach for another time or used it with another group. The learner-led groups comprised 6 sample sets throughout the year to ensure that the learning was not disrupted nor were learners put at any form of disadvantage.

At the end of the class, both groups (teacher-led and learner-led) used the same online Google Form assessment to assess their progress in that lesson's topic. The data we required was recorded via online self-marking assessments in order to compare who scored better out of the teacher-led

group and the learner-led group. I populated the data onto formula-prepared spreadsheets.

Through Google Forms analytics, we could instantly produce the data on these assessment results. Whilst this data is subjective and many variables were at play, it gave an initial indication of differing levels of progress using the teacher-led or learner-led approaches. However, it is the learner and teacher feedback, which was the most important aspect throughout the action research project.

Feedback

Gathering feedback from small focus groups of learners and teachers was imperative to decide how we could best adapt the assessment process for the following session. All learners involved completed a survey asking what they personally felt worked or did not work for them. The feedback from learners and staff was of vital importance to this research and is how we will truly have gauged what parts of the teacher-led and learner-led approach worked for our learners. I have also conducted class discussions where appropriate.

Example

An important feedback topic that came up with most of the class was how I had instructed the learners to answer questions. When planning new digital approaches, we discovered that we had to be careful that the pressure placed on learners' digital skills did not detract from the maths that we were ultimately trying to teach them.

To keep the integrity of the work document in place, I asked learners to answer questions via the comment feature instead of writing all over the document. This is often used in workplaces and industries. It keeps the document tidy and is easy for the teacher to see what has been answered.

This process proved to be rather advanced for most learners and required higher levels of computer skills than I envisaged learners needing. Whilst some learners were able to understand this practice and therefore improve

their digital skills, the focus of the lesson had moved away from maths and heavily onto IT. Therefore, we adapted the original resources to suit the needs of the learners for the following sessions and an example of this refinement is shown below.

First attempt with learners:

By using the comments feature, the integrity of the page stays the same in the live document. If a learner uses 20 lines 200 words to answer a question, all of the questions will be kept on the same page and place as they were previously.
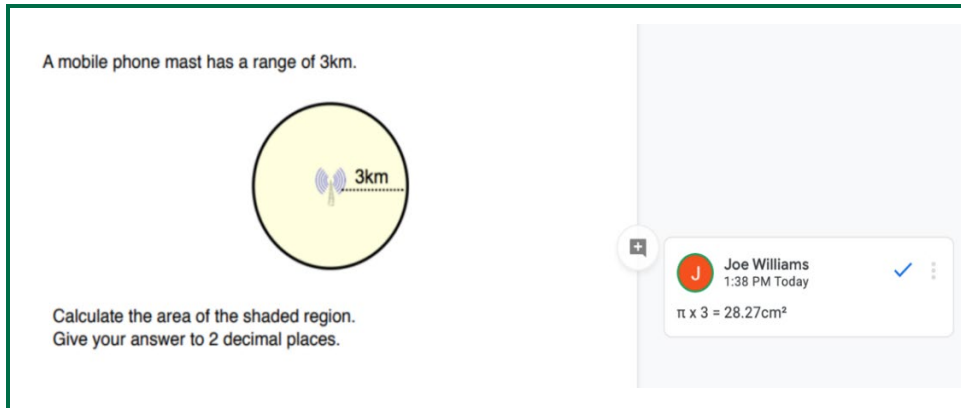
Figure 28.2: First attempt at online question

The group struggled with this. Therefore, we listened to their advice and used the format in Figure 28.3 going forward.

Learners now had a dedicated place to demonstrate working out and answer the question, in a similar vein to most exam questions. Teachers still continue to use the comment feature for marking work, assessing and providing feedback.

Another benefit of this approach is that it seems that learners who have had a digital action research lesson, seem to be better at answering the questions in the correct format, for example by using specialist maths symbols such as ^{2} and $\div$. Overall scores for topics that might be easier on paper than digital, such as angles and linear graphs, have been lower in comparison to topics that typically work well digitally, like ratio and percentages. This is only an 8% difference than the average across the whole cohort, so not a vast difference. However, our scores for learners taking part in the project have generally been higher than those but this may be due to the groups we had chosen to take part. However, there is no denying that it is interesting and yet another reason for why we will push for even more digitally focused provision next year.
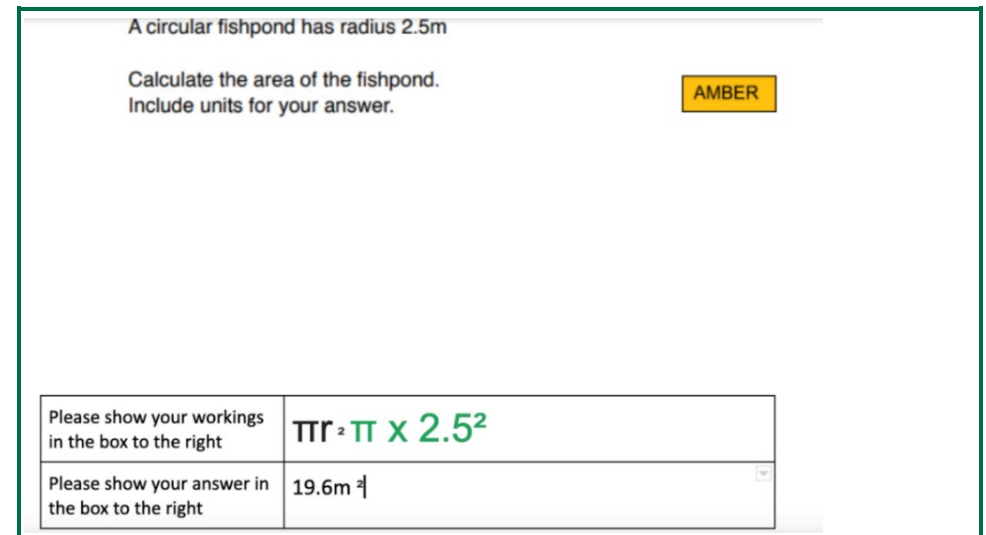
Figure 28.3: Revised online question format

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Firstly, the feedback we received from learners has been extremely detailed, well balanced and incredibly useful. I will admit that I was not particularly convinced that we would get much honest feedback from most of our learners based on my previous experiences working with them.

Our engaged and motivated learners were likely to support the project. Many of our learners dislike maths lessons however, due to being forced to

retake the course, and so I thought these learners would offer little or no feedback. We have completed surveys before, from asking about how learners would prefer the lesson structure, to asking if learners want to have revision classes, but as a department we had never tried asking for opinions on resources and delivery.

What we have received has both humbled and inspired us. Here are a few of the quotes we received:

> *"It is great that the college want to get better, to help us to get better".*
>
> *"The stuff we did today (taking part in the project) made me feel like I'm involved in something that will make me actually get a grade 4".*
>
> *"I've never felt so good at using computers".*
>
> *"It has made me realise that I can use my phone to revise as I don't have a computer at home".*

Some of the most useful and, subjectively, most important feedback, has come from learners who do not participate much in lessons, Due to the project, we now know why. From this feedback, we have so far implemented the following changes:

1. We have become more mindful that the pressure placed on learners' digital skills must not detract from the maths that we were ultimately trying to teach them. At the same time, we have capitalised on the finding that the learners answering questions online seem better at answering questions in the correct format, using specialist maths symbols.
2. The paper and digital workbooks have been designed differently, so learners can edit their digital work in a more natural and simple way, including providing a dedicated space to demonstrate working out. This is a template we now use for all physical and online workbooks. This refinement became vital during lockdown's remote learning. 89% of learners asked agreed that the new layout was better. On questioning

one of the learners involved in the case study on which type of format of workbook that he preferred, he gave the following feedback:

> *"It is better that I know where to write now as before it was messy.*
>
> *I like when work looks tidy, it makes me want to try harder"* - IB.

3. Our weekly exit ticket assessments that used to be taken at the end of lessons were designed to test learners' knowledge on all of the topics taught in that lesson. We now do mini assessments (topic tickets), at the end of each topic being taught, then move on to the next topic before a further topic ticket and repeat. This break-up in assessment has helped engagement and learners generally prefer this method (69%). Staff have also agreed that this is more suitable for our demographic.
4. When completing a project session, we started to teach the independent part of the lesson in small segments (30 minutes), rather than a large portion (1 hour 20 minutes). This was to keep up motivation, as most classes didn't like being left to their own devices for long periods (57%). Teachers also noticed motivation drop after the 40-minute mark. Commonly, learners enjoyed working independently across the whole cohort (73%). However, learners felt that a flipped learning session of longer than an hour was undesirable. We found that many adult learners (21+ years) did not appreciate independent parts of the lessons, whether half an hour or more (54%).
5. Learners like using technology and tell us that they see the advantages of being confident with its use. They found challenging topics difficult whether they were using digital mediums or not but felt they performed better using a computer. However, the adult group, more than any other, appreciated the independent aspect the least. This may well be because of their level of maths comprehension (a lower grade than previous groups). In teaching, we know that, generally, those learners who are of a lower ability will struggle to work independently. I now have some quantifiable evidence. These learners scored, on average,

27% lower than usual in their assessment when learning independently. This could be because of the topics that came up or because the digital aspects of their learning, but many in the group (50%) made clear that they do not wish to have an independent session again.

6. We have had a large amount of positive survey results in regard to both digital learning and independent studying. The following percentages are for surveys given to all areas of the cohort, throughout the year.
   - Learners generally feel their technical skills have improved because of the project (71%).
   - 67% felt that their ability to use technology within maths increased over the year due to taking part.
   - 65% felt like they are more likely to independently try to revise at home from now on and 69% are likely to do so via digital mediums.
   - 74% agreed that they are now more confident in using software related to maths to revise.
   - 71% said that they have to be skilled in digital areas in order to flourish in their futures (up from 48% in the first term).

Secondly, the other aspect of the research that we are proudest of is the increasing ability in technical skills, not just with respect to the learners but also regarding staff engaging in digital resource making. This upskilling could not have come at a better time, due to a series of national lockdowns.

A member of the team said:

> *"While I have generally felt a level of comfortability with technology, I feel that this year has opened my eyes to how digital resources can be so beneficial in streamlining our usual processes and opening doors for more collaborative working.*
>
> *In recent circumstances, where we all have had to adapt our approaches, experimentation with technology has also taught me how online digital means can provide students with access to learning outside of the*

> *standard classroom environment and helped me gain a more flexible mindset to delivering the subject."*

The last academic year, our teaching team were teaching remotely for about 9 months. Both the main curriculum (for remote leaning) and the project has involved the learners using digital resources, which in turn means the teaching team has had to use and adapt resources. While our teaching team are open to new ideas, some of the staff have not always been confident in their own digital skills.

We have now seen colleagues use Google Classroom for the first time, to great effect. We have also witnessed new staff develop and create digital workbooks for the learners to use, which are improving all the time in terms of presentation and adaptability. This has all accumulated confidence with digital teaching and learning.

Due to having to use the same programs that the learners are using in order to teach the specification, the team have embraced this and advanced their own knowledge on how these systems work. The feedback we received from the learners has not only helped us with the project but has also helped us to prepare our remote learning package. Our team now know how best to make resources to suit online delivery.

Staff have, for the first time:
- Made live question Google Doc workbooks
- Created assessments on Google Forms and Jamboards (via iPads)
- Opened their teaching practice, to try new things on Mathwhiteboard, Dr. Frost and Mathsbot.
- Learned how to utilise a new marking tool, the Google Docs 'Rubric' (Google, 2021)

These developments will ensure that we improve our best practice and will lead to the team becoming stronger, with the learners rightly benefiting.

A statement from the deputy project lead:

> *"You could say I entered into the digital revolution that we now find ourselves in by dragging my heels. I was not the most enthusiastic advocate for the use of technology, when let's face it the exam is on paper!*
>
> *Through participating in the OTLA 7 action research project my confidence has grown tremendously. I have completed some truly wonderful CPD with the ETF and I cannot thank the OTLA enough for all the support they have given me and the team.*
>
> *Being a part of the project has allowed me to focus and develop digital learning in a way that I would not have done without the project. The action research has enabled me to be a part of the digital journey and I feel that I have; with the learners, participated in this adventure together. The opportunities to reflect and hear feedback from learners has opened up a different approach and is something which has been incredibly valuable not just to myself but the team as a whole.*
>
> *I now feel confident to try new approaches and embed digital learning to enhance maths lessons rather than feel that it is something which I would try and fit in at the end of the lesson.*
>
> *I am truly humbled and amazed by not only the learners' openness and adaptability to new approaches, but also the team as a whole. Joe has led the project in such a way that we have all felt part of it and has brought us as a team closer together.*
>
> *I am now looking forward to our next steps and continuing the great work that the project has enabled us to achieve."*

If we did not have the rich feedback from the learners, this development would not have happened, and the year definitely would not have been as seamless and successful as it has been. We feel the project has helped the team really listen to our learners.

We truly feel that engaging learners and staff on the project has raised expectations all round. Having the learners appreciate and understand that we are trying to improve our best practice in order to help them and knowing we need their assistance, gives the course a specialist and nurturing aspect. It has also helped us realise exactly what the learners can actually achieve.

Another important factor was a realisation of learners' appreciation of how we want to improve, in order to help them develop. This process is now becoming a mastery, as we look to become excellent at this practice. We are always looking to provide the department with a prestigious and high-status appeal.

We have now been asked if we could let other colleges come and see how we organise our online and digital practice, including our research project. We have presented our methods and findings to networking events for a number of years now and been asked to present again. This work is boosting our teams' confidence, tremendously.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Due to our successes, confidence has risen fantastically in the team, especially in regard to digital ability and perseverance to try new things. One great example of this was the team adopting a new digital semi self-marking tool, the Google Docs Rubric.

Due to remote learning, we needed to find a way of assessing the learners' ability on a group of topics at the end of half term two. One of the staff members, who has not had a particularly large role in the project, went ahead and discovered the required software. This included learning how to use it, trialling it and then us using it with our entire cohort. Rubric makes marking on a computer very quick and efficient. This worked really well and we will use it in the future for at least one assessment if not more per year. I believe that this would not have happened if we had not been so successful with embedding the research feedback and ideas.

Once sureness and buoyancy takes hold, a person is more likely to experiment and have the willpower to succeed.

In the past, it was often only me introducing new technology from within the team. Witnessing experienced staff members now also having an increased confidence to experiment, has been an exceptional experience. Watching experienced staff members become experts in teaching with an iPad, using Jamboard and happily moving to using the Google suite, has been a brilliant experience. The fact that some staff may have been reluctant in using such applications previously only makes the development in their practice more meaningful (Ghurbhurun, 2020).

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

We decided which learners we would track in the first term. I chose a male learner (IB) and female learner (DE). IB was at the College last year whilst DE was a new learner to the College last September. We struggled at times to follow DE throughout the year, as her attendance became an issue. Fortunately, we still managed to gather a reasonable amount of data and feedback from both learners.

IB came to the College in 2019, with a special educational needs background. IB originally achieved a Grade 1 at school, sitting an exam in summer 2019. IB had a fantastic academic year at the College last year. He came to us from a specialist school and has various learning needs. He is extremely hard working and most importantly for the project, very approachable and open to giving feedback. When we performed a survey in the past, he offered meaningful suggestions. IB struggles with using technology so is therefore a learner who I knew would provide much useful qualitative feedback. IB improved to a Grade 3 with last academic year's predicted grades. He also achieved a Grade 3 on the November re-sit. After another impressive year, we are hoping he achieves the elusive Grade 4.

DE was always going to be a particularly interesting learner to engage in a case study, due to having a very unfavourable experience with maths at school. She recalled many instances when she had been let down in terms of tuition. Fortunately, she has really enjoyed her time in maths at the College. DE became more and more confident throughout the year, to the point where she was happy to demonstrate her methods to the class. She is also open to giving feedback. DE found remote learning difficult during the previous lockdown, so as with IB, she provided a real test for how adaptive our digital provision was. DE received a Grade 3 in last year's centre assessed grades.It has been an overwhelmingly encouraging involvement for both and we predict that both learners will progress/achieve this year.

IB has had an incredible year. It is wonderful to see a learner from an educational needs background develop so rapidly. He once struggled with using technology and would actively try to find alternative solutions to having use it but is now asking, while in lesson, if he can revise on a computer. This has been excellent to observe.

DE struggled throughout the year for various reasons, so we missed many opportunities to gather feedback. However, her willingness and perseverance to work independently, using College videos and Century, is more than I could have asked for. She is a learner who once said, "doing maths on a computer is pointless". We have seen a nervous learner who could not complete a worksheet without asking for help grow into a confident learner who will happily catch up on missed work at home. This is the exact kind of scenario and outcome we were hoping for at the beginning of the project.

Another element we are particularly proud of is the attendance of the main cohort. This includes both progress when going remote and when learners returned to college for face-to-face teaching. Our remote learning package provided by the department was both structured and purposeful. This, in no small part, is because of the action research project and learner feedback received.

We strived to produce quality online lessons. Having members of the team with digital backgrounds made it work all the better. As we were able to keep our teaching and learning engaging throughout the lockdowns, our attendance upon returning face-to-face was surprisingly good. In comparison to other courses at the college, we are proud of how many learners attended since returning to college for face-to-face lessons.

Throughout the year, it has been interesting analysing how the data has developed and changed. For example, at the beginning of the year, a particular class felt that the digital parts of the lesson meant that overall; they did not perform as well as normal (72%). However, the same class were asked the same question near the end of the year (post another lockdown) and the result was completely different (20%). This kind of development in perception of technology was a common theme. When we asked a different class after their first flipped learning digital lesson whether they felt that they are more or less likely to try a lesson like this again, only 54% said yes. When asked again later in the year, the same class answered 85% 'yes'. The department, as well as the project, clearly had proved its worth in creating a better digital learning environment.

Learning from this project

Staff confidence, cohesion and adaptability We now have a more confident team in terms of their digital skills as well as personal willpower to try out innovative pedagogical methods. Embedding the perseverance to grow with the learners and adapt new techniques has been an emerging theme from this year. I find that the newer members of the team have developed fresh confidence in their ability and are happier to go ahead with their own decisions, from picking out differentiated tasks to creating shared presentation resources.

Some of the more senior staff members, who may have not been comfortable with their own technical abilities, have now developed to the point where they are willingly trying new software then introduce it to the team. The project, with the pandemic impetus, has helped the team develop and become more determined to move even more towards being a digitally specialist area.

It isn't only staff who have improved with confidence towards using digital means and methods. We have seen some great examples of our project having a positive effect on learners' perception towards digital learning. Since returning to face-to-face classes, most of the team have had multiple learners opt to use a laptop for class revision, which would have been an utmost rarity in the past.

- 81% of the learners asked said they are more likely to use technology to learn independently in lessons from now on.
- 63% said they are more likely to want to use technology in ALL lessons (including vocational).
- Learners have become happier to use Century (71% said they found it useful for learning how to use fractions) in comparison to a few years ago, when a majority of learners disliked using Century.

In conclusion, our mix of digital mediums/ methods to sit alongside the traditional approaches (that we now know work with our demographic), has resulted in one of the most positive experiences the department has had in many years. The success is all the more notable due to the fact that it has also been a year of a global pandemic. We are extremely proud of what we have achieved.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-13/7-28/**

29. USING ONLINE DELIVERY TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT IN MATHS

The College of West Anglia

This project started with an aim to develop our team's ability to deliver remote learning for 16–18-year-olds studying Maths. As the project progressed our research aims evolved, and we report on our research into maths anxiety and misconceptions here.

Summary

The College of West Anglia is a Further Education (FE) college in the East of England, spread across five campuses in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. The Maths department primarily delivers GCSE Resit and Functional Skills lessons, but also teaches Adults in 1 year and half year courses, along with a pilot programme this year for Level 3 Core Maths.

We commenced this project with the aim of adapting our maths delivery to something we could deliver online. We had no experience in doing this at the start of the project, but found we quickly grew in confidence due to our amazing team. We therefore narrowed the focus of this project to investigate common issues learners have with their maths development – maths anxiety (Aga's focus) and misconceptions (Carl's focus).

Carl developed low-stakes quizzes on each topic he taught this year, which were generally used at the start and end of a topic. In the initial focus, this was a method to capture learner progress in online lessons. We overestimated how complex this task would be, and our project very quickly turned in to a case study on maths misconceptions when we decided to investigate our learners' thought processes. The quizzes were made with questions from DiagnosticQuestions.com, which was initially chosen as a way of reducing preparation complexity. All the questions have carefully chosen incorrect multiple-choice answers to expose misconceptions and detect how learners think about a problem. This choice of questions generated data that prompted the shift of focus upon the misconceptions that arose.

One key finding was that there are two types of misconception – Direct and Emergent – that depend on the concepts involved, and that the 'emergent' type can be much harder to tackle – this was found to be the case in our research.

While Carl focused on specific mathematics pedagogy and subject specific development, Aga focused on underpinning emotional connections to the subject itself.

Maths Anxiety is a key issue that has been described as affecting a large proportion of learners, and it has been stated that retaking GCSE maths could cause maths anxiety (Pearson, 2019) especially those resitting GCSE. Considering this, and the fact that we found a considerable variety of well-established misconceptions, we decided to use action research to ascertain if there is a link between the two.

Aga devised a questionnaire which was distributed to Carl's and Aga's learners. Forty-one learners took part in it and four of those learners were then invited for an interview - one learner agreed to take part. We were hoping to have a higher uptake to have better picture of what learners' views on the matter are but, unfortunately, due to GCSE sessions finishing early this year and remote delivery we were unable to. We will continue this part of our research once we are back to face-to-face delivery.

Questionnaire analysis showed that only half of learners asked said they knew what the term 'maths anxiety' means and only sixteen learners were able to name possible signs related to maths anxiety.

We were unable to determine if there is a direct connection between misconception and maths anxiety with our learners, though there is evidence from other research that the two can be linked (Sokolowski and Ansari, 2017). There was insufficient evidence to make an evidence-informed link due to the limited number of learners involved in this part of the research and the type of delivery we used this year. Our findings were inconclusive, but we would like to continue this research once we are back to face-to-face teaching to be able to maximise learner success.

Rationale

This year has been challenging – in addition to the regular challenges of teaching GCSE resits (from those who sat an exam), this year has been compounded by having learners who have not formally sat GCSEs due to the Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) in 2020. We therefore decided to shift our focus away from the initial proposed intention of the work to investigate techniques of online pedagogy.

Engagement of learners has been something we wanted to address from the start of the project. Learner engagement has been a problem for both GCSE and Functional Skills lessons, which is one of the common issues we have in the FE environment.

One key aspect of our project initially was to investigate how learners might effectively communicate answers to us. Once we started using our new lesson plans (created prior to this year and adapted from the 5Rs by Julia Smith (2020)), we considered engagement alongside effective assessment.

We also investigated how, what (and why) our learners think about maths and learning of maths, along with effective assessment for learning that can be delivered remotely. Literature indicates there are two possible consequences when learners fail their maths – increased perseverance which helps improve the learner's performance, or fear of failure which leads to a decline in performance and anxiety (Johnston-Wilder et al, 2015).

Every year, around one thousand learners must study maths at The College of West Anglia. Around half of these learners, because of the Government's condition of funding policy, are required to continue studying towards GCSE maths (ESFA, 2014). The current national GCSE pass rate in FE is around 20% (Linford, 2019), which means approximately one hundred learners will achieve grade 4 or above.

The focus in this action research was developed via Cambridge Maths Hub's Post-16 workshops (Cambridge Maths Hub, 2021), particularly their session on maths anxiety. Our learners often say they cannot do maths and that it makes them anxious. We wanted to understand what learners meant by this statement, what their understanding of maths anxiety is, how it manifests in our classrooms and finally if there is correlation between misconceptions (that are so very common in FE maths re-sitters) and maths anxiety.

Approach

1. Initial Planning phase – identifying how we can adapt to the online learning environment.
   a. Adapting lesson resources from traditional style into 5Rs (Smith, 2020) and accommodating Variation Theory (Barton, 2020).
   b. Finding online technologies that can be used for effective Assessment for Learning.

2. Focusing on Learner Engagement – how can we maximise it?
   a. Different variation sequences and questioning
   b. Trying multiple digital methods to engage and assess learners: What to use apart from our own VLE? Are there any technologies that learners refuse to use?
   c. Which systems are best to use, and are there any learners who cannot access lessons due to digital poverty?
   d. Can we ensure learners are present – ideas from behavioural science. Investigating how we enforce attendance and engagement within lessons – how do we keep those less motivated?
   e. Additional challenge – second large scale lockdown January – March 2021.

3. Identifying maths anxiety and misconceptions – now we have engagement, what can we find out?
   a. Assessment for learning throughout the year with Diagnostic Questions (Barton, 2018). Use of this questioning approach gave inspiration for the misconception investigation.
   b. Direct misconception buster sessions delivered in March and April with ~50 learners. Evidence of improvement across the session and one week after evident.
   c. Surveys completed on maths anxiety.
   d. Two learners chosen for interview on maths anxiety.

4. Synthesis of findings to a conclusion

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Previously the maths department had used a 'Focused 15' approach (Grimsby Institute C4ME team, 2020) to delivery of GCSE resit maths. 'Focused 15' is a focus on the 15 most common topics that appear in exams. This allowed us to reduce the scope of the GCSE specification delivered as we only have nine months to deliver two years of teaching and learning.

This approach had been successful in the previous academic year as it allowed the maths department to transition from teaching the full curriculum (in a very short period) to teaching the most important skills needed to be successful in GCSE examination, as well as everyday maths.

This transition made us realise our learners are not able to connect different topics and apply their skills in different scenarios, for example 'translating' a worded problem into a solvable algebraic equation (Figure 29.1).

There are 10 apples in a box and 4 apples in a pack, Molly buys 10 boxes and 2 packs. How many apples has she got altogether? $10 \times 10 + 4 \times 2$

There are 10 apples in a box and 4 apples in a pack, Molly buys x boxes and y packs. How many apples has she got altogether? $10 \times x + 4 \times y$

Figure 29.1: Example of use of one skillset in different scenarios

Our teaching approach had to change to give learners the opportunity to develop this skillset. We started a transition to 5Rs based lesson plans (still using the Focused 15) when lockdown started.

The 5R model focuses on five elements: "Routine, Recall, Revise, Repeat and Exam Ready?". It was first introduced to us in 2017, at the same time as the 'Focused 15' approach. At the time, 'Focused 15' seemed more important to implement into our delivery, and implementation of the 5R model across our team was inconsistent. Since then, we have modified Julia's 5R model to suit our learners and delivery methods and we re-designed our lesson structure around it.

The new sessions also incorporated variation theory to encourage learners to think about the mathematical methods and processes they would be manipulating in their lessons. Variation theory relies upon question sequences where a crucial aspect changes while others stay the same – such that learners should discern the crucial part (Barton, 2020). Full usage of this theory requires learners to reflect upon and consider how their answers change, and stronger learners may be able to explain 'why'. We decided to integrate this into our delivery as these allowed learners to draw connections between topics, that at first might seem disconnected, but are all interlinked (Figure 29.2).

At the start of our research project we had already put the above systems in place, though the variation sequences had only been used in a simple way, and as a source of useful questions. One modification to our session design in the project was to use the 'Rule' type of question set (Barton, 2020), where typically only 3 answer options would be available. This reduction in plausible answers helped to facilitate engagement with learners, and creative use of this style of question was useful for developing engaging activities for learners on more challenging topics such as identifying 'reverse percentage' questions (Figure 29.3).
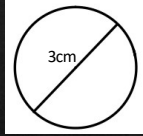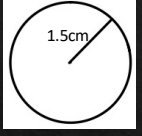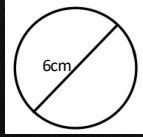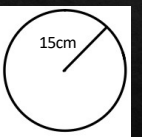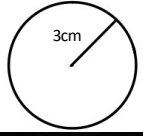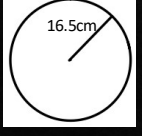
Figure 29.2: Variation Theory questions example

> *"Maths, more than any other subject, has the power to crush children's confidence and to deter them from learning important methods and tools for many years to come"*
>
> (Boaler, 2015)

We quickly established that misconceptions have a clear impact upon learner outcomes. Carl was studying his PGCE this year and researched the theories of misconceptions as a key part of his subject specialism. In turn, these theoretical findings were applied within our action research and put into practice.

Figure 29.3: Variation Theory 3 option reverse percentage question example

The majority, if not all, of our maths learners come to us with negative emotional baggage surrounding maths. Research into maths anxiety shed an interesting light on the importance of learner perception of maths and their willingness to keep trying – 'maths resilience'. Although we were not able to fully investigate how anxiety or resilience manifests within our classroom due to remote lesson delivery, we were able to collate some learners' views on the matter and will be looking at continuing this research next academic year. As a team, we are very keen to ensure learners' previous experience in learning mathematics is not a barrier to learning it with us.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

One of the biggest changes in our delivery this year was remote working and live online lessons as well as our new lesson structure, which, having been developed for face-to-face delivery, had to be adapted.

In September 2020, after very careful planning of our resources with variation theory and prior learning at the heart of everything, we found ourselves adapting resources to allow online delivery. Most of our resources were produced with the assumption that learners will have access to teaching and learning tools such as whiteboards, books, and maths equipment.

Due to the nature of online delivery and the fact that we were not in our usual classroom environment, unable to provide physical learning aides, we had to research and trial online software that would replicate them virtually.

One barrier to effective teaching and assessment has been a lack of verbal learner communication via Zoom. This has been due to technological issues (such as digital poverty or use of mobile phones to access online lessons) as well as some learners being uncomfortable with it. Most learners were also not using their cameras, for the same reasons. This meant we were not able to rely on body language which could indicate they need assistance and restricted our methods for assessing their learning.

The maths team researched a range of different software applications that would enable us to effectively assess learning. Our preferred tools were Whiteboard.fi, DrFrost Maths, OneNote and Microsoft Forms. As a team, we put together several training sessions to present and try those out before we used them in lessons. Successful tools were in turn communicated to the rest of the college in Continued Professional Development (CPD) events. None of those were as effective as physical tools, partly because we did not have a single approach as a team but also, it relied on learners being able to switch between different tools on their devices, at times more than two in a lesson.

As mentioned above, we found out it was difficult to gauge learners' understanding at first. Carl developed his quizzes to help understand what learners have learnt after the lesson, which then turned into prior learning check and 'what have you learnt this lesson?' tasks. This allowed us to a) understand learners' starting point and b) see in-lesson progression. Those quizzes were available to the team to use as they see fit. Some members of the team used Carl's approach and produced quizzes of their own, which they then shared with others.

Carl and Aga had regular meetings to discuss findings and decide on next steps. This time was also designated to discuss any changes needed to our approach, such as use of quizzes as a prior learning check as well as lesson plenary. We also looked at other possible interesting avenues in mathematics education such as comprehensive reading and understanding questions, confidence levels in answering questions, and formal and informal methods of concept delivery. While we did not investigate these aspects in this project, we could do so in the future – a focus on reading and understanding questions could be very beneficial to our learners.

Our team is very fortunate to have been allocated weekly teaching, learning and assessment sessions. The maths team meets Friday afternoon as part of CPD. We use that time to collaborate on resources and new ideas, take part in maths specific professional training, and team discussions on teaching and learning approaches. We also use that time to share good practice with one another.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

We initially identified two learners in the same group for a case study. One of these learners entered the GCSE November 2020 series and passed with a grade 5. Her feedback was that learning synchronously over Zoom was beneficial as it reduced the noise in her learning environment and helped her to understand concepts. Utilising the Zoom messaging system was

described as beneficial as it meant that explanations could be read multiple times.

An early piece of assessment – before and after teaching fractions – demonstrated the two misconception types well. The results demonstrated that learners progressed better where errors came from not reading the question accurately, rather than those where the process itself was poorly understood prior to the topic being covered. We concluded that learners expect that mathematical operations with addition should be straightforward. Since the addition of fractions is not simple, it seemed that learners treated it as if it were, and despite learning the correct process, did not tend to retrieve this knowledge when tested. It seems likely that our learners were able to apply the skill when taught it (procedural understanding), but unable to correctly identify when to use the skill (conceptual understanding) (Rittle-Johnson et al, 2016).

In the later stages of the project, we investigated algebraic misconceptions – specifically, erroneous simplification, for example:

$$2x^2 + x^3 = 3x^5$$

For this task, a diagnostic quiz was used to determine which misconceptions a group had, before tackling the misconception with Frayer models (Quigley, 2018). The correct answer to this first algebraic simplification was 'Does not simplify' – it seemed that learners may be reluctant to select this option. A follow up short low-stakes quiz at the end of the session was used to determine if learners had progressed in the short term. The following week an additional quiz was used that used modified versions of the original questions, and another quiz was to be used after a month to test retention. In general, after a week, more correct answers were given, and some errors were almost eliminated.

As mentioned previously, we also wanted to investigate how our case study learners feel about maths as a subject and what emotions maths education brings as well as if there is correlation between misconceptions.

Johnston-Wilder et al, (2019) describe maths anxiety as:

> *"a negative emotional reaction to mathematics that acts as an 'emotional handbrake' and holds up progress in maths."*

Aga found that from 41 learners who answered a questionnaire on maths and maths anxiety, 20 learners had either not heard about it or had no idea what it was. Other answers varied between *"Nervous to do maths", "When you get stressed and worry about maths"* or *"When people hate maths, but they are forced to do it"*.

Although learners often say 'maths makes me anxious', responses in the questionnaire did not support this claim amongst those asked. One key question used was *"What do you understand by 'maths anxiety'?"* - an example response given was *"I assume its where it gives you anxiety, like what I have"*. This learner was invited to an interview in which she admitted she didn't know *"maths anxiety was a thing"*. When asked to elaborate on this statement, the learner said:

> *"I wouldn't say the whole thing in general (maths), but some parts of maths make me anxious, I just want to completely shut off and I just get worked up about it".*

Johnstone-Wilder et al (2021) talk about the brain-hand model. Siegal (2012) introduced this method as a way of explaining what happens in our brains when faced with a threatening situation, in our case, learners' fear of failure.

In our survey, we asked *"What were the signs/ changes in their behaviour? (of people experiencing maths anxiety)"*, only 16 learners were able to answer this question. Some responses were *"Get angry and loose the temper and keep worrying", "They Go quiet", "not want to do it as they think there not good at it", "get quieter and stressed"*. This is a typical 'fight, flight, freeze' response.

There are a number of possible ways to address this and help build their maths resilience to minimise occurrence of feeling helpless:
1. ensuring teachers are aware of the emotions surrounding a particular task
2. recognising when emotional stress is overtaking and
3. working on relaxation response.

This year, due to online lesson delivery, the only possible way of knowing if learners are experiencing emotional distress was for them to communicate it directly with us via their preferred communication method and, so, this part of the research was not successful. We were not able to introduce relaxation methods either as we have not been aware of possible emotional difficulties.

The survey also asked learners if they think *"maths anxiety relates to reading and understanding exam questions?"* and if so, how. Twenty-four learners answered this question and some of their responses were *"You don't read the question right and rush through questions and get them wrong", "You feel a big amount of pressure, you get flustered, which overall creates a negative mindset. no one will do well in exams with this mind set", "makes you nervous which blocks of your whole understanding and makes you think you're doing things wrong".*

Learning from this project

Two of the misconceptions we have identified are of a non-standard usage of the plus sign. As addition is one of the simplest parts of maths, learners often 'Just Add' numbers. Identifying ways this can be addressed to ensure that learners use the correct procedures would be something to investigate in the future.

The use of diagnostic quizzes online has been straightforward as learners could be sent the links required directly in the Zoom chat. Embedding these into face-to-face sessions may be more challenging due to the requirement of digital devices in the classroom, and the opportunity for disruption these provide. This may be addressed with different approaches to facilitating such quizzes and meeting this need will be a good challenge early in the next year.

The misconceptions identification quiz gave useful data, identifying key misconceptions to address in the session in the short term. The next week's recall quiz showed good progression but unfortunately timing prevented a 4-week check of learner retention of the correct methods with the algebra case study. This could be improved with changing question styles. The infrequency of the correct answer being 'none of the above' may have reduced learner willingness to select this option.

It would also be useful to now bring in some real-world approaches to maths to help to address misconceptions. A 'Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract' process, using real items that can be physically manipulated ('Concrete'), or drawn visually ('Pictorial') and finally shown in a mathematical sense ('Abstract') could be used to debunk misconceptions.

The fully online teaching allowed learners to be quite passive. I would like to investigate the difference between misconceptions being identified by the teacher vs being identified through peer assessment, and if learners find the latter more motivating and if it benefits retention.

Research into maths anxiety has given us a lot to think about. It has outlined the importance of learners' prior maths experiences, their emotional connection to the subject (very often negative) and the need for inclusive environment for learners to thrive in. Although our research in this area was inconclusive, our aim is to continue this on a larger scale, across both GCSE and Functional Skills qualifications.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-13/7-29/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 14

Mentor: Paul Stych

30. Springboard Sunderland Trust
31. TCHC Group / All Trades Training Ltd

CURRICULUM APPROACHES TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT AND EMBEDDING
Paul Stych (Mentor)

It was an absolute pleasure to work with two such contrasting institutes that were both aiming to improve the learner experience around the themes of engagement and embedding. These are such highly common issues for many and yet they remain complex to solve, with all institutes having slightly different needs.

Both these projects looked to tackle their particular situations by working with the learners directly on the themes and shift some of the ownership onto them.

Springboard Sunderland Trust aimed to develop an element of learner ownership, for their personal learning and their target setting by using learner led activities, both outdoor and project based, with learners undertaking a recovery curriculum. This provided much more choice within the activities carried out and how the learning was undertaken

TCHC Group / All Trades Training Ltd aimed to help learners and learning coaches to identify where maths is naturally embedded within the workplace. This was one of the areas of development identified by Ofsted during their last inspection. They used videos made directly in the workplace and with the learner's centre stage carrying out normal work duties, to create greater awareness of the numeracy skills being used.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-14/**

30. RAISING LEARNER PARTICIPATION
Springboard Sunderland Trust

Using learner led activities; both outdoor and project based, with learners undertaking a recovery curriculum, our research aimed to develop an element of learner ownership, for their personal learning and their target setting.

Summary

Springboard is a regional training provider and charity, delivering vocational qualifications alongside maths and English Functional Skills (FS) and GCSEs to learners aged 16+. We work with many unemployed adults and those from disadvantaged backgrounds with multiple barriers to learning. Our aim is to give them the skills they need to get back into either further training or work.

Our aspiration is to support learners to develop a sense of ownership over their learning, so they can track their own progress. We ask learners to consider what steps they need to take each session to improve, what activities would they like to do, and how they might develop their ability to peer assess work.

At Springboard we feel that our encouragement of ownership is key to success, helping learners achieve their goals and set their own targets about how to make progress and what they want (and need) to learn. We hope that our emphasis on ownership will increase learners' motivation because they can see their individual progress and be a part of how they are learning. We hope this will raise learner participation inside and outside of the classroom and can help improve attendance.

Rationale

At Springboard, our ultimate aim is to help learners achieve in order to move on to further education or employment. For many learners, this includes achieving their maths and English qualifications as well as their chosen vocational qualification.

The focus of our research centred around effective target setting in maths, and an exploration of project-based approaches to maths skills development. We were keen to explore how to include maths in every session, whilst also helping learners become aware that they were learning and developing their maths skills. Additionally, we were keen to explore strategies for teaching maths that supported and raised learner participation.

In previous OTLA research (ETF, 2019), we focused on giving learners more ownership of their English learning. We developed strategies to support learners to track their own progress, helping them focus on what they needed to work on step by step, how they were going to achieve their goals and how these strategies could (hopefully) support them to enjoy and attend their sessions more frequently.

Findings from our research suggested that the strategies we put in place were supporting learners to begin to take more responsibility for their learning and their progress; learners became more aware of where their starting point was, what steps they needed to take each session to improve and the activities they wanted to do in order to build their skills. Learners also became more competent in their ability to peer assess, which, in turn, supported their own development.

As this approach seemed to be working for the target groups in English, we decided to adopt the same approaches in maths. Our initial findings suggested that learners found target setting easier in maths; learners knew for example whether or not they could do fractions far more clearly than how to improve their writing or how to construct a report or an article.

In both maths and English however, tutors could really see a difference in both aptitude and attitude where learners had the opportunity to set their own targets and goals. Achievement rates also improved in both Entry Level English and Level 1 maths.

The success of the strategies we designed during OTLA 6 inspired us to explore our approaches in further detail and in new contexts. We introduced projects and planning activities for learners to do and helped them to explore the maths and English skills they would need in order to compete each project. We also extended our work on ownership of learning and personalised target setting.

Approach

Two maths and English tutors decided to trial new approaches with their groups and suggested community-based projects; helping to reduce litter on the local beaches for example. As we offer roll-on, roll-off programmes, we expected learners to be at varying stages in the process.

The intention therefore was to begin at the start of each learner's journey and then re-assess them when the project was finished. We decided to trial the project simultaneously at two different locations. The groups were made up of our (#P4P) Planning for progression course (foundation learners of embedded maths and English who were working within project-based themes).

Maths and English specialist tutors got together, alongside vocational tutors and began planning activities and projects that would use lots of maths and English and allow learners to 'think outside the box'. The teaching team worked together to decide which areas of maths and English would be used, and how, and what skills learners would need to develop in order to complete their activities and projects.

The reason tutors decided to plan the activities and projects outside of the classroom was to try and make learners more aware of their community and the environment.

Themes were chosen each month for their #P4P projects that had been mostly topically linked but for this project tutors wanted learners to make links to nature, fitness and wellbeing and how things like pollution and litter affect the community and environment. Some of the activities and projects that the learners were able to take part in are listed below:

- Leisure and Tourism project: a favourite sport vote (encouraging democracy) with the results being displayed in tally charts and the winning vote being chosen as the outdoor activity. Learners researched venues for the most reasonable deal and factored in an extra percentage for contingency money to encourage and develop maths skills.
- Develop a food plan: showing how this links to the recommended calories for their body and fitness levels, costing the food and looking for the best place to shop. Using one of the meals within their plan they noted how to make this including equipment to use and the health and safety implications whilst making this.
- Environment outdoor activity: beach cleaning. This included maths and English via letters to the council about litter and percentages of plastics retrieved or graphs/tally charts of types of rubbish.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project encouraged an increased focus on vocational tutors and English and maths tutors working together to plan employability type curricula and schemes of work, overseen by managers. This was a collaborative teaching approach that aimed to help improve learner engagement because learners could see the relevance of maths and English as an integral part of their everyday functionality.

The activity also highlighted the gaps in learners' maths and English skills, particularly from Level 1 and above and especially for learners who struggle to read for specific detail, required for maths Functional Skills tests.

The project also helped learners improve their skills to be able to establish and choose methods of maths needed in order to be able to plan the activities and do a RAG rating system of how competent they were in that part of the application of their knowledge. It also helped tutors to see the skills gap in the level of their learners' maths and English, which was not always identified in the diagnostic assessments.

Vocational tutors were able to use this information to plan further discrete sessions. In the past, vocational tutors had used learners' diagnostic results for maths and English to complete a skills scan on the support needed for their subject area. For example, a Level 1 childcare learner who had Entry Level 3 English would need more support overall with writing and sequencing longer paragraphs to complete assignments.

Since collaborating on the project, vocational tutors have offered more in-depth support such as, how to spell specific words and how to use full stop and capital letters and would ask learners to proof-read their work.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Since collaborating on the #P4P project maths and English has been embedded as part as the same session and each session on a particular theme taught by both the vocational and maths and English specialist staff. Maths and English has also been trialled as a combined subject by one tutor.

Learners learnt how to plan activities around topical themes such as mental health, healthy living, democracy within sport etc. linking these activities, where possible outside the classroom. Recently, Springboard tutors have joined forces with YouthCaN (**https://www.youthcan.net/**). They are a growing network of youth clubs, classes and community groups who share an interest in studying and protecting the environment. These groups are youth-directed. They coordinate local hikes, explorations of the environment, investigations of environmental topics and share these explorations through online YouthCaN forums and at local and international conferences and workshops.

As the next step in the project we planned learner involvement in setting up local gatherings to share their project experience so far and to speak to other youths in their local communities. Learners are very eager and keen to speak to other youths in their local community but due to COVID-19 this has not begun yet. It is set to start early July 2021 once all restrictions have been lifted. This is a big shift in organisational practice where the learners are taking the initiative to get involved in wider community issues such as the environment and have set themselves targets with timelines. They have worked with their tutors to plan how maths and English will fit in to each stage. Attendance in these classes have improved by at least 20% since Springboard returned to face-to-face sessions.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Did we meet our overall aims?

The main aims of the project were to help learners move into their chosen vocational course and pass their maths and English. We wanted them to become more confident, more motivated in their maths and English sessions. This was through supporting them to take more ownership of their learning so that they could track their own progress and focus on what they needed to work on step by step. This included how they were going to this and hopefully enjoy and attend sessions more frequently.

Ultimately, we hoped they would move into further study or employment via achieving maths and English qualifications as well as their chosen vocation qualification. Of course, like everyone else, COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the project and more work has had to go online. Some of the most disadvantaged learners in this cohort, struggled to access work online, and therefore, are behind on their individual learning plan and have still not taken their Functional Skills tests or assessments as planned.

The necessity to move to digital learning for three months meant some of the activities and projects have had to be delayed or not take place. However, we are pleased that attendance to the #P4P classes since returning to face-to-face has been better than in other discrete maths and English/vocational classes. Learners were eager to continue to set their own targets and make links to other projects within their local communities.

Please see below some examples from learner journey and case studies based on feedback and reviews.

> **Learner A** has continued to develop confidence throughout the project and is keener to gain her maths and English qualification. She is now more self-motivated to complete self-study and has been able to set targets in each session. More recently she has been moved into discreet L2 maths and English classes after displaying the confidence and skills required to complete these classes alongside their vocation.
>
> **Learner B** has gained a better understanding of what it means to be healthy mentally as well as physically. She wants to progress into childcare and has been making the links between her vocational studies and the health and fitness module covered during the project.

Learning from this project

Due to COVID-19, the project aims were not all met. Once we had to teach online due to lockdown, there were issues with some learners accessing ICT who were digitally disadvantaged and there were other issues with lack of attendance for each session.

Overall, learners have become more motivated to achieve their goal and most of them have a better understanding how important gaining a maths and English qualification is. More than half of the cohort can now set their own targets and plan projects linked to their maths and English. Over three quarters of the two cohorts moved into their chosen vocation and are on track to achieve their next step in their learner journey.

What went well:

- Tutors increased adaptability to work remotely and look for alternative ways to engage learners such as live practical sessions
- Increased collaboration between vocational/maths and English tutors to ensure learners see the connection between their chosen vocation and how maths and English fits in to their course as well as essential skills needed for everyday life
- Improved attendance of learners at sessions
- A proportion of learners moving into discreet maths and English sessions where they are taught the maths and English curriculum and not embedded into vocation
- Increased motivation amongst learners who want to achieve their goal

The lesson learnt for tutors was that this type of teaching has to be face-to face and mostly practically based. Learning online was not fit for purpose for #P4P learners. Research showed over two thirds of learners in FE who come from the poorest families do not have adequate technology and are falling behind their peers. (FE News, 2020). This has meant trying to re-engage those learners who have suffered prolonged gaps in learning online and have fallen behind their peers by offering more 1:1 face to face support to bridge the gap.

It was also realised that too much emphasis was placed upon the sessions being divided equally on maths and English when depending on the topic, it may have been better to teach more maths than English and vice versa.

Vocational tutors further developed their knowledge of maths and English, how to differentiate between levels and what type of work to include in order to support their learners. For example, a level 1 English learner who is studying childcare level 2 will need to be able to write essays of over 500 words and proofread their work for accurate spelling and grammar for their vocational qualification and will need support from their vocational tutor in order to meet this criterion a as at level 1 learners are only expected to write between 250-300 words.

Maths and English tutors learnt how hard it was to plan both maths and English differentiated activities into each session. It would have been far easier to plan fewer activities, focusing more on one learning outcome per session.

Even better if:

- All learners could see the relevance to study maths and English
- Tutors had been able to follow their scheme of work and do more practical projects
- More time had been spent on one subject each week depending on the topic so learners could really broaden their knowledge before moving on to the next step in either maths or English
- More learners had been able to set their own targets without help or prompts and identify skills needed in maths and English to be able to complete tasks.

Where can I find out more about this project?

- You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-14/7-30/**

31. EMBEDDING MATHS

TCHC Group / All Trades Training Ltd

The aim of this project was to help learners and learning coaches to identify where maths is naturally embedded within the workplace. This is one of the areas of development identified by Ofsted during our last inspection.

Summary

TCHC/ All Trades Training is an independent training company that run a variety of projects including apprenticeship which is the focus of this project.

The driving force behind this project stemmed from comments made by Ofsted (2019b) which TCHC needed to address. This project was a creative response to our Ofsted feedback. We were looking for solutions and ways to more effectively support our learners.

Comments from the Ofsted report included:

- …learning coaches do not give as much attention to the development of apprentices' mathematics skills. As a result, apprentices are less confident in undertaking advanced mathematical problems in higher-level apprenticeships.
- Leaders and managers need to ensure that apprentices develop good mathematical skills and use these skills effectively in their everyday work.

Rationale

The aim of the project was to help both the learning coach and learner gain skills to identify where maths is naturally embedded in the workplace and the surrounding environment.

The previous practice was for the learning coach to deliver a short 10-minute learning session around one area of maths e.g. area, ratio etc. This

was the learning coach's idea of how to embed Functional Skills maths. Our goal was to change this mindset practice and help the learning coaches to understand how maths can be used in practical ways that relate to the learner and their working environment.

Instead of following our normal practice of giving resources to learners we decided to actively involve the learners in the production of video resources. Our rationale behind this was two-fold, we not only wanted the videos for the learners to identify where maths was being embedded, we also felt that they could be used to show evidence of the learners' occupational competency.

Maths embedding for apprenticeship work-based learning sessions is not explicit, often limited and sometimes entirely forgotten. This will often result in some learners missing out on developing their core skills which has a negative impact on our ability to meet the deadlines set for Functional Skills curriculum delivery. Learning coaches often struggle to identify where maths is being embedded naturally within the learner's job role and miss key opportunities to challenge learners to become better.

Another challenge that we were facing is the recording of where the embedding of maths may have occurred naturally. Too much focus is given to gathering evidence for the standard and diploma, so Functional Skills tends to take a backseat. This is due mainly to the learning coaches' lack of confidence in delivering Functional Skills when it is not part of a planned session.

Our learning coaches are occupationally competent when it comes to delivering the standard qualification but they often lack the skills required when it comes to teaching maths and English. Our focus during this project was to equip our learning coaches with the observational skills required to support our learners in the area of embedded maths within the workplace.

We also wanted to involve the managers in this project, as it is important to their business that employees have good maths and problem-solving skills. We also wanted their input to see whether there were any internal training requirements that we could potentially support.

Approach

Initially our approach to this project was to:

- work with our Health and Social Care learners to support them in identifying where maths naturally occurred within their workplace.
- support the managers within the workplace to understand what maths embedding was and how they could support the learner by setting them tasks where maths naturally occurred.
- undertake a series of training sessions with our learning coaches so that they could confidently support the learners in not only the production of the videos but also how to identify the different types of maths being used within tasks.
- learner led video production to give them more ownership of their learning.

However, we did not bank on the effect that COVID-19 would have on the Health and Social Care sector so was unable to continue with this approach.

This setback meant that we then had to look at other areas of business that we worked in to see if any were suitable. We found that the Warehousing sector, where we have an apprentice, could be another area to work in. Looking further into this we found that this sector was suitable so decided to move forward with our project in this area.

We decided to take a two-pronged approach:

- the learner to create some videos of themselves at work. By doing this it would stretch and challenge the learner as they would have to use their observational skills when finding where the maths was being embedded within our videos.

- we would also create our own videos from another Warehouse environment.

To support our learning coaches, we organised a training session for them and looked at the learning criteria and where maths naturally occurred within this. We also used the guidance document 'Maths and English in Apprenticeships' (ETF, 2018b) found on the Excellence Gateway website to help with the planning of our training.

After establishing where maths could be embedded the learning coaches then took this back to sessions with their learners. Learning coaches used their sessions with learners to go through daily activities and identified maths within their learning.

This then led to videos being produced showing daily maths activities that occurred in the workplace. The aim of the videos was to help both the learner and learning coach identify embedded maths, improve both learner and learning coach practice and develop training resources for learners and tutors. The videos produced were between 2- 3 minutes in length. The reasoning for this was to make the videos accessible to learners and the learning coaches. These videos could also link with the company's Class2Cloud online learning platform and act as a practical resource for the learners.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

We have noticed a change in the approach to teaching maths since the start of this project. By involving the quality team, we have delivered CPD sessions for the learning coaches around how to identify maths embedded during everyday tasks that the apprentice completes.

This has prompted a shift from tutor-led sessions to a more co-operative session where the learners have given input into the type of resources that they feel would make maths more explicit to their everyday work tasks.

This has led to the learning coaches devising their own Functional Skills type problem scenarios that mirror the type of question that could come up in an exam. The scenarios are all relevant to the learner and their workplace.

An example question is as follows:

- A Warehouse employee is given a customer order to pack onto pallets which then need to be loaded onto a lorry. The volume of goods that the lorry can carry is 120m³. Once the goods have been packed the pallet size measures 150cm x 100cm x 200cm and there are 45 pallets in total. Is there enough space on the lorry to load all of the pallets? Please give a justification for your answer. (This would be a 4-mark question)

During this project we have found that the learner retains knowledge, e.g. how to work out a formula, ratio, area etc. as they can see the impact it could have on the business if they were to get these calculations wrong.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Six videos have currently been produced which are being used to support the learners with their apprenticeship and our learning coaches with their CPD. This is also helping the managers within the learner's workplace as we are teaching the employees not only maths but how to problem solve. Managers have responded by saying that their employees are now more able to spot potential issues during a task rather than waiting until everything is completed before a problem is found.

When building our project team, we wanted to bring together people with a diverse range of skills. We wanted people who were occupationally competent within the apprenticeship sector but also people who had a Functional Skills background. Once the initial team was put together, I felt as the project manager that there was something missing. After discussion with my deputy project manager, it was decided to bring in a member of the quality team to assist and our Head of Technology.

By doing this we felt that all bases were covered as we had a learning coach who understood the sector working alongside a teacher who could support the learning coach with the maths delivery. We also had a member of the quality team who could advise us of any quality issues when gathering the required evidence and the Head of Technology to advise us around best formats for video production and to deal with any playback issues.

This collaboration of professionals throughout the company will ensure that all Teaching and Learning is of a high standard and meets the requirements of both TCHC and the Awarding Bodies.

During the initial project meeting each person within the team was invited to come up with ideas around the best way to implement the tasks required. As project manager, I took on board all suggestions and worked with my team to develop a blueprint which we could all agree on. This gave each person a sense of ownership as no suggestion was left on the table unused.

Working on this project has bought the different teams closer together. A good example of this has been when a member of the quality team worked with the learning coach to identify how to embed maths. The learning coach has then worked with a Functional Skills Tutor to devise scenario-based questions to test the learner's maths skills (an example can be seen in the Professional Learning section of this report). Our apprenticeship team is now working much closer with our Functional Skills Tutors which has enabled them to tap into many more resources to support both themselves and their learners. There is a much better support network between the quality team and the apprenticeship learning coaches with much better lines of communication.

The learning coaches will now ask for support rather than just trying to muddle through on their own. This has not only given them confidence in their own ability to deliver but has given the learner a much better teaching and learning experience.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Functional Skills has never been a popular part of any apprenticeship and we wanted to ensure that not only was the learner engaged during their meetings with the learning coach but they also met the required objectives. By combining the teaching of Functional Skills within the learning that is being undertaken for the qualification standard we felt that we could meet both objectives.

Instead of teaching standalone maths sessions, the learning was incorporated within the teaching for the qualification standard. The videos had a two-fold purpose with one being to identify where maths was naturally occurring and the other purpose was that the learner and learning coach would have a professional discussion around the content of the video, so gathering evidence for the qualification standard. By working this way, the learner progressed much quicker through their qualification and they could see how important maths was within their job role.

Quote from Ami Nurjandoa, TCHC Learning Coach:

> *'Having these videos will also help visual learners understand maths by relating it to their job role.'*

Quote from Sue Crowley, TCHC Quality Team IQA:

> *'The combination of videos and scenario-based questions will aid the learners to identify relevant maths-based problems and work to use their wider skills to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills.'*

Learning from this project

What we have learnt from this project is that unless you have a genuine interest in maths then it is difficult to get motivated.

We found that by interlinking maths with the everyday tasks completed within the Warehouse, both the learner and manager have started to see the relevance of teaching maths and problem-solving skills.

This led us to completely change our lesson plans for the learner. Instead of having two lesson plans, one for the apprenticeship and one for maths, we have combined them. This has meant that our learning coaches are producing more meaningful lesson plans and cutting down on the amount of maths standalone teaching. Through these types of lesson plans, managers can now see the relevance of why we teach the learner maths and problem-solving skills.

Learners and learning coaches have used the videos produced to reflect on their learning and where maths is embedded. The impact of this has meant that learners can clearly identify where maths embedding has taken place.

The positive impact of this project has led us to look at other sectors we work in and we have already identified where we can use this within Health and Social Care and Business Administration.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-14/7-31/**

RESEARCH CLUSTER 15

Mentor: Sarah Richards

ENGAGEMENT IN MATHS

Sarah Richards (Mentor)

It was a great pleasure to work with these project teams. Our group theme was 'increasing engagement in maths'. When the Covid pandemic struck all the teams had to drop carefully made plans and quickly adapt their projects to the new situation. They worked collaboratively and creatively to address the unexpected problems and constant changes. They all found ways of increasing engagement and each one is quite different:

The **LTE Novus** team, led by Nicola from HMP Styal and Gillian from HMP Low Newton, had a very challenging time: teachers working from home and learners locked in their cells with no access to technology. They carefully designed workbooks to enable women prisoners to work independently on their underlying maths skills. The workbooks were designed to encourage a conversation about maths learning between learner and tutor. All learners can become more independent, but it is easier for the higher-level ones. Good workbooks make a difference, but in-person contact is essential.

The team led by Ben at **Chesterfield College** originally intended to look at manipulatives in maths classes. Instead, they investigated Dr Frost Maths, an online tool to assess students' maths skills, set assessments and homework tasks. The gap analysis was particularly helpful. Students who had disengaged from maths study re-engaged when shown how to identify their maths 'gaps' and address them; students revised who had never done so before. The whole department engaged with the project; teachers experimented, made adaptations and lively discussions ensued.

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College identified and addressed motivation, confidence and attainment in GCSE maths re-sit learners. The project, led by Catherine, originally intended to go into the community to meet parents/carers of their students and form links by bypassing the barrier that college buildings can present. Instead, they created chances for students and parents to tell and reflect on their maths learner journeys.

Past experiences have, in the main, deeply and negatively affected their attitudes and attainment. The stories and reflections reveal ways in which the project team can help learners to succeed with their maths GCSE re-sit.

Solihull College and University Centre's team led by Sarah and Holly, enabled students to engage successfully with online learning between their maths lessons. They found that *"small changes make a big difference"*. They changed *"homework"* to *"preparation"*, consulted with their students and adapted tasks. Short tasks focused on what was needed for the next lesson. Reminded by a text message, students often did them on the bus! Class norms changed; students expected one another to prepare; they enjoyed the lessons more, worked harder and results improved. Attitudes changed and many students were doing additional on-line learning.

A common theme throughout these reports is how much the teams gained from collaborating with learners and colleagues. They also valued opportunities to hear about each other's projects at OTLA events.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-15/**

33. WORKBOOKS DESIGNED ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN PRISONERS ENABLE LEARNERS TO BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT

LTE Novus

We carefully designed workbooks to enable women prisoners to work independently on their underlying maths skills. The workbooks were designed to encourage a conversation about maths learning between learner and tutor. All learners can become more independent, but it is easier for the higher-level ones. Good workbooks make a difference, but in-person contact is essential.

Summary

Novus (part of The Manchester College) provides prison education to nearly 50 establishments and three out of the five Youth Offender Institutions (YOI's) around the country.

Initially the project was focused on finding ways to improve the success rates of the new Functional Skills reform qualifications (4748). However, in March 2020 education and the way it was delivered changed overnight in the UK and we faced more challenges than most...

We had to maintain a progressive learning environment and fulfil contractual obligations but without any face-to-face delivery, learner access to technology *and* whilst working from home. It was a daunting time and we quickly had to adapt to a learning model that would suit the situation.

Prison tutors from across the country were put into teams and, working from home, produced a catalogue of in-cell work packs to support qualifications both new and old. The Women's Estate (North), HMP Low Newton, HMP Styal, HMP New Hall and HMP Askham Grange collaborated as a working group and developed adaptable, blended learning workbooks to make maths accessible and support learners via in-cell learning.

Rationale

A large proportion of our learners struggle to achieve a Level 1 maths qualification in the allocated learning hours (55 hours). Many factors contribute to this, including: low literacy levels; a lack of confidence in their abilities; a negative attitude to maths. For some this may be a result of previous schooling experiences or a reluctance to disclose educational difficulties, whilst for others the environment in which they grew up may have had a detrimental effect on their outlook to education. *'If someone in your surroundings has manipulated you from a young age and you've learnt this is normal, you are only able to change it if you act differently'* (Bandura, 1977). The aim of the project was to enable learners to act differently with maths.

In September 2020 we decided to introduce a new set of maths qualifications to run in conjunction with the existing Functional Skills (FS) courses. These were City & Guilds Entry Level 3 'Bitesize' units, which covered 55 core skills areas across all levels.

We chose to focus on six core skill units which were selected because we thought they would be the easiest to access independently. Each unit focused on a narrow set of maths concepts and skills, which provide the scaffolding of knowledge required to progress to either a full FS maths qualification or enrol onto a vocational course with maths as a prerequisite. The Bitesize model with its individual units could also be used for short sentence learners, learners with a skills gap, and for those who would struggle on a lengthier programme.

Approach

- Learners were assessed through initial assessment and maths diagnostics to identify common 'gaps' in mathematical skills/knowledge and understanding.

  We chose the Bitesize Units that would address these gaps:
  o Addition and subtraction
  o Multiplication
  o Division
  o Decimal numbers (including place value)
  o Money
  o Fractions

- The team came from four female prisons across the North-West and comprised of seven tutors, four were maths specialists and three who had experience in either quality assurance or digital support. We formed sub-groups and, working remotely but collaboratively, produced materials suitable for supporting Bitesize learners.
- We attended virtual workshops which included: blended learning approaches, supporting SEND and writing effective assessments.
- The team worked remotely and collaboratively on workbooks, not only for Bitesize, but for FS across all levels and produced over 50 in-cell booklets. Consideration had to be given to the following areas:
  o No personal contact with tutors
  o Limited 'quiet' space for learners to complete work
  o Security restrictions on maths equipment such as calculators
  o Prisoner's mental/physical health and educational needs

- Once quality checked, the materials were trialled with a small number of learners who had been pre-selected according to skill set, motivation and a desire to improve their maths skills whilst in custody.
- Learners were encouraged to provide feedback throughout the workbooks and we used this to inform our amendments.

- We had to be flexible as we encountered difficulties such as: a slow turnaround of work due to quarantine; an inability to authenticate learners' work as their own and an outbreak of COVID-19.
- In-cell phones were installed in November 2020 which allowed for verbal support and feedback between tutor and learner. This allowed for a more personal approach to teaching and also gave us an opportunity to 'tailor' supplementary work if it was required.
- A digital blended learning tracker incorporating an individual learning plan (ILP) was introduced to allow us to centrally monitor quality of work, turnaround times and feedback of learners and tutors.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

To help us meet the diverse needs of all the learners in a remote setting, we were encouraged to attend a series of virtual workshops and webinars promoting blended learning, supporting SEND and effective assessments. Four of the team also completed a Level 2 qualification in Hidden Difficulties which enabled us to use an appropriate sequence of teaching and a flexible range of strategies to engage the high percentage of learners who had disclosed an additional support need.

The workbooks were developed using a national template and the framework of content for each unit used both existing strategies and creative approaches to challenge and stimulate the learner throughout the unit (Figure 33.1). Consideration was given to the inclusion of diversity, equality and British values through careful planning.

We encouraged learners to be autonomous by:
- setting themselves personal and developmental goals
- reflecting on their progress
- submitting learner feedback
- completing end of course reviews
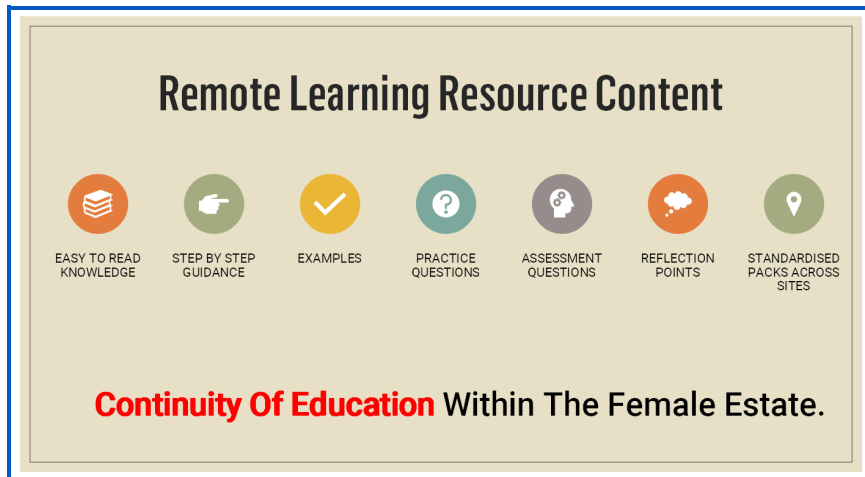
Figure 33.1: Remote Learning Framework

Learner-focused reflection helped us to identify areas for development and review the pace, approach and teaching method in each unit. With this information we were able to adapt and refine the work as we went along so as to produce a set of clear and differentiated workbooks with suitable pedagogical strategies which supported the needs of the learner (Figure 33.2).

We were unable to conduct any FS exams during lockdown, but we were able to gather portfolio-based assessment material which supported the Bitesize qualifications once we resumed classroom-based activities. Authentication of work was essential to ensure we were adhering to City & Guilds guidance; however, this proved difficult in some of the establishments due to the housing arrangements of the learners. A decision was made to defer assessment until authentication of work could be guaranteed.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Prior to the pandemic, there had been little opportunity for inter-site collaboration due to staffing requirements and location. With the transition to home working and an introduction to digital networking via Teams and Zoom calls, we suddenly had the opportunity to easily exchange best practices, skills and discuss problems we were facing. Close, collaborative and fruitful working relationships developed.

During the initial lockdown (March 2020 to July 2020), we were reliant on a combination of FS and topic-based workbooks being distributed by prison officers and marking being done at home via secure DPD delivery. Offenders were frustrated at being 'locked up' for long periods of time and 'requested' workbooks but there was no way of assessing how suitable the workbook was for the learner.

Figure 33.2: Workbook

We found ourselves dealing with a large proportion of returns which were at the wrong level for the individual. The diversity of prior attainment in the prison population meant it was impossible to cater for all.

Learners who had enrolled prior to lockdown were encouraged to continue working towards their qualification on a remote basis. However, this was met with a mixed response. Some had been affected by COVID-19 themselves; some had had friends or family affected, whilst others had seen their mental health deteriorate with the changes in regime.

We returned to site on a limited basis in July 2020, with guidance from both Ministry of Justice and Novus and with a directive that we should only be on site for marking and administration. This allowed us to work collectively, whilst focusing on our own subject areas and with access to personal information on each learner.

Individual assessments (IA's) were reintroduced in the form of paper based BKSB which allowed us to allocate learners to a suitable course and provide appropriate workbooks.

Blended learning trackers were created which enabled us to track and monitor learners' progression and log any feedback received or sent out. This feedback was used to inform us of any support requirements and also an aid in 'tailoring' the work the learners might be sent in addition to the workbooks.

Approximately one month after the introduction of the Bitesize qualifications, in-cell telephones were installed, which allowed direct contact being learner and tutor. This was hugely beneficial to both learner and tutors as it allowed verbal feedback to be given and the opportunity for learners to voice any concerns they be having with their work.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Bitesize is a new qualification with a new delivery model and the data provided is the initial data. With not being able to authenticate learners' work and the limited learning support available to our learners during the pandemic, final assessments were completed when learners returned to face-to-face classroom delivery.

Some learners who had never worked independently began to do so with the new workbooks, *"thank you, I've just got work on Friday night 24th Oct 2020, I would Like a pen and Scrap Paper to Practise first, I am happy with my achievements up to now, I'll get this work done this week".* The higher-level students often thrived on being able to work at their own pace, supported by phone or written feedback.

It may be that some lower prior achievement learners find working independently difficult because they are working at the wrong level. For example, one Entry Level 3 learner worked very quietly in lessons. She skimmed through workbooks completing as little as 20% even though she had help with reading and further explanations in class. She did not return homework. During the learner's weekly review, we both agreed to enrol her on Entry Level 2 and that workbooks would be sent as homework to read prior to lesson enabling the learner to read and process information and concepts of maths topics prior to the next lesson. She worked independently on the Entry Level 2 workbooks in her cell and subsequently worked more independently in class. She passed her Entry Level 2 with 83% and progressed to the Entry Level 3 with much more confidence.

About twenty-seven learners started the Bitesize qualification and thirteen learners achieved (48%). Two learners continued on the programme and were on target to achieve, increasing the success rate to 56%. Twelve of the twenty-seven learners (44%) were released from prison before evidence could be collated due to the 72-hour quarantine.

Learning from this project

Well designed and attractive workbooks make a difference.

Higher-level, more able learners thrive when they can work independently: for some of the more confident learners, the remote in-cell model gave them the opportunity to work independently and at their own speed. They engaged with the weekly telephone support and used the learner feedback within the booklets to voice any concerns or support needs they may have had.

Collaboration between sites benefits everyone: all establishments worked positively, supporting each other, sharing ideas and working with the strengths of each individual producing standardised resources for both new and old qualification for a bended learning model of delivery.

Assessing learners' maths level correctly at the start of a programme is very important.

The new standardised workbooks and trackers support continuity of learning: they enable learners to continue with learning when transferred to a different prison. Learners can pick up where they left off and not have to start over again. Tutors can liaise with each other and share learners' progress trackers/work.

In-cell telephones make a big difference: tutors can contact learners and talk through any misconceptions. Tutor and learner can discuss concerns and provide further support.

Prisoners need quiet spaces to study: some of the prison wings can be very loud, and learners struggle to concentrate or even complete work sent. Learners living in a house could be sharing rooms with up to four other people, and communal space is often noisy and distracting.

Learners give useful feedback when given the opportunity: great feedback received from learners which allowed tutors to identity additional support requirements, make amendments to teaching, encourage learner's engagement etc.

Low level learners face significant barriers to independent working: 65% of learners in English and 77% in Maths were Entry Level 3 or below which was identified at induction though initial assessment results. 66% of these learners disclosed at induction that they have mental health issues and/or learning disability with associated learning difficulties. This means that blended learning may not be suitable for everyone due to their lack of

confidence and basic literacy and numerical skills. As suggested by Stankov, Morony & Ping (2011) *'Confidence is a much better predictor of learners' achievements than any other non-cognitive measure'.*

Learning related to the pandemic:

Limitations to remote delivery (staff absences, reliance on Prison Officers): staff not on site, incorrect work handed to learner, no marking or feedback to learners, unsure if learners are receiving work.

Difficulties substantiating authenticity of work: Unsure if the learners have received support from others or if someone had completed work for them. Not all establishments have only single or double cells. This is another potential problem with blended learning.

Turn-around of work due to quarantine: 72 hours quarantine for all work impacted on the time taken for work to be sent, returned to be marked. Once feedback had been sent alongside with guidance and the next steps the process could take up to 3 weeks.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-15/7-33/**

34. USING ONLINE ASSESSMENTS AND ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER INDEPENDENT LEARNING AND IMPROVE TEACHING

Chesterfield College

This project explored using Drfrostmaths.com to assess students' maths skills, set assessments and homework tasks.

Summary

Chesterfield College is a further education college in Chesterfield, North Derbyshire. The aim of the project, which involved the whole maths department was to see if online assessment and activities could improve our lesson planning, foster independent learning and improve learner progression.

Rationale

In an FE environment, teaching GCSE resit is difficult. Time is limited and for most learners, much of the content is being re-taught. It is important that time is used efficiently by identifying what students do and don't know and adapting accordingly. We hoped that an online maths self-assessment tool – Dr Frost Maths (DFM) – would help us to achieve this aim.

Wiliam (2016) states *'When students are the owners of their own learning all other strategies fall into place. Students play a part in deciding what they will learn, so classroom questions are designed not to 'catch them out' but diagnose and support what needs to happen next'*. We hoped that using DFM as an assessment tool would aid learners in owning their learning and encourage them to be more independent.

Approach

For some-time there had been departmental discussion about using online resources to encourage our learners to do more independent-study and to help us identify the 'gaps'.

We discussed various subscription websites such as MyMaths and Mathswatch but decided on DFM. It was free and could do the same things: assess; track learners' progression; videos; past exam questions; and paper resources. The department attended an on-line training with DFM.

Because we had no experience with DFM colleagues were given freedom to implement it as they wished. We hoped this would mean everyone in the department would contribute to the project. I decided to use DFM more heavily with my learners on the Kickstart programme. This is a course with no vocational element designed to reintegrate learners into education. Colleagues used it with: GCSE, Functional Skills learners, A-Level and adult learners.

After exploring the use of DFM for a number of weeks in our individual classrooms and online environments, we decided to create an online formative assessment for our learners. With learners and members of staff isolating in October 2020, we thought this was perfect opportunity to try out an online assessment

We saw the benefit of feedback grids (figure 34.1 below) which made it very easy to identify which topics a class was weaker on, and plan feedback lessons accordingly.

Figure 34.1: Feedback grid

We then moved on to experimenting with using DFM in lessons.

I created some diagnostic questions that covered most of the foundation skills for that topic. Learners completed the questions online and the feedback grids populated instantly. I could see how questions were being answered live and was able to pause a class to model answers using the on-line whiteboard or direct individuals there while others continued answering questions.

We then focused on monitoring and encouraging engagement.

January 2021 lockdown meant all teaching was moved online. DFM exercises proved an excellent way to check if learners were engaged as you could see if they were answering questions. You could then direct learners

to the DFM whiteboard to model answers whilst not disrupting the PowerPoint presentation on Microsoft Teams.

Part of our aim of using online assessment was to try and promote independent learning. A major advantage of DFM was that every question answered was put into a bank attached to the learner by topic. It was easy for staff to identify learners' gaps in knowledge.

The next step was to empower learners to identify their own gaps so that they could engage in directed self-study. I made a video to help learners identify their weaker topics based on all the questions they had answered so far. I then encouraged my learners to work on those topics by watching videos on DFM and completing the relevant topic tests during February half term.

To further encourage self-study we decided to recognise the work learners were doing on DFM for our Kickstart learners in their monthly Kickstart awards ceremony.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Online assessment has given us the capacity to mix online work and class work. Learners in the classroom can use their devices or college computers to complete online tasks in college as well as at home. This is useful for working on individual targets and targeted extension activities in a lesson. We are currently in the process of buying tablets to help facilitate this, should learners not have appropriate devices.

There were other projects looking at gap analysis; we collaborated and discussed how we analyse gaps and encourage learners to self-study. These discussions are still continuing as we work in an FE environment with so little data on our learners when they arrive. Working to learners' gaps is the most effective way for learners to progress and is more valuable than implementing a 'conveyor belt' curriculum.

I identified the questions that the majority of learners answered incorrectly within an assessment, which is done with the click of a button on DFM, and used them as starters.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Over the course of the year members of staff have been implementing DFM in new and exciting ways; it is far more than just an assessment tool. It has been rewarding to chat with colleagues about what they have been doing and learning new things from each other. For example, I had mainly used the bank of GCSE questions with my learners, but some colleagues have explored the key skills platform for lower-level learners and functional skills learners. Others created worksheets or diagnostic questions using the GCSE bank. The DFM whiteboard was used a lot by colleagues too.

DFM also has a shared area where worksheets created by teachers can be accessed by anyone in the organisation. This has led to members of staff sharing and using each other's worksheets which has cut down on workload.

One of the successes of this project has been staff participation. Every member of the maths department has used DFM in some way. I believe this is due to members of staff being able to implement as they wished. We have had many discussions in departmental meetings about on line learning and shared experiences. This has led to colleagues learning from each other and trying new things.

A lot of discussions happened informally too. Colleagues would ask each other how to do something if they did not know and often figured out new things together.

It was important to keep lines of communication open during homeworking and we used Microsoft Teams to do this. The chat feature was a great way for colleagues to quickly ask questions about how to do something on DFM and receive a quick response. The channels feature allowed us to create troubleshooting threads about DFM and collect any information about

glitches. We all saw the benefits of using DFM in an FE environment. I believe the site's ability to cut workload and allow us to use our time more effectively was another reason for staff participation being so high.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

"I have never revised for a maths exam before now". Many of my Kickstart learners have described a change in how they revise with some learners revising for the first time.

After returning to college in March I stopped on-line learning in class and encouraged learners to use DFM to identify gaps and for self-study. During a class discussion over Teams with Kickstart learners it was clear the learners saw value in knowing the names of topics they were weaker on and being able to set targets. Knowing the name of the topic meant that the gap and progress tables made sense to them and they could do internet searches for help if they didn't like DFM videos. This has promoted more independent learning.

Engagement on DFM has varied over the year for Kickstart learners due to trying out different approaches and learners finding out which methods of self-study they preferred. Kickstart learners have often had poor educational experiences consequently have negative attitudes towards mathematics and academic learning. They are often difficult to motivate and rarely work outside the class. The fact that they were evaluating how useful DFM was for them and experimenting with other platforms indicates an increasing confidence and independence.

Some learners showed an increased activity in March and April when revising for assessments but others have decreased activity on DFM, but this may have been because some of them had found sites that they liked more.

Learning from this project

- We have found that it is really productive to have the whole department being involved with the project and having freedom to experiment and do things in their own way. This has led to colleagues finding out new things independently which promoted productive departmental discussions about further implementation.
- The data collected by DFM on each learner and for whole classes enables us to know far more about them. In turn we are able to; plan for class/individual feedback, set detailed targets for learners to improve, and adapt schemes of work. This information can also be accessed by catch up or intervention colleagues for effective small group corrective teaching.
- Learners can be empowered to identify their own gaps and use DFM videos to revise and then practice the skills they need. They can see their progress within each topic as they improve. The new 'courses' feature (Figure 34.2.) allows learners to find topics and skills covered in lessons easily.
- Learners are encouraged and supported by targeted feedback on DFM. Automated marking allows more time to do this and concentrate on adapting lessons and schemes of work to suit a class.
- Reward and recognition is a motivator to use DFM. Leader boards make it easy to identify the number of points and questions answered per learner. This can be displayed in your institution. The home page lets you know the activity of your learners so it is simple to spot when learners are doing independent practice and praise them.
- Some learners can be disadvantaged using DFM if they are using an old device, mainly when showing working out. This can be remedied by making working out optional when setting a task and allowing learners to hand in written working.
- For equal access, DFM allows paper-based versions of online worksheets to be printed easily.
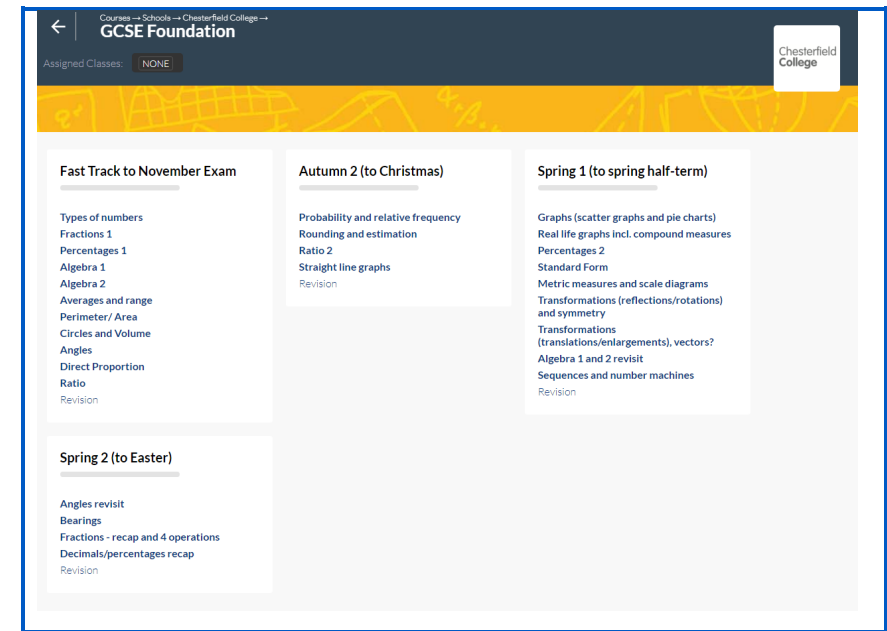
Figure 34.2: Dr Frost 'course'.

- The already motivated seem to have benefitted most from DFM. Our challenge is to show all learners the benefits, help them be more independent and to take charge of their learning.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at
https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-15/7-34/

35. MATHS STORIES
City of Stoke on Trent Sixth Form College

This project identified and addressed aspects of motivation, confidence and attainment in resit learners tackling GCSE Maths.

We created opportunities for students and their parents to tell and reflect on their maths learner journeys. Their stories told how past experiences had, in the main, deeply and negatively affected their motivation, confidence and attainment. The stories and reflections revealed ways in which we could help them to succeed with their maths GCSE re-sit.

Summary

The original aim of the project was to go into the community and meet the parents/carers of our students on 'their side of the fence'. This was to form links and hopefully minimise the barrier that our college building can present to some families. However, we had to adapt to the circumstances of this academic year. This report focuses on the reconnaissance aspect of the action research process – exploring the situation in great detail, as the foundation for subsequent responsive activities.

We listened in depth to students' and their families' stories of their maths learning. We want to seize and celebrate this opportunity to make post-16 learning of maths safer, supported and successful.

Rationale

For many of our GCSE resit students, attendance at parents' evenings, home support for attendance issues and assessment feedback discussion with parents is minimal. Many families find sixth form college a daunting environment. Without all around background support for learners, it can be easy for them to lose track and disengage.

Our project focused on interviews, discussions and questionnaires with both students and parents. The themes investigated included students' feelings about their maths learning and attainment, experiences of online learning, maths 'legacy' attitudes and approaches to and preparation for assessments.

In the process of carrying out the discussions we identified key barriers to parental involvement and student progress that will be addressed. We also aimed to identify ways that we could support the students to become more effective in their studies.

> *"Perhaps the most interesting finding is the fact that the more parents and children talk to each other about meaningful subjects, the better students achieve; home conversation really matters"*
>
> (Lucas, 2010 p.3).

Approach

- • Students were asked to generate questions that they thought relevant to their parents' experience of learning maths.
- • Motivation, achievement, environment and expectation were discussed.

What shall we ask?

- • Three questions on what they enjoyed, what was helpful and what advice they had for our maths teachers.

Parents sent 3 questions

- • In groups of three, students were interviewed with discussions on parental responses to maths learning, students' own experience of maths learning, strategies for exam preparation and advice for future students and teachers.

Student interviews

- • Students had conversations with their families about maths.

Student home conversations

- • Four written questions were put to students about their preparations for assessments, home conversations about maths and thoughts on improvement.

Feedback from students

- • Findings discussed specifically with Maths staff at the college
- • Shared across college with other staff at CPD event

Feedback to Staff

- • Findings shared at Sixth Form College Conference
- • Findings shared at ASK Maths lead teachers event Stoke on Trent.

Feedback further afield

Figure 35.1: Project Approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Reflective practice and enquiry are embedded in our professional life in the college. Students are regularly asked for their responses in student surveys and questionnaires.

Designing and considering the questions used in our project afforded opportunities for discussions on cultural, religious and socio-economic matters affecting learning in maths.

The students' lead on the questions discussed gave more direction, relevance and weight to the project.

Three main publications were used in guiding our project:

- • Engaging parents in Raising Achievement: Do they know they matter? (Goodall and Harris, 2007)
- • The impact of parent engagement on learner success: Identifying barriers to learning (Lucas, 2010)
- • A Guide to Tackling Maths Anxiety – Insights from the Power of Maths Roundtable (Pearson, 2019).

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Our planning, scheduling and schemes of work address all the findings of this work. Collaboration with parents is enhanced by progress coach liaison, exam preparation and specific timetabling for such and is already embedded in next year's scheme of work based on this project.

Meetings with the maths team and across the wider Level 3 foundation[3] teachers and support staff will include findings and reflection on this work.

Work has been presented to the **Sixth Form College Association national conference 2021** (**https://www.sixthformcolleges.org/**).

We lead teachers will be sharing findings at ASK Maths (An opportunity area project across 3 colleges and work-based learner providers in Stoke on Trent/North Staffordshire) college staff and work-based learning tutors and teachers.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The four main themes of the interviews, discussions and questionnaires can be summarised in these student statements:

"I can't see it (getting a grade 4)".

" He motivated me (a previous teacher) … I think of him to keep me going".

"I'm not so scared of getting it wrong (as) I've already failed it now".

"I'm never gonna get my maths".

Figure 35.2: Main themes

When Ellie made the statement that she was *"Never gonna get my maths"*, she was making it to her classmates and to her sibling: How could she expect to surpass her mother's achievement in maths? Ellie was capable of achieving a Grade 4 in her GCSE but her crushing lack of confidence permeated every part of her learning in maths.

It's a powerful statement of intent that she got ready and into her lesson for 8:45am. What didn't keep her here? About 5 weeks after that statement Ellie left the college and left education. Phone calls to her mother and to Ellie herself to encourage her to stay were fruitless.

Other interviews with students revealed a similar pessimism about the results but they stayed.

From the beginning of the year we encountered the 'I can't see it' (success in maths). This is expressed in various forms from many of our students in resit maths and perhaps represents an even greater call for us to harness the glimmer of hope that gets our students in to the room for a lesson in the first place.

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[3] Level 3 Foundation is the name for our Level 2 courses i.e. GCSE resit

The need for an injection of support, trust and open communication is clear and, in every student, we saw an opportunity to begin helping students move on from feeling a failure.

For example, Mia felt failing maths was inevitable and catastrophic but later in the year she said: 'I enjoy maths now because I'm not so scared of getting it wrong if that makes sense? Because I've already failed it now, I've already had that feeling so now it's like I'm on the road to making things better".

Learning from this project

This project, although much altered from its original concept, gave voice to students on their experience of learning. Reflecting on school experiences, home attitudes and teacher relationships gave students opportunities for building rapport, increasing confidence, and guiding practice. Some reflections were particularly relevant and have informed our planning for the next academic year.

Students really engaged with the interviews. They were articulate and willing to share their experiences of maths learning. Their reflections on their own preparation and feelings about learning were insightful.

Half of the replies about preparation for assessments and exams said they didn't know how to effectively prepare. A quarter of replies said that it was easier to revise for English and other subjects than for maths.

We have changed the structure of our scheme of work to allocate a third of all lessons to address these skill deficits: exam technique e.g., greater use of goal free questions; active revision methods e.g., identifying their own gaps and making targets; exam readiness and techniques to calm and prepare for an exam for anxious students.

A majority of students, who expressed an opinion of online lessons, said it was not effective for them at all. In March we received CPD from MEI (**https://mei.org.uk/**) to quality check and improve our provision of on-line lessons.

Most students went home and had conversations with their parents about their maths. I am going to continue using home conversations, working with students to develop the questions, as a part of our discussion about maths attitudes with my students.

I am also going to offer to go into colleagues' lessons and do a short session on how we feel about maths.

A small adaptation to the classroom conversations is to use the pronoun 'we' rather than 'you' when talking about needs, attitudes and even revision techniques.

We can present college maths as different. It is a fresh start, and to acknowledge and accept a differing path and timescale to achieving one's potential can be an important validation to a student that has had the 'bottom drop out'.

Getting to know and valuing students as individuals makes a difference. With a small teacher input the reward in attendance and engagement in students can be huge. Our GCSE resit students are receptive to a new approach. Many students mentioned teachers by name who they felt had given them support. The substance of that support was very much that the teacher listened, responded, and cared about their learning in maths.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-15/7-35/**

36. BUSY ON THE BUS IN SOLIHULL
Solihull College and University Centre

The aim of this project was to enable students to engage successfully in online learning between their maths lessons. We changed "homework" to "preparation", consulted with our students, adapted the tasks. Class norms changed; students expected one another to prepare; they enjoyed the lessons more; worked harder and results improved.

Summary

Solihull College and University Centre is based over 3 campuses, the largest of which is in the town centre of Solihull. The college offers School Leavers & Adults, Full Time and Part Time Courses, Apprenticeships & Bespoke Employment Training.

The Project Lead (Head of the Maths department) and myself, a maths lecturer, were involved in designing a GCSE retake course that incorporated independent study and established a routine for learners to prepare for their maths lesson each week.

Other maths teachers within the department used their own resources and methods to encourage students to study independently

This project developed from a need for students to do additional study as well as attend a two-hour maths lesson each week. Many students who arrive straight from secondary education have had their in-class maths study time halved, but we still expect them to progress. For this to happen, students need to take ownership of their qualification throughout the academic year and monitor their own progress on a regular basis.

Rationale

In Further Education (FE) we emphasise the importance of attendance and progression on achievement. Unfortunately, it is not enough. Students need to have a combination of good attendance and good study skills to ensure success. We need to be aware that many students aged 16-18 years of age have never been taught how to study outside of the classroom and do not possess a toolbox of independent study strategies.

The idea of the project was to equip them with straightforward resources and realistically timed tasks to encourage them to develop these skills and monitor the impact it has on their own learning.

The project focused on our Public Services students from level 1 up to level 3 who attended maths lessons all together with their vocational BTEC group. For the purpose of evidence, I focused on the level 2 Public Services group. This cohort of students had a range of GCSE maths grades from U upwards, allowing us to reflect on a broad spectrum of students with different abilities and educational backgrounds. The 16 students had come from different types of secondary backgrounds, many from mainstream, but some from alternative provision.

We were clear what we wanted to achieve, but were unsure of the best approach to take, which led us down a path of trialling different types of resources and evaluating each one:

- In September 2020, students were set up on Mathswatch (https://www.mathswatch.co.uk/) and encouraged to try a range of activities over a two-week period, which included consolidation, preparation and/or watching method videos, all independently.
- It was clear after this that the uptake of preparation tasks was a route to investigate further due to their structure and design.
- At this stage we found students were more likely to actively engage in tasks that were short, easily accessible, and held purpose and value to them.
- The 'Preparation Tasks' were launched and assigned to students on Mathswatch on a weekly basis **before** their lesson took place. The task was designed to take no longer than 20 minutes. It incorporated previous skills, taught in our sequential delivery model, that were to be used in the forthcoming lesson and encouraged students the chance to try skills that were about to be taught. In addition to this, students had the opportunity to watch videos that explained the methods alongside each question.
- Once a routine was established the first feedback was gathered from students in November 2020 to find out how they felt about the preparation tasks including structure, when they were set and the impact they felt it was having in the classroom.
- Our preparation tasks were altered in a response to a finding that some students thought the tasks were too simple and required further stretch and challenge and a reminder system was implemented to remind students about their preparation 48 hours before their lesson.

Approach
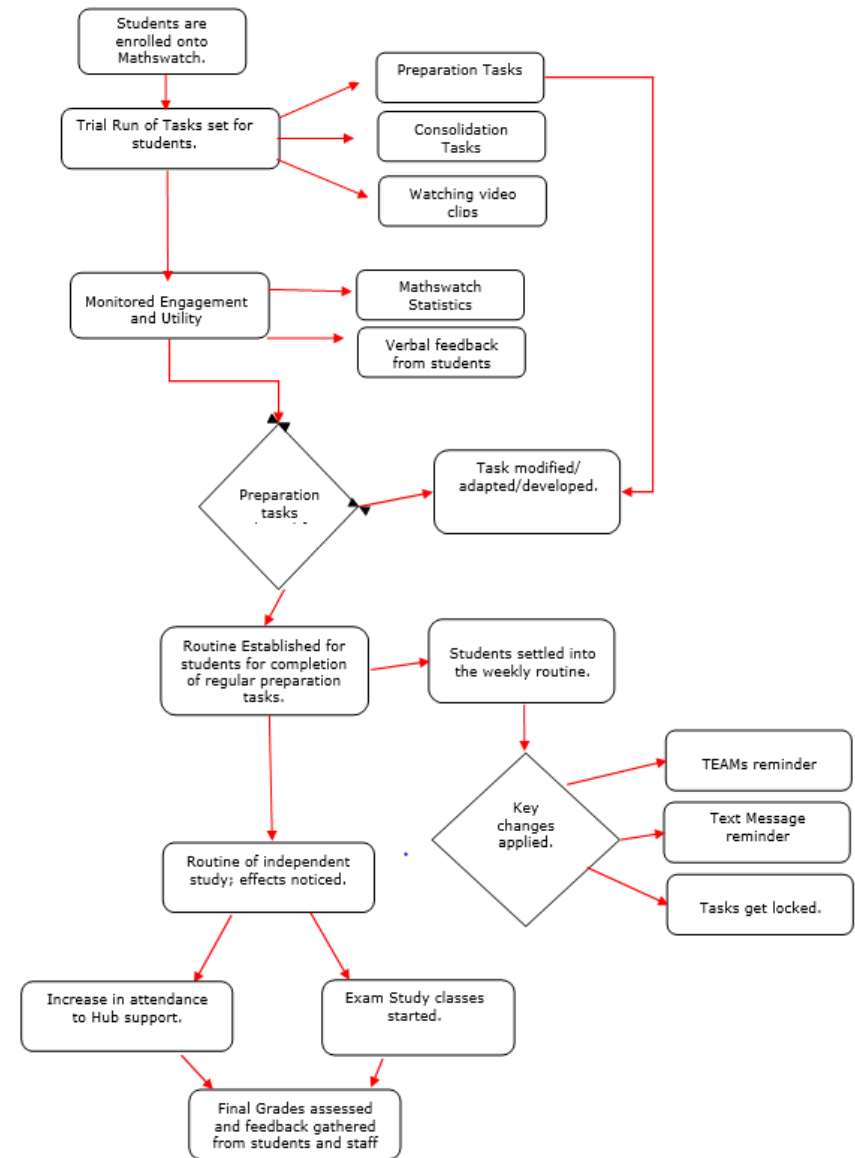
Figure 36.1: Project Approach

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

It became apparent early on that, if at the start of each session, I asked which students had completed their preparation tasks, it encouraged more students to do them. The idea of exposing the group to those completing them was a strategy used to inspire them to become part of that group of students, which was a positive step to take. When carrying out whole class discussions, the confidence of those completing the tasks was obvious and their self-esteem levels were getting a real boost: *"I know this because I've just done this before the lesson"* and *"I never understood this topic before I watched the video clips in the preparation task"*.

This simple technique of asking this question at the start of each lesson changed the group norm; from not doing work outside the classroom to doing it and feeling proud about it. Students were then aware of the "preparing" group growing and the benefits of carrying out the work. As more students joined the "doing it" norm so the normative pressure to conform increased.

Students found new ways of studying independently. The fact that the Mathswatch tasks were easily accessible, provided them with structure and support material alongside each question. This enabled students to see how they could study on their own and their traditional view – that they had to sit down and learn at a desk – was transformed and new study approaches adopted. Students realised they could study on the go with their mobile device. Some of them completed their preparation tasks on the bus coming into college.

All I now had to say when I arrived at a lesson was *"Who's ready for the lesson"* and students understood that this question related to their preparation and wanted to be one of the students to raise their hands.

Attendance remained at an all-time high with the average attendance sitting at 89% throughout the whole of the project. Students made their feelings clear, that in preparing for the lesson they were more likely to attend in order to demonstrate what they knew. The element of anxiety was removed for those completing the preparation tasks, as they were able to identify what was about to happen in the lesson and they felt they had more control over the delivery.

We shared these findings with the rest of the maths teachers in our department and the 'preparation' approach was also adopted by those teaching adults. Most of the adults have been out of education for many years and they found that refreshing their knowledge before a lesson substantially increased their success. The teachers saw a difference in their confidence levels immediately.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

As motivation levels increased, students started to query what more could they be doing in addition to lessons and preparation to support their progression. Changes to our delivery model were put in place to support the demand from students for additional maths learning.

To mitigate the impact of Covid, the Department for Education offered the FE sector Catch-up funding to provide students with additional learning opportunities to bridge the gap. In response to our project and students' desire to take on more study outside of the classroom, 'Exam Skills' lessons were created. These online lessons meant students could study additional content from home and fit it in around their current timetable. New relationships were forged between teachers as the structure of these sessions was discussed and monitored to support both styles of lessons running simultaneously.

By December students could see the impact the additional study was having on their learning and many students took up the additional online learning on offer each week, including the Maths Hub support sessions and Exam Skills sessions. This took their maths study time up to 4.5 hours per week; back in line with their secondary education.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Overall student feedback was positive (Figure 36.2). Many now understood the importance of carrying out work outside the lesson and how they could use this new set of independent study skills and implement it into other areas of their programme.

How do you think the preparation skills you have learnt in maths this year might help the way you work and study in the future?
It will allow me to prepare my ideas and gather my thoughts before any task or study
The preparation tasks give me confidence to succeed and in the future I know that preparation tasks will help me prepare for lessons
Help me to feel more confident in engaging in lessons
It will allow me to make sure that I plan for everyday life
It makes it easier to remember
Sometimes extra work is a good idea
These preparation skills will help me with all sorts of methods that I learn

Figure 36.2: Student feedback

This student realised the benefits of independent study spilling over into other areas of her course:

> *'It will allow me to prepare my ideas and gather my thoughts before any task or study'.*

The emotional connection that students made between independent study and progression was evident in their feedback:

> *'The preparation tasks give me confidence to succeed'.*

The student feedback also demonstrated how students were feeling more confident in their own maths skills and realising that the short preparation tasks started to improve their maths.

At this point in the research the student's overall attendance as a group had not dropped below 88% and the retention rate at this stage was 100%. At the start of the academic year, we noted the average grade for the class and this sat at 2.1, with our current targets set to raise standards for each student by one grade per year, the target was to raise the average group grade up to 3.1.

At the end of the academic year when all grades had been submitted to the exam board the group's overall average grade sat at 3.2; exceeding the target. Within this group of 18 students 8 students went up by one grade, 5 students went up by two grades and 1 student went up by a staggering three grades. This student in question engaged in the full 4.5 hours of maths per week from January up to May 2021.

Learning from this project

"Small changes make a big difference"

Whilst all the other teachers were setting tasks which were a mixture of consolidation and preparation; the engagement was minimal. We feel that this was because they lacked some, or all, of the following key elements:

- The students need to see the value in what they are completing, and '**preparation**' is a word they engage with and understand and maps across into all areas of their education and life.
- Teachers were still using the phrase **"homework"** and with its long history of being ignored this was not a suitable term to use with these students.
- The task needs to be routinely set every week in the same format and at the same time. A reminder is required 48 hours ahead of the lesson for maximum engagement.
- The task must be no longer than 20 minutes.
- The format of the task must follow a set pattern each week so students can see the value.
- Teachers must hold students to account as they arrive and congratulate those completing the tasks.
- The tasks must be locked as the lesson begins to avoid use of them at the incorrect point.

There is one key area where this independent study was clearly not working and that was with our level 1 vocational group. A lot of these students arrive at FE with low self-esteem, behaviour issues, undiagnosed learning conditions and a sense that the education system has let them down in the past. Asking them to engage in independent study was far too much for these students and they had many other barriers to education that we also needed to address first and foremost. We need to investigate further how to help these Level 1 learners engage in independent study.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/cluster-15/7-36/**

EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION
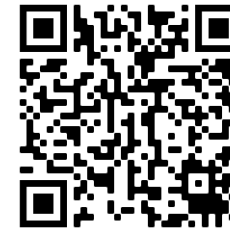
ESSENTIAL DIGITAL SKILLS
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

Research Group Lead: David Prinn
Mentors: Dr. Lynne Taylerson

                         Chloë Hynes

DIGITAL SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC (AND BEYOND)
David Prinn (Research Group Lead)

The projects

In early 2021 we secured additional funding from the Education and Training Foundation for a small number of action research projects, based on Essential Digital Skills (EDS), which would run alongside the OTLA 7 projects. Having started much later than the main programme these projects were completed in a much shorter timeframe, running from January to April 2021 (and this included a break for Easter).

Seven projects were selected, all of them from Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers which is where much of the work in EDS is currently taking place. The short timescales of the programme were more suited to the ACL providers who typically offer shorter courses lasting a few weeks. You can read the reports from the seven projects in the following pages.

Project Initiation meetings were quickly arranged at which we worked with teams to refine their research proposals to ensure they could be completed within the allocated timeframe. A truncated version of the Action Research CPD was included to get teams started quickly then they were able to join with OTLA 7 project participants at CPD events such as research round tables and writing workshops. One project lead commented after the first meeting *"I am blown away by what's available and the CPD opportunities on offer through this programme. Thank you!"*

The project mentors, Lynne and Chloë, provided intensive support to the project teams, meeting with the teams more frequently than on the OTLA programme to maintain momentum. One project lead said *"Thank you for the opportunity to take part in the project and for all your help and support mentoring us. We really feel like it's been worthwhile and made a difference and we are keen to carry on with our research too".*

Pandemic-driven development of teaching approaches

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a stimulus to develop the use of digital approaches. As teachers and learners were confined to their homes they needed to find ways to continue their education and the obvious solution to the problem was to make better use of digital technology.

Teachers who may previously have been reluctant to engage in digital approaches now saw the benefit as it provided the best solution to their current problem.

It is, perhaps, ironic that it has taken a global pandemic to enable some parts of our education system to see the benefits of teaching online where previous initiatives such as FELTAG (BIS, 2014), which tried to impose arbitrary quotas for online learning, have been less successful. **Busy teachers need a better motivation for learning how to change their approach than "you have to do it because we think it's good".**

A quota or target-driven approach will inevitably encourage teachers to find ways to do the minimum to hit the target rather than researching the best ways to make use of digital approaches. Teachers may take the line of least resistance by trying to make use of apps that they are already familiar with, for example "I know how to use xxx app, how can I use it to squeeze some technology into my course?".

This approach can be thought of as a **"solution looking for a problem"** and results in mainly **Substitution** of technology for existing approaches (or at best **Augmentation** – providing some minor functional improvement) which are the lowest levels on the SAMR model of incorporating technology (Puentedura, 2006).

In 2020 teachers were driven by having an immediate problem to solve rather than the extrinsic motivation of arbitrary targets to meet. They were motivated to find the best solution to the problem rather than being driven by their favourite apps. This has resulted in **Modification** and **Redefinition** of their teaching approaches (the highest levels on the SAMR model).

As Terada (2020) puts it *"Good technology integration isn't about using the fanciest tool, it's about being aware of the range of options and picking the right strategy - or strategies - for the lesson at hand."*

Meeting the needs of learners

Most of the projects developed courses to meet the immediate needs of learners rather than just to gain a qualification.

Coventry AES were the only provider who worked with learners who were gathering evidence for EDS Qualifications (EDSQs). The focus group was Coventry City Council staff who needed to improve their digital skills for work and for daily life.

The remaining projects concentrated on finding out what digital skills learners needed to meet the challenges of the lockdown situation. This may have included how to communicate with family and friends or shop online as well as being able to access courses remotely.

Westminster AES developed a resource to promote independence in learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. Learners needed tailored support to access programmes like MS Teams for the first time.

Teachers also took the time to find out what devices learners had available to them and tailored courses to what was available.

Islington ACL delivered their course via Zoom and the tutor used interactive PowerPoint presentations. Their learners used a range of different devices to access online courses and they did not want to restrict the project to just one device.

EDS is about more than just hardware and software

Not all of the projects focused on how to use digital devices or applications. One project focused on content.

Haringey ALS's project was unique in exploring online misinformation, its impacts, how to detect it and how to warn others. It enabled some really powerful dialogues about information validity and the motives of some 'posters' of social media messages. The project focused on women (especially single mothers).

One powerful aspect of this project was teachers working with learners to jointly plan relevant activities and design appropriate resources. Learners created video diaries and community messages outlining the positive influence on their wellbeing.

Coventry AES's project also featured iterative co-creation of curriculum and resources with learners as partners. Teachers trialling new tools (for example Jamboard) really benefited from 'live' learner feedback and immediate reflection and action by the teachers – the compressed timescales for the EDS Action Research programme encouraged this!

This type of working also allows rapid challenging and action-taking on teachers' previous assumptions (such as **Westminster AES** who had assumed that students would know their student number from an ID card and their date of birth in a specific format – key data required to log on to their network).

Newcastle City Learning developed a short course for trainee caregivers about digital notetaking. They found by consulting learners that learner perceptions of their digital skills were different to the teachers' assumptions. Learners' anxieties were based around the content of the notes themselves rather than the digital skills required to undertake the task.

COVID-19 leads to Catch-22

Barriers between IT and ESOL departments have been broken down during the course of this programme. The pandemic, and the need to access courses remotely, meant that ESOL learners now needed digital skills to be able to participate but, in some cases, before COVID-19 the IT dept (who delivered EDSQs) would not allow learners to access courses if their English was below a certain level.

This led to a Catch-22 situation where the learners needed to improve their digital skills before they could access the course which would improve their English, but they needed to improve their English to enable them to access courses which would improve their digital skills.

The solution found by project teams was for ESOL and IT tutors to work together to enable learners to develop their English and digital skills together.

At **Barnsley MBC** an ESOL tutor and an ICT tutor worked together to develop visual resources that enabled Entry Level 2 ESOL learners to access their courses from home. *"This collaboration has been the trigger in developing stronger working relationships amongst colleagues from different curriculum areas who now regularly draw on each other's expertise when required".*

One key finding from this programme is that EDS (at this level) needs to be embedded in ESOL courses and delivered by ESOL teachers. As one project lead commented: *"It's easier to develop an ESOL teacher's digital skills than teach an IT teacher how to teach ESOL"* and **Islington ACL**'s project team said "*(we) believe that the key to its success was the way in which it was delivered by ESOL teachers rather than IT teachers"*.

The ideal situation would be to have an ESOL tutor and an ICT tutor team-teaching. **Barnsley MBC** tried this approach and they found that *"Teaching using ICT can be stressful for ESOL tutors, but we found having an ICT tutor to support was very useful and the ICT tutor found that having an ESOL tutor present also helped communication".* Of course, there are cost

implications associated with having two teachers in a classroom (either face-to-face or online) which means that this approach (even though it may be the best solution for the learners) may not be sustainable financially. Perhaps a worthwhile follow-up action research project might be to investigate to what extent, after a period of team teaching, ESOL teachers have become confident enough to deliver the EDS content by themselves.

Collaboration is key

Because this programme took place at a time when the country was in lockdown, face-to-face meetings and collaboration between providers was not possible in the same way that it had been in previous OTLA programmes, but the teams made good use of digital technology to meet online.

The project teams especially valued the opportunity to share their findings and hear about the other EDS projects at an online sharing event which also acted as a 'dress rehearsal' for their presentations to the wider OTLA programme participants.

"Just had a great morning sharing findings of #EDS_AR with really supportive #FE and #ACL colleagues from across the UK. This time last year, I would've been terrified but the more you do it, the easier it becomes. #practicemakesprogress #justdoit" (Tweet from project lead after event).

The EDS project teams joined with the OTLA 7 teams to present the findings from their projects at an online dissemination event which took place in July 2021. You can watch a video of their presentations by following the link at the end of this report.

Although collaboration between providers was limited by the conditions of the pandemic, an important outcome from this programme was the value of collaboration within their own organisation between teachers from different curriculum areas, professionals at different levels working together and even teachers within the same department who found they had more opportunities to collaborate with each other because they were working on an action research project.

At **Westminster AES** the LDD team worked collaboratively with EDS tutors in the design and implementation of an induction resource. After taking part in the project one learner commented *"I now prefer doing courses online and learn more by doing it this way"*.

Islington ACL's project was a collaboration with tutors from two curriculum areas - ESOL and digital specialists. They developed a short discrete Digital Skills course for ESOL learners that enabled them to confidently access email and Zoom sessions.

Manchester AES used an existing app to develop EDS skills with learners who had low levels of English and with Entry Level ESOL learners. Teachers from different curriculum areas came together to discuss their experiences of using the app and to improve how they used it with their learners. They commented that *"it was good to see collaboration happening amongst professionals of all levels and experiences"* with members of the project team ranging from a student teacher to a curriculum manager. The app is now being used in a "Digital for ESOL" short course that has been co-created by teachers from Digital Skills and Talk English teams.

Newcastle City Learning noted that *"the project enabled a space for staff to connect and talk about teaching and learning. This is something that is not always prioritised but was really appreciated"*.

Back to normal?

In recent years much of the emphasis in Further Education seems to have been on 16- to 19-year-olds resitting GCSE English and maths. These projects have reminded us that there is more to FE than that. The Adult and Community Learning providers have had an important role to play during the pandemic and have demonstrated that they were able to adapt to the unprecedented situation that they were presented with. They have helped adults to access learning in ways that would not have been thought possible previously.

As we write this in the summer of 2021, restrictions caused by the pandemic are being lifted and there is talk of going 'back to normal'. Will we want to return to working in the same way that we did before the pandemic? Or will there be a 'new normal' that continues to use the best of the new teaching approaches that have been developed to enable learners to access their courses remotely.

The pandemic has enabled teachers to explore more efficient ways of working (without having to be threatened with quotas or targets) and it seems likely that many will want to continue using these approaches in a blended format for part of the time with face-to-face teaching only being used where it is necessary.

The ACL providers are now well placed to assist adults and other disadvantaged members of their communities to develop the digital skills that are essential in the post-pandemic world.

Where can I find out more about this programme?

You can find more details of this programme at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/essential-digital-skills/**

Click the link above or scan the QR code below to go to the ccConsultancy website where you will be able to read more about the EDS Action Research programme, watch videos of presentations by the project teams at the final sharing event and read fuller versions of the project reports including appendices which contain case studies and resources.

EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

RESEARCH CLUSTER 16
Mentor: Dr. Lynne Taylerson

37. Westminster Adult Education Service
38. Coventry Adult Education Service
39. Haringey Adult Learning Service

DIGITAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY LEARNING

Dr Lynne Taylerson (Mentor)

It was fascinating for me as a mentor to work with these three innovative project teams on such an important area as EDS. Testimonials from teachers and learners in their project reports are proof of the impact of their work. As a result of these projects learners and ACL colleagues are able to access online learning webinars with confidence using a range of digital tools, interrogate online information for accuracy and validity and manage their online identity and security.

An outstanding feature of all three projects is how they gathered and used such diverse and vibrant research evidence to aid their analysis and support their conclusions. This came in the form of learner video diaries, Google Jamboards, reflective journals from the teaching team and examples of learners' work as it developed.

All three teams developed powerful insights on the unspoken barriers that prevented learners getting online and using digital networks and resources confidently. The project teams were able to open up insightful conversations which allowed them to unpack assumptions around learners' digital access and use challenges.

Another aspect of this work that resonated as impactful were testimonials from learners on how their new digital skills were being used. They are putting learning into practice not just during immediate work and study; their new skills are bringing wider benefits in their family and social lives. They are now also able to engage in social digital spaces and guide family and friends in their safe and appropriate use.

Westminster Adult Education Service developed a session strategy and supporting resources for tutors working with learners who are accessing a Microsoft Teams webinar for the first time. The session and resources helped learners use cameras, microphones, chat features and emojis and

have been trialled successfully with positive feedback from learners both over the phone and in learning resource centres.

Coventry Adult Education Service took a diverse approach to Coventry Council colleagues' digital skills development. Individual tutors experimented with use of Google Jamboard, Forms and Sheets and the setting up and managing of Zoom webinars. The council staff learners used the resources and commented via video feedback that they had expanded their skills and gathered some very useful evidence for their Essential Digital Skills (EDS) portfolios.

Haringey Adult Learning Service explored the real impact misinformation is having on women who are disproportionately affected in COVID-19 times. A co-design element was at the heart of the project. Learners created video diaries and community messages explaining how the raised awareness of misinformation types and identifying signs of misinformation has positively impacted on their wellbeing.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-1/**

37. SUPPORTING LDD LEARNERS USING MICROSOFT TEAMS
Westminster Adult Education Service

This project developed a session strategy and supporting resources for tutors working with learners who are accessing a Microsoft Teams webinar for the first time. The session and resources have already been trialled successfully with positive feedback from learners both over the phone and in learning resource centres.

Summary

The project focus was on using Microsoft Teams and getting learners up and running on this platform. These are learners who have never used this app before and prior to lockdown the use of digital within the curriculum was not explored with them.

The first challenge to overcome was to get learners logged on and using Teams. Once this became regular and more familiar, we wanted to experiment with other activities and resources which would enable learners to use the chat function in Teams to be able to interact with other learners in a classroom.

This activity is important for our learners as Microsoft Teams provides a digital space that brings learners together to enable them to have conversations with each other and allows us to provide support with their learning. It enables them as learners to take part fully in their own learning, as well as achieving the main aim of encouraging collaboration between learners and tutors.

Rationale

The first COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020 taught the team a lot about what learners needed to be able to engage with online learning. When coming back into the classroom, the team were keen not to lose what had been learnt, including effective embedding of digital skills. The aim of the

project was to develop a resource to promote independence with learners with LDD. Learners needed tailored support to access programmes like MS Teams; teachers were spending hours supporting learners to do so, so we decided we needed to create resources to support this process.

The need for the support resource was identified due to a recent induction session that one of our team had with a new learner which took place over the telephone and lasted 2 hours. This was because the learner was unable to comprehend the original induction document, which was only accessible from the website. Given that these learners faced sufficient challenges accessing the online space, this was far too difficult for them. Based on this tutor-learner experience, our first thoughts were that an image-based support resource demonstrating how to log in for the first time, which can be sent to learners' homes, may be the best way forward.

At the beginning of the project learners faced difficulties in logging onto Teams and they needed to understand how to use Microsoft365 in the first instance to use Teams properly. In addition, learners with difficulties and disabilities found it difficult to navigate the internet and lacked patience when content was being downloaded to the web browser, which resulted in them repeatedly clicking, causing multiple pages to pop up.

By developing a resource that specifically focused on providing a Teams induction we hoped to allow more learners to log on to Teams. This access would give them confidence and allow them in the short term to progress on their existing course. In the medium term this would allow them to access a greater number of other courses.

Approach

The team needed to consider the varying needs and spiky profiles of the learners. As a first step, the induction process was reviewed, with the aim of better understanding learners' digital skills and capabilities.

As a result of this review, we focused our initial attention on one specific resource to identify how learners can be helped to develop digital skills and confidence. We also hoped to develop an additional resource for slightly more advanced learners.

We developed a learner guide to support the wider induction onto Teams of learners who are operating at Pre-Entry Level. We were unsure of what format this would take and from discussions with our EDS teachers who deliver the EDS qualification to mainstream learners, we decided to incorporate some elements of an existing induction resource that they were using with their learners.
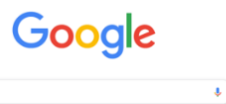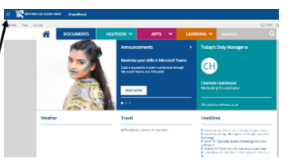
Figure 37.1: Access guide for MS Teams

A 'how to access guide' for MS Teams was developed which consisted of a two A4 page visual resource that signposted learners through the steps on the WAES website to log in to MS Teams (see Figure 37.1).

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

From the tutor-learner experience we quickly realised that time spent developing a clear resource and a step-by-step guide for learners would help reduce time spent 1:1 supporting MS Teams login and resource downloads. Previously this was taking anything from 1 to 2 hours of support outside the classroom, which was in addition to the GLH provided by the course being undertaken.

We observed good practice being undertaken by colleagues who worked in Community Learning. We filmed a Community Learning teacher demonstrating to learners how to access MS Teams via their phones. This was done in a classroom-based setting and required the use of the interactive whiteboard. In the observed session there were three participants. The total duration of the session was 1.5 hours. Our observation revealed that this was an efficient use of time.

We had also identified by observing the learners we worked with that the major stumbling block was that many learners with learning difficulties and disabilities were not aware of their student ID numbers, despite wearing a lanyard which displayed them.

Some learners also had challenges in recalling their date of birth and some did not know their date of birth. The learners' birth date was the required initial password, but they had challenges in inputting this. The knowledge from these observations further informed the presentation of how to complete this requirement in the resource.

An additional necessary learning experience was a greater understanding of how to access MS Teams on a smartphone, as we had initially only been focusing on laptop access. Using a smartphone requires the downloading

of the Teams app which was an additional step that was not considered before, as laptop access of MS Teams can be done through the browser.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The LDD team worked collaboratively with the EDS tutors in the design and implementation of the induction resource (See figure 37.2.).

Figure 37.2: Induction resource

Having a visual aid showing the hyperlinks required to access the intranet, along with clear examples of username and password addressed signing in issues for learners.

We were able to observe community tutors inducting learners onto Teams and this helped shape our resource ideas further.

The EDS tutor assisted the design process of the induction materials which was directly informed by their own experience of delivering the new EDS

qualification. With this in mind, as an aspiring qualification for some of our LDD learners, we felt that it was very relevant in supporting our learners onto further accredited qualifications.

During a recent QIP meeting the quality manager, impressed with the action research being undertaken, suggested that the ESOL team would also benefit from having access to the finished resources which could then be amended as necessary to meet the needs of their learners during their digital induction. Due to the simplicity of the resource design and the ease of language accessibility the resources lend themselves to being used across the wider curriculum for a wider range of learners operating at the lower ability scale.

The team aligned themselves with colleagues from other departments, to see where there was consistency and inconsistency in digital support and set up. From this we identified that ESOL and community-based courses used tablets and smartphones to access Teams and greater emphasis was given to live demonstration. This was in contrast to our approach which consisted of producing a resource for learners, which they would then follow through the steps as directed. This was done to promote confidence and independence, to further enable learners, using PC and laptop only.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

As part of the action research, we worked closely with and tracked the progress of two learners, DB and LKB.

DB has Moderate Learning Difficulty and suffers from anxiety.

He has been shielding since January and has not wanted to come into college because he does not feel safe.

He lives in sheltered accommodation but has carers to support him. He uses his laptop mainly for playing games on.

He is very independent and will often work on his smartphone and conduct research.

DB has now stayed online and is accessing the class from home. He does need his carer to remind him of when classes take place. He is an active member of the class and wants to further continue his skills development.

During lockdown 3, DB maintained engagement on two different courses which were delivered on Teams. DB completed his courses during term 2 and did not enrol on any courses in term 3.

DB: *"I now prefer doing courses online and learn more by doing it this way".*

LKB is very much a smartphone user and loves using his phone to access work and email teachers regularly.

To overcome digital poverty LKB was provided with a smartphone which we secured through The Good Things Foundation, who aim to work towards a goal where everyone benefits from digital access.

LKB is now able to access Teams on the smartphone as well as on a newly acquired tablet. He now regularly communicates with the project lead using the Teams chat facility (see Figure 37.3).

LKB now uses the chat facility outside normal class time to communicate with peers.

Although he has a laptop, he likes using his phone more.

He has now completed an Entry Level 1 Digital Skills for Life and has progressed onto the next level.

LKB: *"I was never happy around using laptops and preferred my phone, but this has now changed......I broke my phone in lockdown and the college helped me get a new one, which helped my studies".*
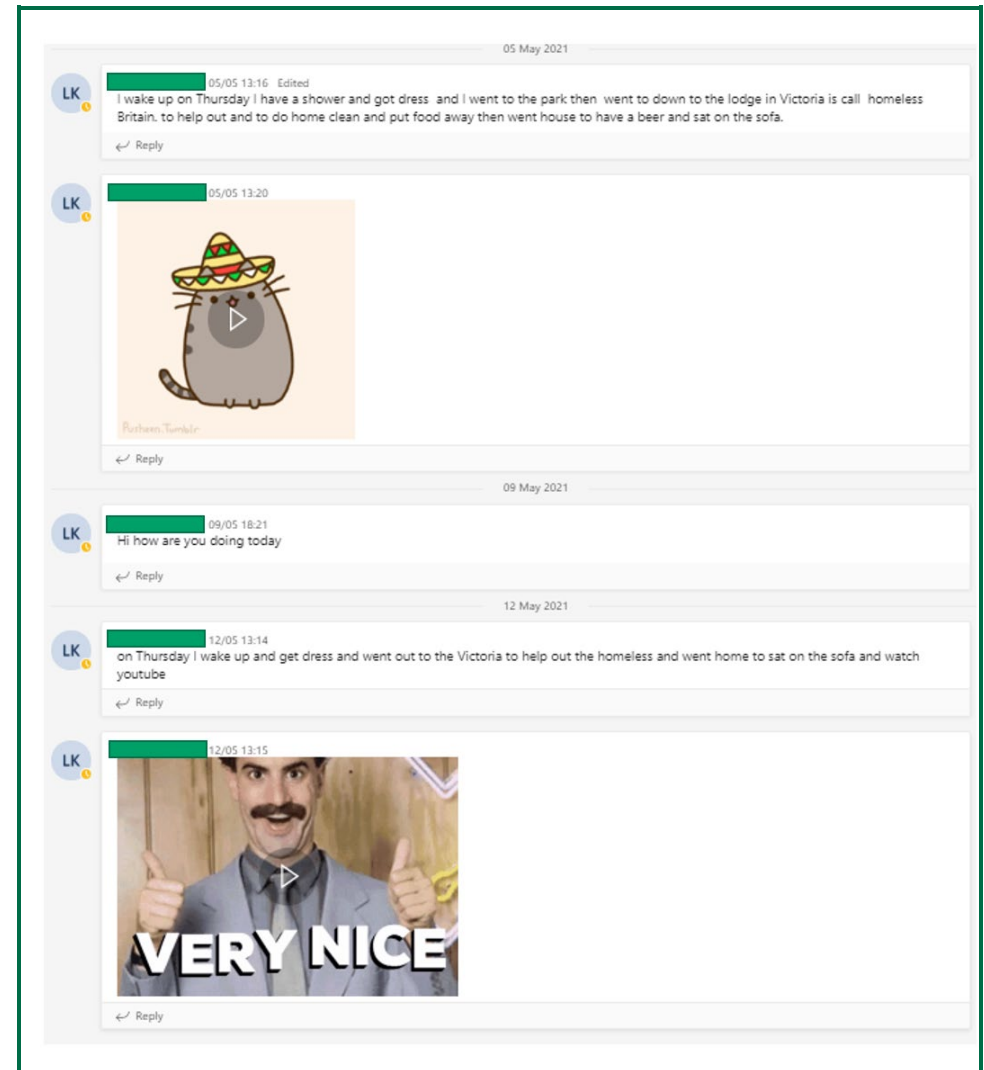
Figure 37.3: LKB using MS Teams chat facility to communicate with teacher and peers.

In addition, he is now confident in writing emails and has communicated using these.
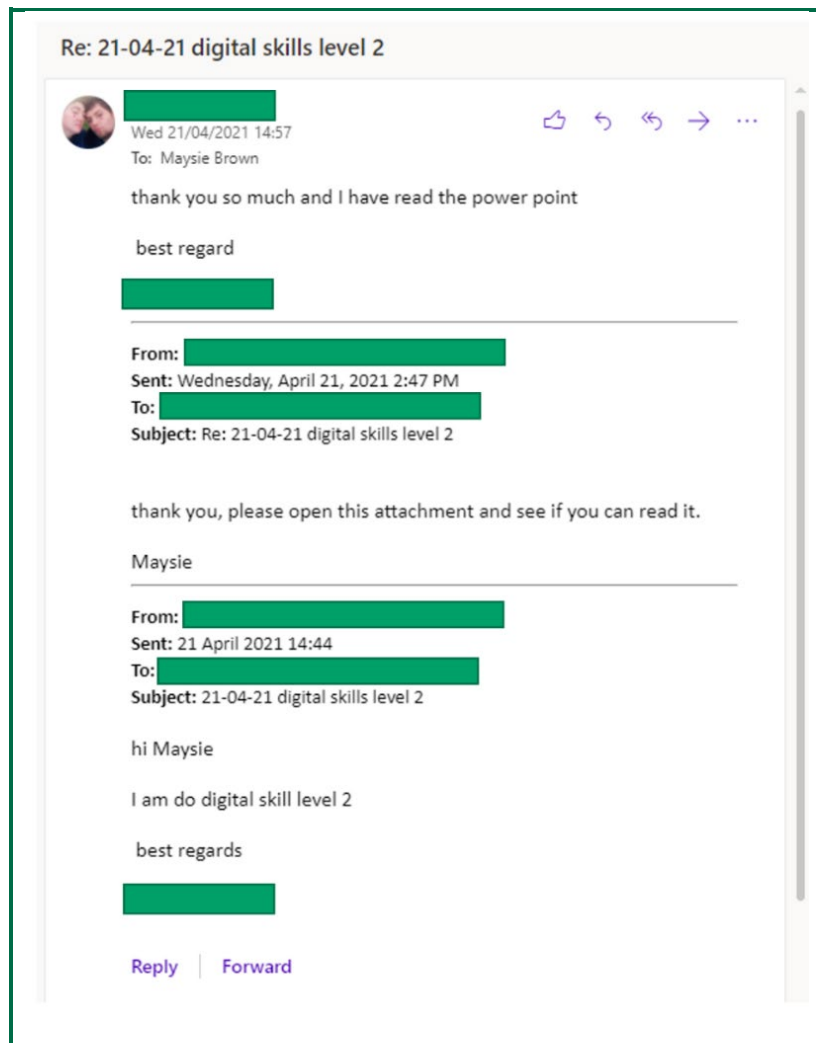
Figure 37.4: Learners using email to communicate with teachers

The final resource has been used for learners who have newly enrolled onto term 3 (April 2021 starts). From a cohort of 5 learners, 4 learners were able to use the resource independently and access Teams. One learner required prompting from the learning support assistant, which consisted of them sitting beside the learner to remind them of their DOB and learner ID number. This was a remarkable distance travelled for new learners, as previously this would have taken the whole class time.

The resource has now been adapted due to the way learners access the college system, this was done so to improve GDPR compliance, however this has added an additional barrier for this group of learners, more so that this was done mid-term. Taking part in this project made us realise that any change in resource needs to be carefully managed so as not to cause anxiety and distress to learners.

This project allowed us to think about learners holistically and to consider their diverse circumstances. We were already aware of the learning difficulties and disabilities that the learners had arrived with, however this was further compounded when considering limited access to devices, connectivity and space to learn when using a digital platform. The impact of lockdown on these learners was not considered in this project and further work is planned to ensure content is reflective of potential trauma experience as a result of COVID-19, for example fear, loss, isolation, abuse or financial difficulties.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-1/waes/**

38. DEVELOPING COLLEAGUES' DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION SKILLS
Coventry Adult Education Service

This project took a diverse approach to Coventry Council colleagues' digital skills development with individual tutors experimenting with use of Google Jamboard, Forms and Sheets and setting up and managing Zoom webinars. The council staff, who were the learners using the resources, commented via video feedback that they had expanded their skills and gathered some very useful evidence for their Essential Digital Skills (EDS) portfolios.

Summary

This project aimed to use an action research approach to investigate digital learning and the effectiveness of learner-led digital activities. We wanted to detail what methods of delivery would be best suited to fully engage learners with low or no digital skills using the EDS framework. The focus group was Coventry City Council staff who needed to improve their digital skills for work and for daily life. We hoped to see how the activities impacted on engagement, achievement and progression.

We used three interconnected methods of delivery:

1. use of a video conferencing platform (Zoom); The use of Zoom enabled staff to learn how to use a platform that could be used outside of the workplace to communicate with family and friends, enriching life skills.
2. use of Google Jamboard to foster learner collaboration; The use of Jamboard gave a rich evidence gathering, collaborative, interactive formative assessment tool for learners and tutors.
3. use of Google Sheets to promote learner collaboration online; The use of Google Sheets enabled synchronous and asynchronous working on a group activity.

Rationale

The aim of the project was to support learners (in this instance Council staff) to improve their digital skills for work and also within their daily lives. With circumstances due to the pandemic moving learning and work online, it has never been more important to support people to develop their digital skills.

The staff targeted were in those areas of the Council where use of digital skills for communication and work were low. Learners may have had no access to IT equipment other than a mobile phone. Thus, we are focussing on 'hard to reach' learners who are becoming increasingly disadvantaged in the modern world. As mentioned above, learners will learn how to use a video conferencing platform (Zoom) as a means to communicate for work purposes and in their daily life i.e. to communicate with family and friends and to help their children.

The action research also considered activities to foster online collaboration through the use of tools including Google apps, Jamboard and Google Sheets. The Google Suite was an online offer available for tutors to utilise as part of the wider online teaching and learning experience created through the COVID-19 pandemic. Tutors were instrumental in choosing these approaches.

> *"We have shared our findings as well as some of the projects we have created for ourselves and inspired each other to try different methods that each of us have created for our own classes when appropriate."*

The tools were also chosen by the tutors because of a curiosity to develop new ways of interacting with learners in an online environment that was ever evolving. The impact was measured against how well the learners

engaged with the activities and how they used their new digital skills to better communicate both at work and in their daily life.

Approach

An initial advert was listed on the Staff Intranet to capture the interest of individuals who want to develop their digital skills as well as managers who know that they have identified staff with low/no digital skills. The initial expressions of interest were captured via a shared document by the Council's Admin team.

The expressions of interest were then followed up and processed via a newly designed Initial Advice & Guidance (IAG) form by the tutors within the action research group. The forms were used to note learners' starting points.

Individual learners were supported at every stage to get them to be able to engage online and were introduced to the online conferencing platform, Zoom. Three ICT tutors delivered the teaching of skills to enable learners to participate in EDS. Basic skills in the use of the internet, applications – such as Google Classroom, Google Sheets, Zoom and email were delivered to staff using pre-Entry Level 3 community learning courses to enable participation in EDS at Entry Level 3. Some staff members did not have the basic skills to engage prior to attending sessions with Adult Education.

The research project enabled the tutors to 'think differently' about their approach to EDS and their delivery styles. The new thinking brought about creative use of digital collaboration tools (Google Jamboard and Google Sheets) and the effective use of Zoom. Each tutor as a member of the project team facilitated one aspect of the activity.

The learners took part in the EDS activities during class time and then as homework, putting the strategies into practice in their daily lives (e.g., setting up a Zoom meeting with family or friends). The use of Jamboard was found to be very effective as a means to facilitate formative and

summative assessment. Learners collaborated on a Google Sheets activity that brought about skills in team working and sharing.
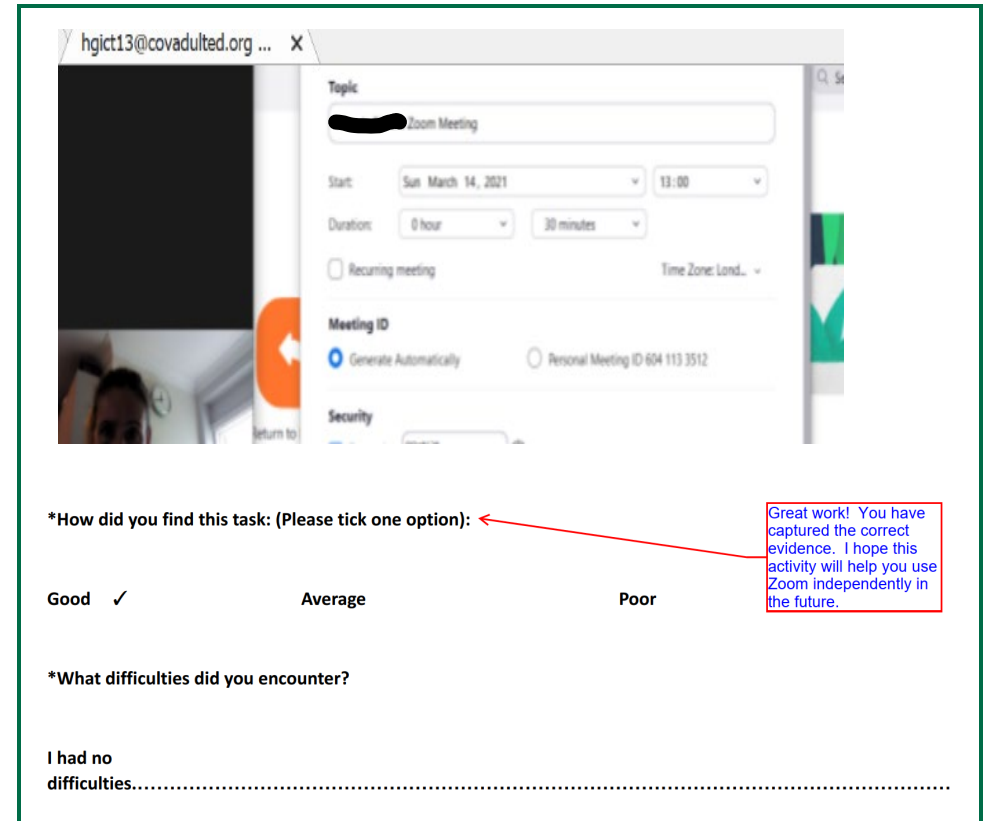
Figure 38.1: Screenshot of a learner setting up a Zoom meeting

Feedback from learners was gathered in written, recorded audio and visual forms on a weekly basis (session by session), and on completion of a unit of activity to clarify that learning had taken place. The reason for the differing forms of evidence/feedback was to embrace additional online tools, personalising feedback for learners who would normally have a face-to-face conversation with their tutor. It added variety to the gathering of evidence, analysing achievement of learning objectives mostly for formative assessment.
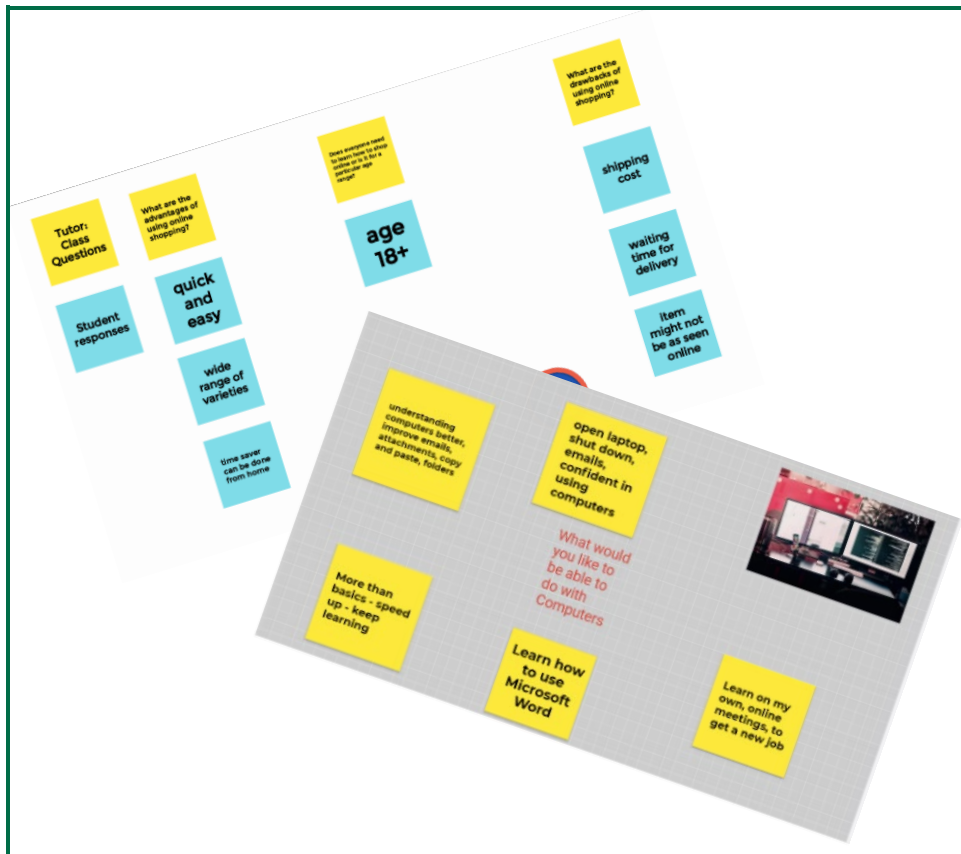
Figure 38.2: Screenshots of Jamboard activities

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The creation of the activities brought about an invigorating experience for the tutors, as practitioners. The use of a 'multi-use' document that captured initial advice and guidance and primary learning objectives made it easier to target activities to individual learner's needs.

The processes of trialling the digital activities and receiving feedback from peers and learners enabled changes to be made to each activity and a growth in the approach to teaching learning and assessment practices.

Individual tutor reflections also improved subsequent delivery of the activities. Online practices (use of Jamboard, for example) helped teachers and learners build up an evidence base and the Jamboard activity was also very useful as an assessment tool. Learners really enjoyed engaging with the Jamboard and its use created new ways of capturing learner responses to activities set using online versions of sticky notes. It was quick and 'convenient' with a real sense of immediacy as tutors could post images or stickers saying 'well done!' which appeared right away.

Tutors have also collaborated, asking their peers for feedback on work they had created. Managers from vocational areas of learning are asking for training in the use of Jamboards for their tutors after hearing about its success on this programme.

> *"…using formulas in Google Sheets, working collaboratively so the learners could see what the other learners were doing. If a learner made a mistake, the other learners could easily offer advice and encouragement."*

Engagement with the digital tools enabled learners to see their learner journey through the activities creating a 'can do' attitude and collaboration and participation were enriched by the activities. The increase in collaborative working also supported asynchronous learning and allowed learners to 'catch up' if needed. The asynchronous part of the collaboration came about because one of the learners was at work and unable to attend the class but was still able to take part in the group exercise at a time that was convenient to them and input into the Google Sheets.

Evidence of learning and impact of learning was able to be captured on the equivalent of one sheet of paper, recorded digitally.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

As a result of the project more emphasis has been placed on the upskilling of Council staff with no/low levels of digital skills, enabling them to achieve the EDS qualification as a route to further CPD and greater digital inclusion.

Use of Jamboard enabled collaborative approaches to be developed, with learners and teachers working together on various aspects of the EDS qualification.

The sharing of cross-curricular good practice stemming from the project proved motivational. This was showcased during a whole Service event which took place in April 2021 during an online staff development event. Many tutors commented that they would find the activities useful to trial in their respective curriculum areas.

The tutors involved in the project have experienced their first delivery of sessions to the whole service and are now being invited to other curriculum areas to share the project findings. Communication has also increased within the team of tutors as they explore more options such as an application called Mote, which can be used for recording feedback to learners.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners have engaged with the activities and their feedback has helped activity revision for future sessions. Some learners have developed in resilience and independence, for example, trying out activities in a supportive, collaborative space can encourage people to 'give it a go'.

Learners have shown a more developed realisation of how digital skills impact their lives at work and home. They are also implementing their EDS learning within their daily work activities, empowering efficiencies and productivity. Examples of learner feedback illustrate this.

"Today's learning about Google Sheets was really informative, as I am already doing my Level 1 maths and that helps me doing my tables and graphs. I enjoyed working together with my classmates and the way our tutor guides us."

"Today's lesson was very informative… I just need more practice and I will be able to use this skill in my work I carry out for the City Council, thank you."

Learners worked towards targets set, evaluating their own progress as they achieve targets which may be written and/or oral. The learners' individual learning plans therefore formed part of the evidence of progress and impact.

The demonstration of learner skills was collected through recordings of activities e.g., a learner hosting a successful Zoom meeting. Learners 'know' the skills they have acquired and how to use them effectively at work and at home:
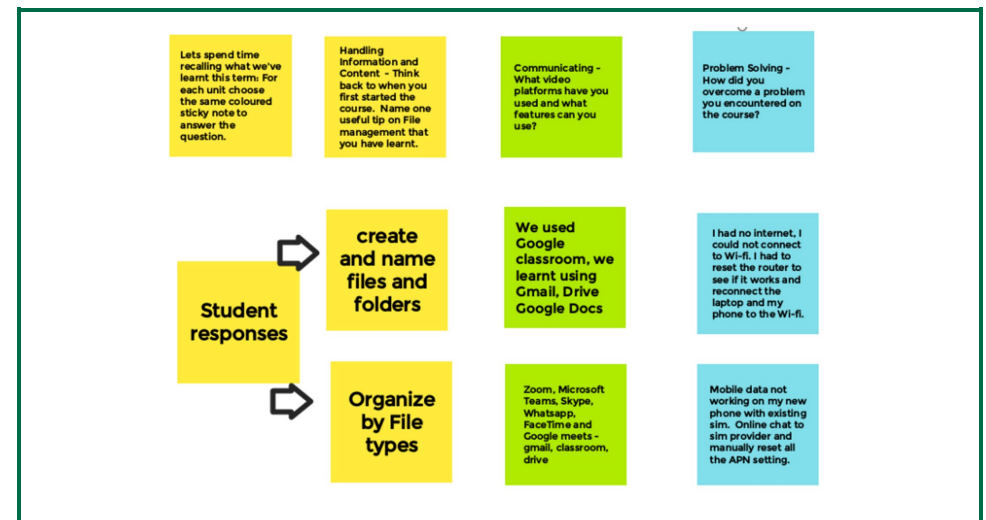
Figure 38.3: Screenshot of Jamboard activity

Learning from this project

This project contributed to an ongoing developmental state for the EDS programme, especially the varying aspects of collaboration on learning and assessment for learners and tutors alike. Improved inclusion was the forerunner for this project and the aim for it and beyond, instead of looking inward, we decided to look outward, to 'think outside the box'. The improved inclusion related to the bringing together of individual tutors that had been working in silos on the delivery of their teaching and learning remit. The tutors became a 'team' again. The creativity that was once a vibrant part of the delivery of digital skills, was re-ignited through collaborative working and the development of the project from conception.

Working digitally actually supported assessment and helped evidence learner progress. Before conducting the research, we previously felt that digital facilitation would be more difficult as we had to move away from face-to-face learning. Additional 'sharing' sessions and development sessions have been planned over the coming months to enhance delivery of teaching and learning activities.

There is now a new 'open door' to finding different innovative ways of working to facilitate initial, formative and summative assessment. The discovery of new tools for gathering evidence of learners' learning has created a continuous professional development aspect to the thinking of the tutors. No longer do they have to 'just fill in the assessment paperwork!'

> *"I have been able to offer a different approach for each learner to accommodate their style of learning, their reasons for learning different things and their requirements within their own individual jobs or personal projects."*

There is a correlation between this project and the results that have come from the collaborative ways teaching and learning has been conducted which tell us that use of digital platforms can impact the lives of tutors and learners alike. The digital skills gained bring a 'social' and 'well-being' element to the learner journey as they use the skills learned to communicate in their communities and abroad.

This project has highlighted the need for EDS in the lives of all staff, especially staff that have been disadvantaged and excluded for lack of digital skills.

The ICT curriculum team are now exploring ways of offering EDS to ESOL learners and encouraging more cross-curricular collaboration, looking at ways of embedding EDS into the ESOL programme.

It is very early within the life of the works that have been opened up. There is more to explore, try, investigate and implement and share. We look forward to seeing how these activities continue to impact on engagement, achievement and progression.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-1/caes/**

39. EMBEDDING WELLBEING APPROACHES IN EDS PROGRAMMES

Haringey Adult Learning Service

This project underpinned principles around Trauma Informed Practice. We explored the real impact misinformation is having on women who are disproportionately affected in COVID-19 times. A co-design element was at the heart of the project where learners created video diaries and community messages outlining the positive influence on their wellbeing.

Summary

Haringey Adult Learning Services (HALS) provide basic skills and vocational courses that target migrant residents with low levels of English, people with no qualifications or those not qualified to Level 2. Learners are unemployed or in low paid employment. High levels of health inequality in the east of the borough mean most learners have low to moderate mental health needs. The service works to the borough regeneration and economic development strategy via a Good Employment Recovery Plan. The service has a strong ethos of multi-agency working, partnership, inclusion and learner involvement, underpinned by a strengths-based approach.

Our work investigated the effect on learner wellbeing of embedding wellbeing activities into EDS sessions with a focus on online misinformation. We focused this project on women (particularly single parents) due to the disproportionate effects data has shown that COVID-19 has had on this group (Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2020)

The project team was made up from Essential Digital Skills (EDS) Tutors and a Creative Skills tutor to facilitate the co-design aspect of developing and embedding the misinformation/disinformation workshops.

Small group sessions aimed to give a safe space for learners to explore individual concerns around fake news. Through a co-design approach the focus was on empowerment to take control of these issues and, using new digital skills, create their own positive messaging around misinformation.

Intended outcomes included:

- providing an understanding of what misinformation is
- learning about who creates and shares misinformation
- exploring what motivations people have for doing this
- considering how misinformation can affect our wellbeing
- investigating how we keep up-to-date with information online.

We wanted learners to build confidence in these key areas through the workshops and co-creation activity, and a sense of connection with a wider online community through their sharing of the resources.

Rationale

The focus on women for this project (particularly single parents) was in line with the Trauma Informed Approach (Weston College, 2018; Shevrin Venet, 2020) with which HALS has been underpinning its delivery since March 2020.

Our video diary activity was designed so that learners were able to use the device which is most accessible to them. The co-created message activity focussed on short slogans, which were digitally produced so that learners' language and literacy skills will not be a barrier.

ESOL Learners were also encouraged to produce their messages in languages other than English so that they could be used in future in their communities. Tutors needed digital upskilling, particularly in the areas of digital wellbeing, to improve confidence to facilitate these topics.

To disseminate progress and learning, project updates were shared on service and team chat threads and access to workshop resources were shared with all staff through a range of accessible formats. Staff were

invited to trial any of the project activities and to reflect on their experience and learning in a shared online project space in MS Teams.

Project updates were also recorded so that staff will be able to access them in a range of formats.

Approach

Stage 1:
- Learners are introduced to the project and complete a quiz on fake news.
- Learners create short video clips where they record how they feel misinformation is having an impact on their wellbeing.

Stage 2:

Learners take part in 2 workshops around misinformation following principles of co-design:

Workshop 1: Presentation delivered outlining:
- What is misinformation?
- Why do people create it and spread it?
- Why is it so overwhelming?
- How can I spot it?

Learners completed a survey answering questions through 'Panda' Emojis. The reason for choosing panda emojis was because we felt they represented the different emotions more visually than just the smiley faces. The panda was simply a design choice made from the various emoji icons available in PowerPoint.

The decision to use emojis in particular was based on it being recommended by our mentor as a really useful strategy for accessibility and understanding for questionnaires and getting feedback.

Questions included:
- Do you think fake news is harmful or misleading?

- How would you feel if you shared a message to friends and found out it was fake news?
- How much do you trust social media to keep you up to date about issues you care about?
- If a news story made you feel strong emotions (fear, anger), how confident do you feel that you would suspect it to be false or misleading?

Learners took part in 'The Bad News Game' to be *in the shoes* of someone who is spreading misinformation.

A series of community messages based on their new knowledge and skills were produced by the learners in MS Word.

Stage 3:

Learners shared wellbeing journeys by creating a second video diary recording:
- What their experience was of playing 'The Bad News Game'.
- How confident they now felt that they can look after their own wellbeing (and their family and friends') online in relation to what is fake or what is misleading.
- Wellbeing community messages which were shared across the service.

The workshop template for the workshop events was also introduced to other classes across HALS.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

We are now seeing digital literacy programmes appearing in schools, colleges and universities, with lots of innovative lesson plans and tools, but roll-out is still very much a process of trial and error. The co-design element of this project allowed us to work with learners to get an understanding of how misinformation affects them based on their lived experience and design resources to meet their needs.

Our approach for this project was to create a series of co-designed workshops with a group of learners to create resources to raise awareness of and promote discussion about misinformation.

The practitioners involved were professionally developed as action researchers: we encouraged critical thinking about education, values and practice. A process model in the design and delivery of the workshops was put into practice. A praxis curriculum model with learners empowered to co-design content (motioning of learners as experts in their own learning and development) subsequently improved their wellbeing. We drew on relevant research as part of this evidence-based practice (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

In advance of the first workshop, we created a series of questions about misinformation for the learners to respond to in their video diaries. This allowed us to have a better understanding of what type of information and resources might help to address the knowledge gap and what kind of concerns and attitudes the group had about misinformation at the beginning of the project. This demonstrated our commitment to maintaining high standards of ethics and professional behaviour in support of learners and their expectations.

The activities encouraged the group to consider how they keep up-to-date online, how being online might impact their wellbeing and explored trusting our instincts and judgement in the online space. This was supported by the group creating statements and messages in response to a series of questions, such as "What would you say to someone who is feeling overwhelmed by false and misleading stories online?" and "What advice would you give to someone about looking after their wellbeing online?", which were then shared within the group.

Throughout the project we were active. After each workshop we made changes for the following workshop based on identified learner needs, for example, introducing 'The Bad News Game' using role play, placing learners in the 'shoes' of someone: spreading fake news (see response in Video

diary 2). We dedicated an additional workshop to develop the personal messages which allowed learners the time to reflect on what they had learned and freedom to create their own personalised community messages, enabling them to feel connected:

Jamboard:
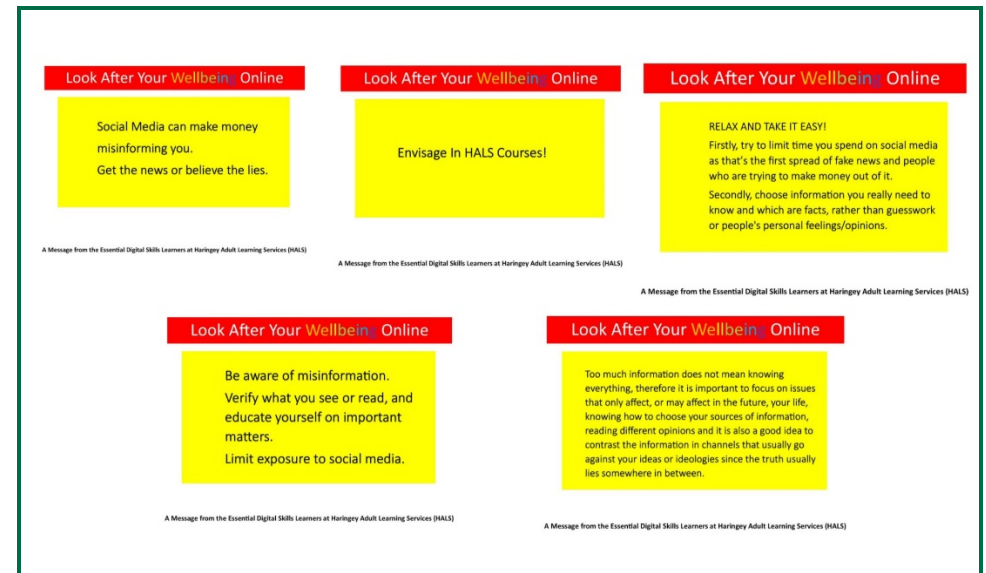
Figure 39.1: Screenshot of Jamboard activity

Practitioners are subject and/or vocational specialists as well as experts in teaching and learning and showed commitment in maintaining and developing their expertise in both aspects of their role to ensure the best outcomes for their learners. Continual refreshing of knowledge and skill sharing occurred across the project by sharing resources via the MS Teams platform and CPD sessions.

Edmodo Group:
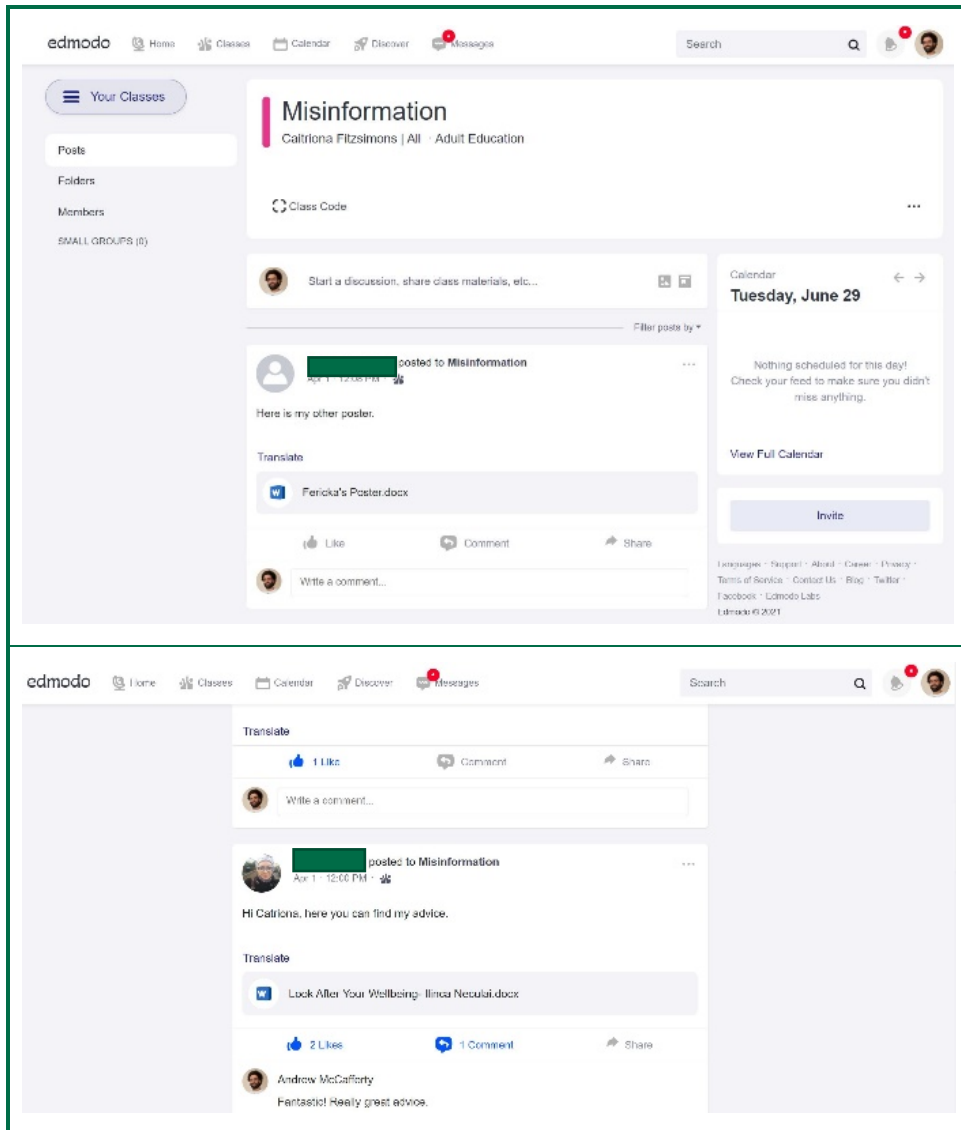
Figure 39.2: Screenshot of Edmodo Group

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Project updates were shared on the service and team chat threads and access to the workshop resources shared with all staff through a range of accessible formats. Staff were invited to trial any of the project activities and to reflect on experience and learning in a shared online project space in MS Teams. Any project updates were also recorded so that staff will be able to access them in a range of formats.

The video diary activity was designed so that learners would be able to use the device which is most accessible to them. As not all learners had a smartphone, it was decided as a group to use MS Teams to record the videos, enabling all to participate.

The co-created message activity focused on learners devising short slogans, brief messages and digitally produced content so that learners' language and literacy skills did not become a barrier. Although the messages were produced in English, ESOL Learners were encouraged to produce their messages in languages other than English (Figure 39.3). The benefits of this enabled learners to respond in their first language and therefore reduced cognitive load (Bell Foundation, 2021).

The workshops were designed and scheduled based on learner needs through practitioner collaboration. Practitioners in different roles worked constructively in new relationships both within HALS and in their own setting. The class tutor and the associate tutor collaborated on the resources to ensure they were relevant for the learner group.
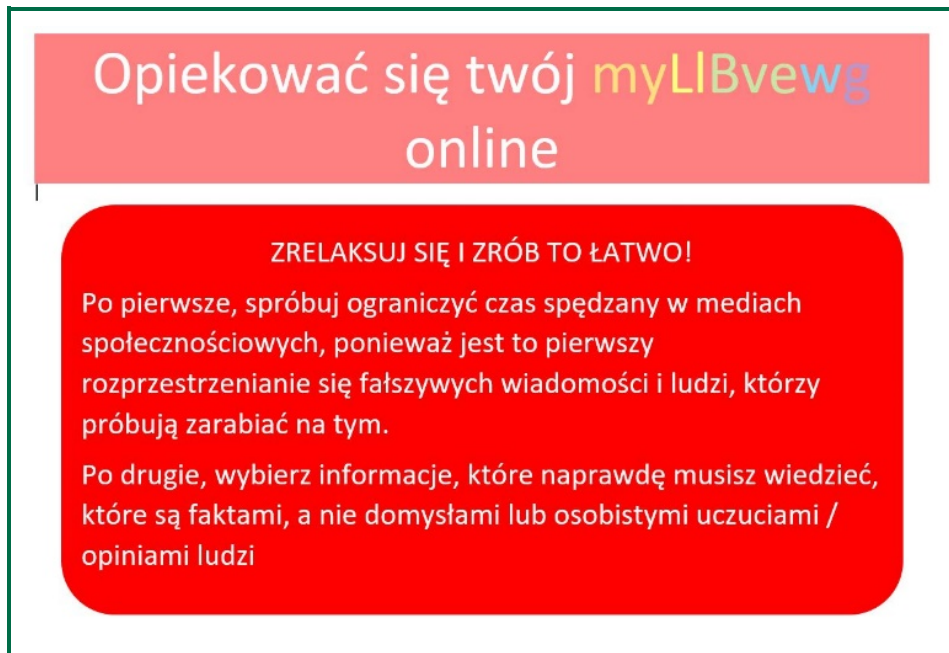
Figure 39.3: Screenshot of message produced by a learner in their first language

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The learners, as a group, reported that they often struggled to tell the difference between news that is real and that is 'fake'. They were unanimous in believing that false and misleading news stories are harmful, but less clear about the motivations of why people create and spread misinformation online.

When asked if they were concerned about what is real and what is fake or misleading online, they provided some valuable insight into the impact of misinformation on their wellbeing.

One learner expressed concerns around violent and aggressive news stories, another how misinformation might impact and affect her children. A young mother said that she finds it "very scary" not knowing if what she is

reading or listening to is real or not and shared her worry that the intention of misinformation might be an attempt to control you or make you believe something that isn't true. A male learner spoke about how he is starting to struggle with misinformation, especially the news on social media, where people post messages or share links and it's hard to know if it's a joke or if the statistics are real.

This can be illustrated best with learner case studies. The first case study focuses on two female learners, K and M.

What were the learners' challenges at the beginning?

K has two daughters, 19 and 16, and it is their age group she was most concerned about. She worried about the ease of access to information making them:

> "…feel that they are in control because they know stuff, but it's not really that they know, it's that they know how to get or how to access stuff about, they don't talk about, they see it, and there tends to be especially a tendency to accept it because (their) friends have been hearing it…".

It therefore becomes more commonplace more acceptable. K also felt that people access information differently, and this can be confusing.

M was very concerned and said she was:

> "…trying to avoid the news which are full of violence and aggression, and I just tried to sort out everything, so I choose what I want to hear."

She commented that it is a:

> "…very difficult situation because you know it's getting more and more and then we just stuck. Now if you watch TV, it just full of the headlines and other headlines already hitting basically two words to tell us everything!".

M was trying to be aware but found it quite intimidating as to how to find trustworthy news amongst the amount "headline" news intent for an emotive response.

What did they learn in the end?

K commented:

> *"I definitely feel more equipped. It's good also to know that it's so serious that there is a need to educate people. It's not just all in my mind!".*

She also remarked that she does not *"have worry but thinks about it."* This demonstrated her new, calmer way of approaching the topic now that she is more equipped. At the same time:

> *"I guess I'm always expecting that something will come along and catch me out. But it'll be fewer things because I know a bit more about it."*

M reflected:

> *"I think I got so much information that I never thought about that before. Not to take everything from social media, so it's a truth. Here I got some so much more and it will help. So yeah, we will be much more aware of everything, and I will double check everything!"*

She also felt confident to pass on what she has learned to friends and family as:

> *"Everyone needs to be aware, but of course not to be paranoid about it. But obviously…we have to have our eyes open, you know, just to decide what is good, what is bad. So that's why it has been really helpful."*

This learner feedback tells us that the experience was extremely valuable, and the learners enjoyed all stages of the project. They were fully engaged as it was meaningful to all participants in their own unique ways. They enjoyed being filmed and learning these digital skills. I looked forward to teaching them how to record and edit their own video diaries and this element will be covered in a Level 1 qualification.

The next steps for the team are that most learners are progressing to EDSQ Level 1, where they will explore recording and editing videos themselves at Level 1, developing further their digital literacy.

Learning from this project

Over the course of our investigation, we learned that:

- Learners had some degree of knowledge about misinformation but not a clear understanding of what it is.
- Learners reported feeling overwhelmed by the scale of misinformation online and worried about its effects on them and those close to them.
- Learners had some idea of the motivations behind misinformation, and it was a cause for concern for many of them, particularly relating to health information.

We also valued feedback from EDS research peers at the dissemination event, in which practitioner research peers told us:

> *"What a critically important part of education – considering misinformation. This should be at the core of so many courses today".*
>
> *"I like the idea of video diaries".*
>
> *"[This curriculum is] potentially so empowering".*
>
> *"Misinformation is having a real impact on community health and wellbeing".*

What went well:

The project approach of breaking down the key aspects of misinformation, e.g. defining it, tools to spot it, was successful in helping the group to feel more confident about dealing and interacting with misinformation online.

Creating the personal messages and statements facilitated discussion around the issue and allowed learners to hear about lived experience from different perspectives. Although the group were unanimous that misinformation is harmful, what that harm looks like and how it impacts differs from person to person. So, beginning from a place of understanding the needs and concerns of the group supported the creation of resources that played a meaningful role in addressing the issue of misinformation and, more broadly, looking after their wellbeing online.

Even better if…:

In the future we would like to extend the curriculum to allow exploration of learners' own unconscious /confirmation bias. Are there outlets that they think 'oh that must be false' because they share views that don't sit with their own e.g. "I'm right dot com" (Joe Rogan Experience, 2015).

These could be further tools to promote critical thinking in real contexts.

ESOL Learners could produce more of their messages in languages other than English, widening the reach in a diverse community.

Learners could be encouraged to record and edit their own videos improving their digital skills even further. This will be explored by the team in future with progressing learners at Level 1.

Where can I find out more about this project?

There is so much rich evidence and information on this project through learners' testimonies. The best way to experience it is to visit our Padlet (Figure 39.4), which is available via the link or QR Code below, where you will find learner journey evidence, case studies, evaluation reports and information about our teaching and training resources. Examples of resources involved in the project may also be found in Appendices 1-4.
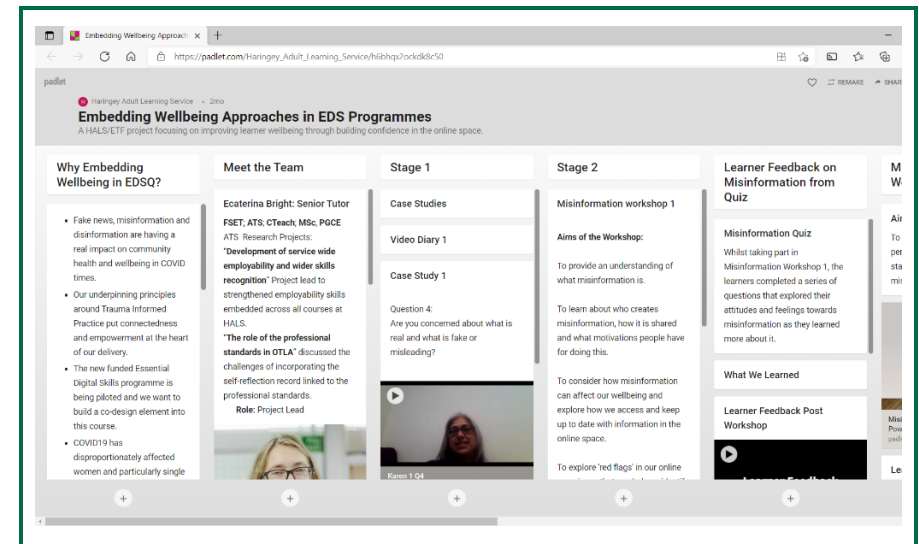
Figure 39.4: Project Padlet - https://padlet.com/c_collins2/HALSEDS21

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-1/hals/

RESEARCH CLUSTER 17

Mentor: Chloë Hynes

A BRIDGE TO DIGITAL LITERACY FOR ESOL+ LEARNERS

Chloë Hynes (Mentor)

Whilst these projects were exploring Essential Digital Skills (EDS), they were met with the challenge of a qualification that was not necessarily purposeful for some of their learners. As such they endeavoured to find ways to be inspired by EDS and in some instances use it as a framework to embed the development of digital literacy in their learning spaces.

The project teams challenged assumptions, worked multi-modally, collaboratively and reflectively. Each team was a joy to work with and think critically alongside. As their mentor, I learned a lot about my own practice as an ESOL teacher and digital specialist. Their experiences contributed to my ongoing thoughts about the value that EDS has for embedding digital skills, particularly in ESOL provision and other discreet cohorts (regardless of whether or not they are doing the qualification).

Some projects focussed explicitly on providing a foundation course towards the EDS qualification, whilst others worked to develop a bridge between learning, and life and work. Needless to say, each team was innovative in their approaches to developing the digital resilience of their learners (and in some ways, themselves).

Newcastle City Learning investigated learners' feelings about digital note-taking in health and social care with both ESOL and English cohorts. The team discovered that learners' anxieties were based around the content of notes themselves rather than digital skills required to undertake the task.

Manchester Adult Education Service explored how far their existing learning app could be used as a remote bridge course to develop the (ESOL and literacy) learners' digital skills in preparation for blended learning.

Whilst all the teams worked successfully as collaborative projects, two teams added the additional bridge of working across two departments (ESOL and IT) with quite different findings.

Barnsley Adult Skills & Community Learning developed a short Essential Digital Skills course for lower level ESOL learners. Their focus was on the grading of language along with using appropriate visuals. The team took a cross-curricula approach which has also broken down barriers within the organisation itself; between the IT and ESOL department.

Islington Adult Community Learning developed a short Essential Digital Skills course for entry level ESOL learners to enable them to confidently access email and Zoom across a range of devices. The project team believe that the key to its success was the way in which it was delivered by ESOL teachers rather than IT teachers.

Whilst this programme was short and sharp, the impact has been significant; on their learners, on their organisation and externally through journal articles and the many events the project teams have contributed to since conducting their research.

Where can I find out more about these projects?

You can read the detailed reports from these projects in the following pages, and you can find links to this cluster's presentation at the final dissemination event at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-2/**

40. ASSUMPTIONS AND ANXIETIES: LEARNERS' FEELINGS ABOUT APPLYING DIGITAL SKILLS IN WORKPLACE CONTEXTS

Newcastle City Learning

> "Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."
>
> Isaac Asimov

This project investigated learners' feelings about digital notetaking in the health and social care workplace. The key discovery was that learners' anxieties were based around the content of the notes themselves rather than the digital skills required to undertake the task. In response, supportive time-limited tasks were developed that modelled real-life scenarios whilst developing learners' digital literacies.

Summary

Newcastle City Learning is an institution which provides a variety of courses to post-16 learners developing knowledge and practical skills for work in the UK. This project focused on a group of trainee caregivers enrolled on the Care Academy course. The group were a mix of ESOL and native English learners.

The main area of exploration was in relation to a work-based Care Academy and how to support potential carers to develop their digital skills for the workplace. The team supported learners to work on specific skills most pertinent to their area of work, including notetaking. The team found that building in time for talking and reflection with learners was especially important to help learners grow in confidence but also to reflect important values for working in care.

Rationale

Assumptions are often made about what learners can or cannot do, particularly in relation to digital skills and capabilities. Note taking is a particularly important skill that learners need to develop when preparing to work in health and social care and increasingly these need to be written and sent digitally. Digital skills are often taught discretely and not applied in work situations until after learners have finished their course. This research aimed to gain a fuller understanding of how learners feel about applying digital skills competently by simulating a workplace situation, within a given time frame. Additionally, this research aimed to introduce the learners to, and improve, digital note taking skills.

Approach

Before:

At the start of this project the tutors discussed the content and context of potential activities, the logistics and the delivery of this topic within the short 4-week window of the course. All tutors involved have contributed to the planning and delivery of the Care Academy curriculum, therefore they had a good understanding of the care standards required from the learners.

Tutors devised 4 open questions about aspects of digital notetaking skills competencies. In order to discuss in depth and to get ideas from all the learners, the class was arranged into breakout groups with an allocated tutor. They were then encouraged to discuss their feelings about digital

notetaking skills. This allowed tutors to identify where their anxieties come from, rather than simply accepting that their anxieties were present.

The project team shared the responses and information collected from the learners and agreed on the next activities and strategies. Therefore, activities were planned around learners' expressed anxieties rather than what we assumed were their anxieties.

During:

Most of the learners had neither seen nor written care notes before so scaffolded notetaking activities were developed, including exemplars, practice work and top tips for digital notetaking.

To start, example care plan cards were discussed in small groups and ranked from best to worst based upon learners' educated guesses. Following this activity, students were encouraged to give feedback on the cards and their reasoning behind the rankings. This was intended to make learners think about appropriate and inappropriate notetaking practice.

Top tips for writing notes were discussed and examples were created as a group that listed the information they thought should be included when writing a care note. For example, physical changes such as: deteriorating health, pain, injuries or a change in hair colour.

A comparison of good and bad exemplar notes describing the same scenario was the final activity which prepared learners to produce their own digital care notes. Using a detailed scenario and some previous notes about the patient, learners digitally wrote and sent care notes with realistic time pressures. Tutor and peer feedback followed to discuss what learners felt confident or less confident about.

Reflecting:

Learners completed a questionnaire about the notetaking activities and shared their feelings about it. They were given 8 sentence starters to encourage discussion about their perceived confidence and ability when

making digital care notes. This proved very useful to distinguish the various skills used and areas for improvement in teaching.

In depth discussions with two learners with contrasting English language abilities gave more in-depth student feedback.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project impacted on our professional practice in numerous ways. Firstly, it led us to question our initial digital skills assessments and ask if they are too skills based and to a certain extent superficial. How can we get a clear image of students' digital skills without witnessing them in a relevant context? This led to us changing our initial assessments by making them more discussion- and activity-focused to ascertain learner starting points.

Learner perceptions of their digital skills were different to our assumptions, and this made us question how much of our other teaching is based on assumptions. Learner perceptions were more focused on the desire to get it right with notetaking and their anxieties were directed here. Pullinger and Franklin (2010, p.111) discovered similar anxieties among pharmacists when writing healthcare notes. One pharmacist stated, *"You wouldn't want to be wrong in the notes… you've got to be pretty sure of your facts",* a sentiment shared by our learners. Recognising this has reminded us to be fully prepared to work digitally to alleviate these concerns through blending the unfamiliar skills of notetaking with more familiar digital skills.

We now appreciate that learners need opportunities to overcome these anxieties. Our planning has taken on a new focus on integrated tasks that can achieve this, rather than singling out desired skills to improve and expecting learners to know how and when to use them appropriately.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project enabled a space for staff to connect and talk about teaching and learning. This is something that is not always prioritised but was really appreciated. With ever increasing time taken up with administration and developing the technical knowledge needed to teach online, it was a powerful reminder of the importance of tutors taking the time to 'talk' about teaching and learning.

There is now a greater focus on talking, listening and Socratic questioning, which is filtering into other aspects of teaching and learning. Development in this area has been highlighted as key to developing critical problem-solving skills.

Existing teaching and activities for this course are being reassessed, including pace and timings, to create time for these changes.

The benefits of the action research approach have been disseminated within the wider organisation and an action research sharing CPD programme is being developed to demonstrate the success of our adapted approach.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

In applying their digital skills to a real situation, the majority of learners changed from thinking that hand-written notes would be faster and easier, to agreeing that digital notes were their preferred option (Figure 40.1).

Learners commented that they made fewer mistakes working digitally. When discussing benefits of digital notes one learner commented *"When I write it down [on paper] I'll probably make 2 or 3 mistakes".* Some learners felt more comfortable moving towards digital notetaking practices if they were able to write a draft in their phone first before adding their notes into the official document.

This highlighted the importance of familiarity with technological devices and showed that the basic skills were present, learners just needed that extra step to demonstrate their digital notetaking competence.

Learners felt that they got through their digital skills activities more quickly, because they were using them meaningfully. Helsper and Deursen (2015, p.129) support these findings by stating *"… [digital] training is more attractive for individuals when it's built around contents and assignments that are appealing to those concerned."* This clearly made an impact on students as the course recorded 100% achievement and retention.

On completion of the course every learner had the opportunity to attend an interview and 60 - 80% secured employment. One employer commented that *"the learners recruited from the course had much more awareness and confidence than our usual recruits".*
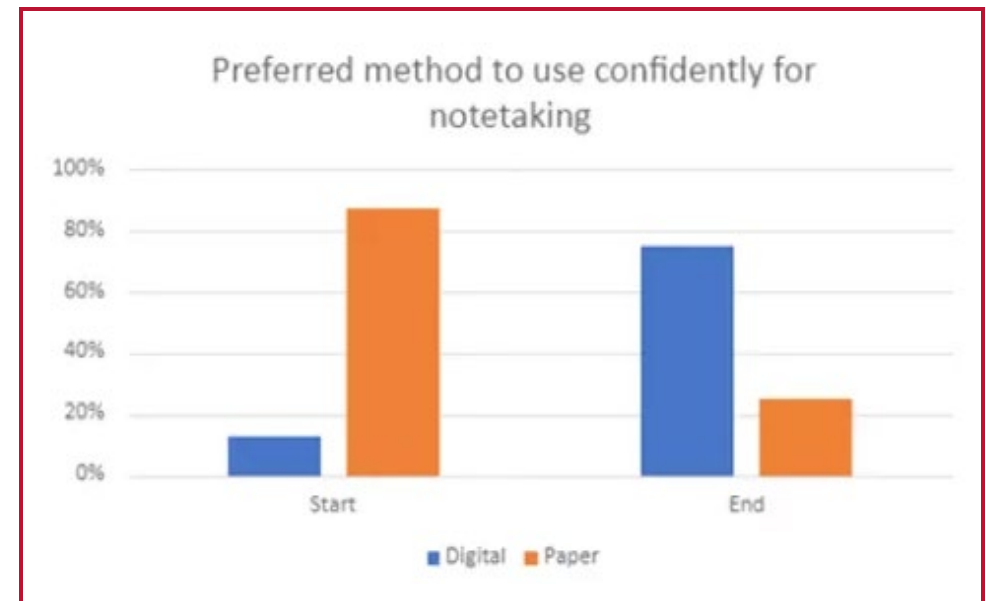
Figure 40.1: Preferred method for notetaking

Learning from this project

Learning from this project has been wide ranging. Despite tutors' assumptions, learner concerns were less about whether they had the required skills and knowledge, but whether they could apply the skills and knowledge in the role, and within a certain time frame, with many asking themselves *'Am I going to get it right?'*

Work in health and social care is perceived as low skilled and needing few qualifications. We wrongly assumed this meant learners would have limited digital skills or lack confidence, *"Those most likely to have low levels of digital literacy tend to be simultaneously economically, socially and personally disadvantaged."* (Helsper and Deursen, 2015, p.129). However, our findings showed many learners are confident using technology and opportunities to apply them in the workplace is a key area for development.

It is easy to assume that technology is the issue and that learners' digital skills are limiting their ability to take care notes. How often are we guilty of making assumptions because we are unaware of our biases? How often should we 'scrub off' these assumptions and let the light in?

More time needs to be made to talk to students about their concerns and starting points rather than developing token checklists to file. If we stick to the latter, we risk making activities less meaningful and relevant to future practice in employment.

Integrated and context specific activities prepare learners for the workplace and build confidence. Increased opportunities to feedback and communicate their feelings led to increased engagement and feeling 'valued'.

If we were to do this again, a suggestion to improve the digital note taking task would be to simulate a more realistic digital system for submitting the care notes. This would give learners a more accurate experience.

ESOL learners in particular could benefit from some help to understand the skills they are developing so they don't remain overly focused on the knowledge they are learning.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-2/ncl/**

41. "BEGINNER EDS? THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!"

Manchester Adult Education Service

This project explored to what extent our Learning Community app could support low level English learners to develop their Foundation Essential Digital Skills (EDS) in a blended learning environment. Learners have responded positively to the app content and the project has inspired more of our colleagues to use it too.

Summary

Manchester Adult Education provides Entry Level to Level 2 courses/activities to improve the lives and skills of adults in Manchester. Our learners are from diverse backgrounds with varying motives for developing their Essential Digital Skills.

This project looked at our Learning Community app, which had originally been designed for the delivery of Pre-Entry ESOL content to low level learners enrolled on the 'Talk English' Project programme. This app, which is actually a website, has useful features for beginner learners of digital. For example, clear and easy to navigate colour coded sections for 'classroom' and 'targets', and settings to prevent learners from leaving the app when clicking, so reducing the number of browsers open at any one time.

Teachers can direct learners to the app to complete modules and set targets. Learners can complete activities in the app and evidence completion through 'ticking,' adding photographs and using voice recordings. Teachers can give feedback to learners on their progress within the app.

We wanted to know to what extent this app could be used to develop EDS with foundation level learners with low English and Entry Level 1 to Entry Level 3 ESOL learners, and if it could prepare learners for developing their EDS in a blended learning environment. The app wasn't used on an accredited EDS course; it was used on non-accredited courses with the aim to better prepare learners for an eventual EDS qualification (EDSQ).

Rationale

Our Digital Skills for Beginners courses attract significant numbers of low-level English and ESOL learners. Digital Inclusion and progression into positive destinations is a priority for MAES.

We noticed that many learners progressing through the Digital Skills for Beginners courses either did not want to progress to the next level course or they were not yet ready to progress. There were anxieties and confidence issues around moving to a blended learning environment (our Entry Level 3 EDSQ is a blended model delivery). It was also evident that, for some learners with low level language/basic skills, the acquisition of foundation skills could take longer.

We wanted to increase accessibility and progression amongst this particular group of learners and felt that the app could be used to facilitate these areas by providing a safe and supportive space for learners to develop their digital skills. The app can be thought of as a simplified Google Classroom, and it was hoped that use of the app would develop learners' essential digital skills through a blended learning model.

Learners who had already completed a 6-week face-to-face Beginner course (or had slightly higher skills) would be invited to a 6-week blended course: "Beginner Plus". The plan was that learners would have one session in the classroom and complete one task asynchronously at home, via the app.

The app tracks learner progress and helps provide an evidence base, so it is clear to see any progression through activities attempted and/or

completed, recordings, feedback and to get a sense of the development of softer skills, e.g. digital confidence and resilience.
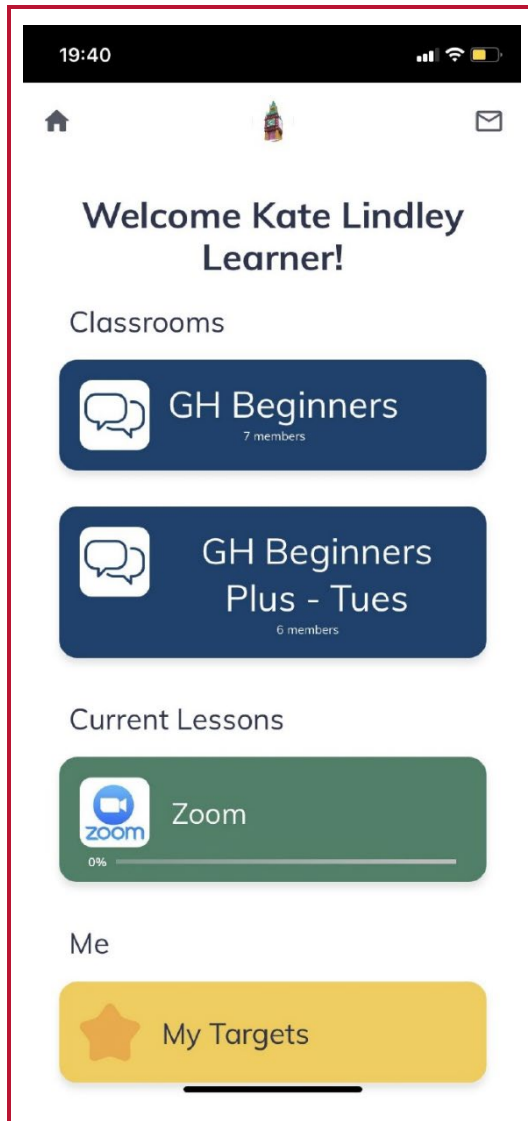

Figure 41.1: Learner view on the app

Approach

In terms of app content, we wanted to prepare learners for potential future EDSQs and so we identified areas which we felt Beginner Digital Skills learners would need to practise (namely email and video conferencing). However, we did not want to impose the curriculum from the top down and so we worked with the learners to create a digital skills clock. This approach helped both them and us to see how and when they used digital skills.
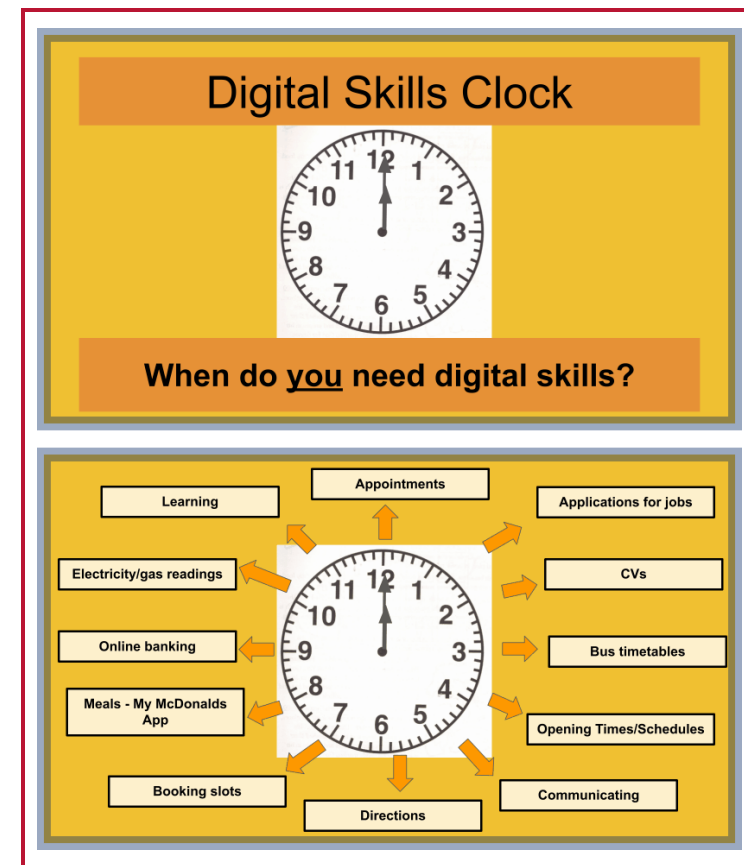
Figure 41.2: Digital Skills Clock

From this approach, it became clear in all our classes that learners wanted to develop email and video conferencing skills. It was great that the areas of the EDS standards which we felt they needed to practise actually aligned with the skills the learners themselves identified as being most relevant to their lives. The EDSQs definitely seem much more reflective of how people use tech nowadays (than previous IT qualifications).

We decided to introduce the app in the face-to-face Beginner classes that were running at 3 centres during Lockdown 3 (Jan-Mar 2021). We had envisaged it as a simple blended learning approach that we could use with our Beginner Plus classes but we asked all the Beginner classes if they would be interested in using it too.

Different teachers had different approaches: some left it to individual students to decide if they wanted to use the app and some made it integral to their lessons. Modules on topics such as, email, video calling, copy and pasting were added to virtual classrooms and individual work was sent in the private chat as a link.
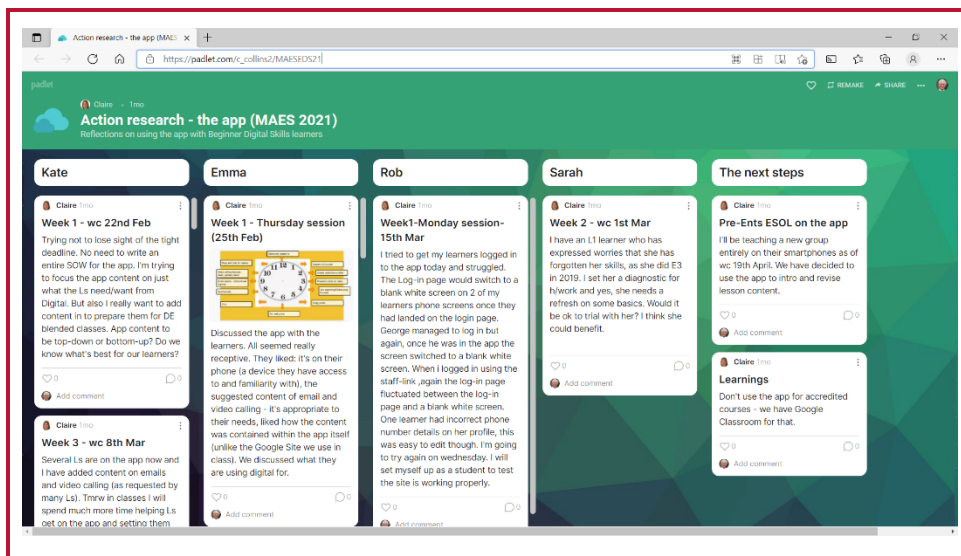
Figure 41.3: Shared Padlet - https://padlet.com/c_collins2/MAESEDS21

All teachers involved recorded their reflections on a shared Padlet (see Figure 41.3.). Here is a reflection from one teacher from the session where she first introduced the app to the group:

> *I like how they are very vocal about what they need and would find useful. A lot of discussion on 'IT frustrations' and I wonder if we could have something on the app around 'reframing feelings' when something goes wrong e.g - "it's another opportunity to practise those steps" instead of "oh now what have I done" - I heard a lot of that today and I think they put too much pressure on themselves.*

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Although some learners were really excited about it and seemed keen to use it; others were less enthused by it. This appeared to be for several reasons: some learners had come on the course to learn PC skills and did not want to practise on a phone app; some did not want to study at home; ESOL learners found it quite hard to get on the app on their phone, as well as trying to learn how to use a PC.

We felt that with more time to explore and practise the app (for both teachers and learners), more of us would come to see the value of it; that is, it is a *relatively* easy-to-use, self-contained VLE (virtual learning environment) and communication system. Instead of learners and teachers having to familiarise themselves with several different platforms, the app has lots of features and is self-contained.

One teacher commented:

> *I am looking forward to using the stream to communicate with my learners. It seems more efficient that emails and less invasive than texting them on their personal phones.*

Following discussions with the Talk English team (who have used the app extensively), we developed an approach to introducing the app that included breaking down the stages of using the app into microsteps, so as not to rush into getting learners on it and completing the lessons.

As a result of this useful feedback, a teacher on the Pre-Entry "Digital for ESOL" course (which we launched just recently) spent much longer on the lead-in to the app with these Pre-Entry learners than when she introduced it to the (mainly) native speakers on the Beginner Plus bridging course. She spent time pre-teaching lots of useful vocabulary before even mentioning the app; terms such as homescreen, click/tap, add, homework, app, PIN/password helped the learners to understand how and why they were using it. She also used lots of visuals to depict each step of searching for and logging on to the app website. This was a crucial stage that had been overlooked by some teachers when we used the app initially.

For learners in our pilot "Beginner Plus" classes, using the app seemed to help them achieve their stated aims. After watching tutorial videos on Google Meet and Zoom, and then testing their knowledge with Wordwall games, learners were able to access both Zoom and Meet and use some of the key features in these apps. By allowing them to see the interface in videos first and then reinforcing the video content by completing quizzes, it could be suggested that learners had a reduced cognitive load (Shibli and West, 2018) when coming to try the apps for the first time. They already knew what to expect and understood what each icon was for.

One learner noted that she and her classmates were making 'small steps and big changes'. Learning how to cut and paste, for instance, made a big difference to their digital work. By studying tutorial videos on the app and

then practising on their phones, they felt better able to cut and paste data to complete their Universal Credit journals.

In terms of teaching practice, we will continue to use tutorial videos, vocabulary pre-teaching, games and quizzes to introduce new software before learners access it for themselves.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The courses took place in different locations across the city and this resulted in different demographics according the localities. One group consisted of predominantly white British job seekers, another group was mostly learners with an ESOL background, and a further group was much more mixed. Teachers adapted their approach based on the needs of the group and it was revealed (perhaps unsurprisingly) that the groups with an ESOL profile needed more induction time on the app than those who had English as a first language. It is easy to tailor content on the app to each learner, by sending links as direct messages.

Increasing motivation and maintaining engagement to use the app was key. Through initial assessment, teachers came together to discuss key course targets and how this blended course would differ from our purely face-to-face beginner course. We decided to focus on email and video calling (the communication aspect of the EDS framework).

Tutors who were using the app shared ideas and activities to support learners in achieving the KCTs (key course targets). The project lead and deputy developed these into modules on the app for all teachers to use in their classrooms (with the flexibility of using the app in different ways that suited learners' contexts).

Teachers from different curriculum areas came together to discuss their experiences of the app and to direct our next steps with it. We learned from each other's experiences (see Figure 41.4: *Reflections from Teachers* Google Sheet) and now use a shared Google Drive of resources to better introduce the app to learners.

Tutors added reflections to the collaborative Padlet and caught up with each other in meetings, telephone calls and ad hoc conversations. Tutors could comment on reflections and concerns, and support with any trouble shooting. Participants in the project ranged from a student teacher to a curriculum manager; it was good to see collaboration happening amongst professionals of all levels and experiences.

What feedback have you received from the learners re: their experiences of the app?	What advice would you give to teachers new to the app?
They have enjoyed using and it has helped them. This is because we have been able to create materials that support f2f / Zoom sessions	It depends how tutors want to use them. In TE the app is integral to our course and activities on the app support f2f sessions. I think you need to teach your learners how to use it and allow sufficient time for this in class. You also need to get learners to add it to their homescreen on their phones or devices so that it's easily accessible , then you need to make sure you put on good quality activities. Another tip is to ensure you give learners timely feedback when they do submit work.
I have had a couple of my more able learners say they really like it and find it very useful for practise.	Give it a go! Embed in face-to-face sessions to support learners to use it and see the benefits.
Difficult to get access. Easy to get access and use. Good for Learning	Practise and eventually it will become your friend. Excellent teaching and learning tool.
They liked the idea. I think they expected it to be a standalone app.	Please give it a go. Have a play with it first. You can't break it.
	Make sure you understand all the facilities on the App and are able to use them. Make sure you receive appropriate training and this should include, how to produce

Figure 41.4: Reflections from Teachers Google Sheet

We are now using the app as part of our "Digital for ESOL" short course, which is being co-created by teachers from Digital Skills and Talk English teams, and hope to use it as part of a new "Digital Nature" course, which will be informed by the work of a Family Learning tutor who delivered an "Outdoor Adventurers" course. There is great potential to roll-out the use of this app across all curriculum areas at MAES, both to capture learning on non-accredited courses and also to support the development of learners'

foundation digital skills, and we can share our learnings of what works (and what doesn't) with our wider team colleagues.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners had differing motivations for joining the course. These different motivations were targeted through the app content. Learners looking to secure work and referred by local DWP centres wanted to develop specific skills relating to job search etc as well as develop confidence in relation to specific aspects of digital technology. Other learners wanted to develop their laptop skills, and some wanted to better develop their essential digital skills for learning on other courses.

During the first session, learners reported feelings of 'confusion' 'being overwhelmed' 'being lost' and 'lacking in confidence.' We wanted learners to experiment, take risks, make mistakes, use multiple digital skills and have fun. It seemed that the app would provide this safe 'self-contained' space for learners to have a positive experience and build their skills. It would also be a space where learning was manageable, and motivations could be met and/or extended.

Some learners returned to the app, others didn't engage with the app outside of the classroom and some didn't engage at all. This perhaps reflects the different motivations learners have or could be indicative of how much app "buy-in" the individual teachers developed with their classes.

As outlined earlier, learners in the "Beginner Plus" classes were able to achieve their targets by watching tutorial videos, playing games and then testing out the various platforms (e.g. Zoom, Meet, Gmail) for themselves.

Some learners really enjoyed getting the tailored work in the private chat and two "Beginner Plus" learners have just progressed onto a blended Entry Level 3 Essential Digital Skills course.

Learning from this project

Despite being a short project, many learners got value from taking part in it. Feedback included "really useful", "good for practice" and "excited" [to use it]. The fact that the app is simple and self-contained was really effective for lower-level learners and felt more effective than Google Classroom; we are now using it as the main learning management system for our Pre-Entry "Digital for ESOL" course. However, it was not wholly successful.

For some learners the size of the screen was too small on their phones. Most of the app's features were readable but when it came to doing Wordwall activities (see Figure 41.5), for example, the font size was just too small. Teachers must always check any content they add to the app on their own phones to ensure readability, ideally on different makes of phone where possible.

To make it easier to use (and to practise their PC skills), some learners added the website as a bookmark to their browser bar and they found that to be much more accessible.

We learned that if you want learners to start using the app regularly, you need to add content that is meaningful, relevant and useful to them and to provide timely feedback on any tasks you set. We needed to get into the habit of regularly checking the app from home to see who had been on it and responding to their input. We allocated time in our calendars for this task.

We also needed to use the app at set times in the face-to-face classroom so that learners could get used to accessing it with teacher support, where necessary. Setting warm-up activities on the app worked well for this and soon learners in some classes were used to logging straight onto the app to find the activity.

We all agreed that the app needed to be introduced early on in the course and at the start of a lesson. It was hard to take learners off a task that they

were really engaged in order to get them using the app. It worked much better in the classes where teachers used the app for starter activities.

We also agreed that the app needed to be an integral part of the course teaching method, at least initially. If it was not wholly integrated, it risked being just another onerous bit of tech to learn.
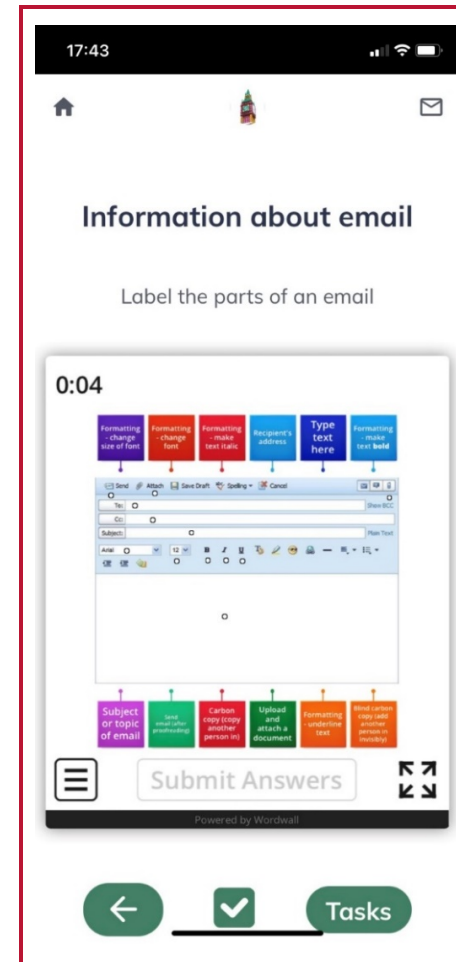
Figure 41.5: Wordwall activity

A common reflection was that getting learners on the app initially was quite hard work and generally required one-to-one support. Where it was easy for learners, this tended to be in classes where English was a first language.

Perhaps learners needed much longer learning the skills of how to enter their username (i.e. phone number) and pin. I wonder if, in some cases, the teachers could be so invested in the content of the app, that the stage of actually getting on it in the first place gets a little rushed. The skill of accurately entering a username and password could easily be practised over an entire lesson or more.

Also, once on the app, many learners would forget their pin between sessions and found re-setting it hard work. A screencast showing learners exactly how to re-set their pin, would be really useful.

We need to be mindful of the potential frustrations some learners may face when having difficulties logging in. Teachers reminded them that it wasn't their problem; it is something we all struggle with at times.

We feel that a lot of pre-teaching of entering usernames and pins would be beneficial before introducing the app. This skill is essential for so many online services that it cannot be rushed or overlooked.

Now we have started using the app with Pre-Entry ESOL learners (who are learning Digital Skills), we have adapted our approach to spend much longer on the lead-in and pre-teaching important vocabulary. Getting learner "buy-in" to the app before trying to get them on it is so important too. If they know why they are doing it, and can see the value of the app, any potential frustrations during logging on may be mitigated by this desire to use it.

Update:

Since writing this initial report, we have used the app as the main learning platform for several 4-week Digital for ESOL courses. Learners have used the app to complete their ILPs (individual learning plans), complete online lessons and communicate with teachers and classmates.

These courses were taught entirely via learners' smartphones and so the skills needed to use the app were relevant to the course content (namely, using phones to access online ESOL classes). Teachers spent time pre-teaching relevant vocabulary (e.g. app, log-in, PIN, add to homescreen) and focused on the micro-steps of getting on and using the app effectively.

Because the app was introduced as the main learning platform and all learners were eager to use it, there was no reluctance to it. Learners on these courses were not there to improve their desktop skills and so using the app on their phone didn't feel like a distraction to the main lesson, as it did in some of the earlier classes.

Several Beginner Plus learners said they were competent with smartphones and what they really wanted was the chance to develop their keyboard skills.

The absence of PCs in the Digital for ESOL classrooms also helped with learner buy-in. Whereas in the Beginner Plus courses learners were seated at and invested in using the PCs, in these Digital for ESOL classes the focus was on using the learner's own device and so it became a habit for learners to engage with the app both during and outside of lessons.

Where can I find out more about this project?

The project team created an online version of this report which is available at **https://wakelet.com/wake/vwZMQtJYNNt6ckgvRqo0B**. You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-2/maes/**

42. DELIVERING EDS TO ESOL LEARNERS
Barnsley Adult Skills & Community Learning

This project developed visual resources and learning methods to support Entry 2 ESOL learners' understanding of instructional language, with a focus on digital terminology. Once the language barriers were removed, the tutors found that learners were surpassing expectations and confidently able to take responsibility for their own learning.

Summary

Adult Skills and Community Learning supports the delivery of Barnsley Council's vision, addresses local priorities and supports the achievement of corporate outcomes by harnessing the transformational potential of learning. The Service maintains the key principles of supporting adults to develop skills, confidence and access to technology to be able to participate in a wider variety of learning experiences and transfer those skills to work and home-life and is committed to ensuring technology is fully embedded in the learner journey.

This project was designed to offer the Entry Level 2 ESOL learners a bespoke programme to develop their digital skills to enhance their life and work and also support the online delivery of their ESOL programme.

The learners were a small cohort of existing ESOL learners who had struggled to continue with their learning in the lockdown periods due to a lack of digital skills. The bespoke programme was developed to furnish the learners with the skills they needed to be more independent in the digital world.

The programme was designed and co-delivered by an ESOL Tutor and an ICT Tutor, who supported each other professionally and developed a rapport to be able to be each other's "critical friend". This collaboration has been the trigger in developing stronger working relationships amongst colleagues from different curriculum areas who now regularly draw on each other's expertise when required. This has supported their own professional development.

Rationale

During the COVID-19 lockdown, low level ESOL learners struggled to effectively continue with their learning due to their limited digital skills. The Service wanted to address this issue by developing a bespoke cross-curricula essential digital skills programme for low level ESOL learners to develop their independent digital skills for use at home and prepare them for work.

The project would develop strategies to support the development and understanding of digital terminology to learners where English is not their first language. It would also improve the digital skills of the ESOL tutors and give them the confidence to embed and deliver digital skills within the ESOL provision. In the initial teaching session, it was identified that the ESOL learners would need additional support with understanding digital terminology before undertaking their essential digital skills qualification.

Tutors within both teams had previously identified needing support when delivering to low level ESOL learners and requiring knowledge to ensure digital skills are embedded within the ESOL curriculum. The project aimed to enable both teams to work closely together to develop and share good practice and develop resources to be used in future delivery.

Approach

The Service wanted to explore and develop relevant and engaging resources to meet the needs of the ESOL learners and promote their development in understanding digital terminology as a starting point to further develop and embed their digital skills.

The approach was to develop the use of instructional language and visual resources for learners to support their understanding of basic IT terminology and how it underpins the development of the practical action.

The planned activities supported the learners to access their own Google Docs accounts and be able to document their own reflections/progress in relation to their journey of developing essential digital skills.

The proposed activities were designed to support a positive learner experience, to develop the curriculum offer that progresses the knowledge and skills that the ESOL learners will need in order to take advantage of the opportunities that prepare them for their next stage and develop their confidence in using digital technologies.

The activities would support learners to build on previous learning and develop the new digital knowledge and skills they need. It was important that the foundation building blocks of gaining the knowledge and understanding of using correct digital terminology is embedded in the learners' long-term memory and they have the confidence to use them fluently and consistently. From these activities there is a clear progression to essential digital skills which all the learners will have the opportunity to develop those skills as their next steps in their digital skills learning. This initial course enabled the learners to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to explore progressing onto the essential digital skills provision.

The tutors worked collaboratively in developing a glossary of terms with the ESOL Tutor being a "critical friend" and supporting the ICT Tutor to pitch the resource at a level suitable for the learners.

The tutors contributed to a Padlet on a weekly basis to document their reflections and achievements within each of the sessions.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project aimed to increase staff confidence in working with low level ESOL learners and developing their digital skills to support them in their ESOL course. The tutor reflections on the Padlet provided evidence of a significant rise in confidence when working with low level ESOL learners and having the ability to prepare resources suitable for the level of the learner. Importantly, the ESOL tutor is also more confident in embedding digital technology within her provision.

A glossary of terms was produced with the tutors working collaboratively to agree a final product to meet the learning needs of the learners. The development of the glossary went through three amendments, the images are shown below. At each revision version, the ESOL Tutor gave constructive feedback on how the resource could be adapted to benefit and better support the learners. This supportive and collaborative approach ensured the resource developed the learners understanding of the digital terminology. The ESOL tutor commented how she supported the ICT Tutor to develop this learner resource to support the learners' understanding of key terminology:

> *"The use of visual aids such as images, shared screen, demonstrations, videos, glossary are essential to support learners' understanding of the spoken language. The course requests learners to take actions using many different verbs: click, double click, open, tab, scroll, etc. Knowledge and understanding of the terms is essential to be able to take the correct action."*

Figure 42.1: Version 1 of the Glossary

Figure 42.2: Version 2 of the Glossary

Figure 42.3: Final Version of the Glossary

Both tutors have developed their use of breakout rooms in their teaching sessions, which enabled more individual support to learners. The tutors indicated they will use this function more extensively within their teaching.

The introduction of this project has allowed the Service to review and reflect on the way communication takes place with ESOL learners in all curriculum areas. The Service will develop a mentoring support scheme to enable tutors in all curriculum areas to work with the ESOL team to develop resources suitable for all learners. The ESOL tutors have been keen to share ideas and good practice with colleagues throughout the Service and share best practice when preparing resources or communicating with learners.

The project enabled opportunities for co-facilitation, with an ESOL and digital specialist teaching together, resulting in hands-on sharing of good practice and development of the skills and knowledge of both tutors.

The project has allowed the Service to identify a renewed emphasis on cross-curricula teaching to support the development of all learners.

Teaching materials and resources, that have been used to support this sharing of good practice, were shared on a Padlet.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Use of a Collaborative Padlet

The Padlet became a working document and a community space where the tutors were able to reflect on the sessions, this was further enhanced by Lead Tutors being able to contribute and share their ideas and experiences which were used to develop the course week by week.
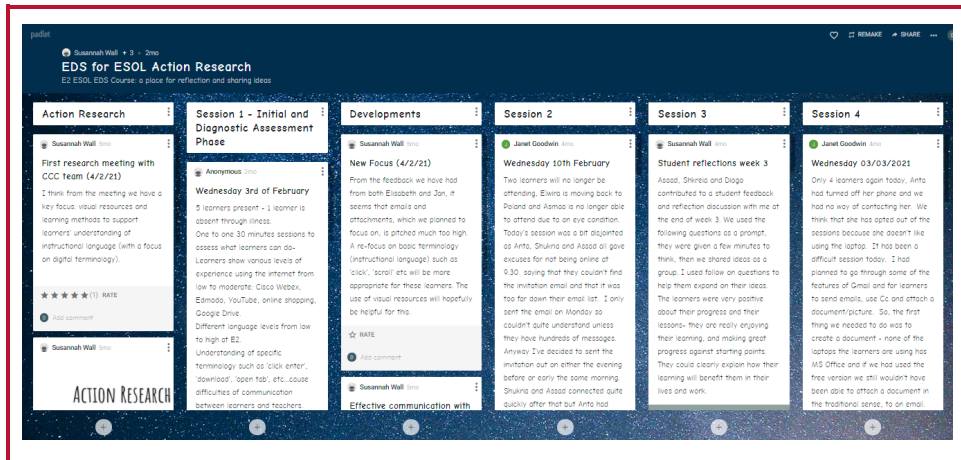
Figure 42.4: Screenshot of the Collaborative Padlet - https://padlet.com/c_collins2/BarnsleyEDS21

Developing tutor confidence in using the online meetings software

The use of breakout rooms became very efficient in meeting learners' specific needs. Reflections from the ICT tutor early in the programme identified the language barriers with the learners and developed the sessions to use breakout rooms to ensure all learners can continue their learning at a suitable pace with the ESOL tutor supporting in one room and the ICT tutor in another.

Collaboration with teaching colleagues

Teaching using ICT can be stressful for ESOL tutors, but we found having an ICT tutor to support was very useful and the ICT tutor found that having an ESOL tutor present also helped communication. As one tutor stated:

> *"I have enjoyed working collaboratively very much … We agree on lots of good practice, and I've learnt lots about working with ESOL learners. I think my colleague has kept me grounded throughout the course and has supported me when I've struggled with the language barrier".*

Use of a wider range of digital platforms

The use of the Collaborative Padlet encouraged both tutors to reflect on the sessions and were positive and willing to develop their skills in using this in education. Staff involved in the project showed a positive attitude to using it to share and collaborate on.
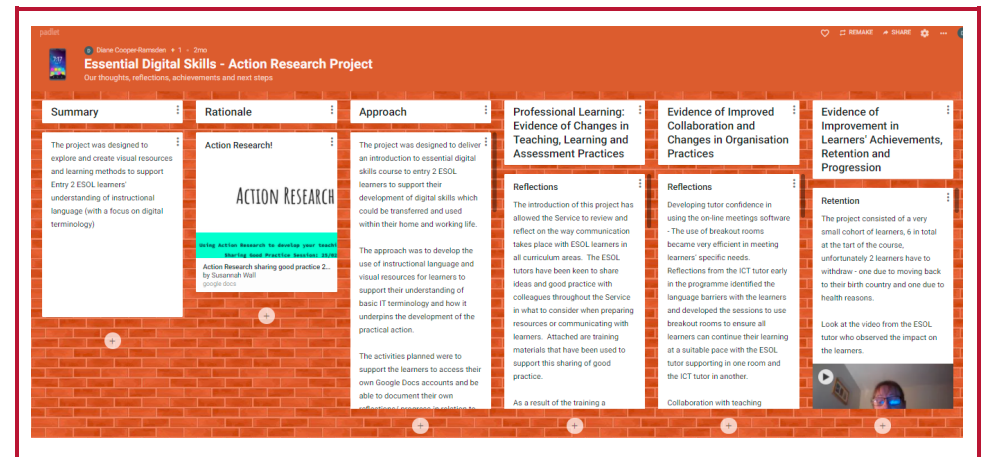
Figure 42.5: Screenshot of the Good Practice Padlet - https://padlet.com/c_collins2/BarnsleyEDS21b

Tutors developing as Reflective Practitioners

The digital action research project created frequent opportunities for the tutors to focus upon aspects of their established teaching strategies, and to collaboratively explore opportunities to develop and try new techniques and resources to improve learner participation both in and between the sessions. Teachers learn from each other and develop strategies and techniques that can be used in their future teaching.

Developing a supportive Community of Practice

Staff development sessions have previously been held in small curriculum teams, but through the project, this has resulted in the sharing of good practice, especially between the ESOL and ICT teams. The tutors have been encouraged to collaborate and share ideas in a relaxed and informal environment. The joint activities have become opened up to enable staff to reflectively evaluate what each team is trialling within their teaching, learning and assessment. This has improved working relationships between tutors from different curriculum areas.

Generated practical solutions

Collaboration between the tutors has helped to identify and find solutions to very practical barriers, such as how to ensure the learners can easily access their online session. Learners were struggling to find the link to the session, therefore as a Service we have decided to set a reminder email to be sent 15 minutes prior to the session, this will ensure the email containing the link is near the top of a learner's inbox and therefore more easily achievable. This is crucial to support a prompt start to the session prior to a learner having confidence in using bookmarks.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners have surpassed expectations and have confidently been able to meet their negotiated targets.

Learners have been exploring and developing the use of their loan laptop devices from the Service. They are becoming less dependent on the use of the mobile phones and developing long lasting understanding of the roles and features of different platforms accessible from their laptops, eg Google search, Google Drive, etc – this is supporting the move to be able to develop their digital skills which they are using in their home-life and preparing them for the world of work. In week 2 the learners had made a language connection with their ESOL class where words such as document, CV and forms were being used. Recognisable language was building learners' confidence.

Three of the learners contributed to a student feedback and reflection discussion at the end of week 3, using the following questions as a prompt:
- What did you find useful?
- What can you do now?
- How will you use this?

Video extracts from the discussion are available on the Good Practice Padlet. The learners were very positive about their progress and their lessons; they are really enjoying their learning and making great progress against starting points. They could clearly explain how their learning will benefit them in their lives and work. The learners identified they were more confident in using their laptop and becoming more and more confident in using Google Drive to sort and work with documents and had an increased confidence to undertake online shopping in a safe and secure way.

The learners also expressed that the digital class had supported them to be able to access their online ESOL courses during lockdown and continue their ESOL learning. One learner commented how he was combining the learning from his ESOL class to his digital class and was both pleased and proud of the progress he had made and was grateful that he had had this opportunity to undertake this digital course.

The tutors commented that the learners are showing good skill development and the positive impact this is having on their confidence. The learners can navigate successfully between Google search, Google images and Google Drive. They can copy and paste images into a new Google Document and add text. They can take screenshots. They have completed extra work away from their formal sessions and have created their own comprehensive glossary for their own use. The learners are able to confidently send e-mails.

The learners have also been successful in attaining the Entry Level 1 Digital Skills for Work qualification accredited by Gateway Qualifications.

Learning from this project

The course for the action research project had to be delivered fully online due to being in a National Lockdown situation. At the end of the course and upon reflection by the tutors, it was decided moving the course to face to face delivery would support the learners to develop their digital skills in a conducive environment, where the tutor was easily accessible to give the learners the support they need. The learners would be supported to improve their digital skills and prepare them for progression onto an online course. The initial face to face course would help to mitigate learners' anxiety around getting online whilst developing their confidence in using IT equipment.

The skills gained by the ICT Tutor to prepare resources suitable for low level ESOL learners will also be able to be used when preparing and

teaching Entry Level 1 and 2 learners to develop their digital skills. The tutor developed her knowledge on the need to grade language and extend the use of visual images to support learning, rather than the resources being too text heavy. The tutor flipped the resource, as can be seen in Figure 42.3 above, so that the learners were providing the language in a way that supported their own learning.

The tutors worked with learners who had spikey profiles in ESOL and also spikey profiles in digital, but the assumption should never be made that someone who is low level ESOL has low level digital skills, as once the language was no longer a barrier, the learners excelled in their digital skills.

Working collaboratively across specialisms has helped both tutors to develop their teaching practices, when preparing resources and developing digital content for learners. Providing the opportunities for both open and honest discussions between the tutors has been beneficial and resulted in a better learning experience for the learners. The honesty and openness of both tutors supported the success of the collaborative teaching, which was key to its success.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-2/bmbc/**

43. DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL DIGITAL SKILLS AMONGST ELEMENTARY LEVEL LEARNERS OF ESOL
Islington Adult Community Learning

This project developed a short discrete Digital Skills course to bridge the digital skills gap for ESOL learners and to enable the learners who have the greatest need to improve their Essential Digital Skills. The aim of the course was to enable the learners to confidently access email and Zoom sessions across a range of devices. Feedback from learners has been positive and the project team believe that the key to its success was the way in which it was delivered by ESOL teachers rather than IT teachers.

Summary

Islington Adult Community Learning (ACL) is situated in the London Borough of Islington, which borders on the London Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Camden. The department offers further education and health and well-being courses for Islington residents over the age of nineteen, with learning centres located in libraries, children's centres, community centres and other locations across the borough.

Islington is a borough of sharp contrasts, with areas of high deprivation as well as pockets of wealth. Within this setting, ACL operates under the wider council priority to create a fairer Islington.

Islington ACL's mission is -

- To create the opportunity for residents from whatever their background, to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life.
- By delivering outstanding teaching and learning, to meet the needs of residents, employers and the local community.
- To inspire learners to develop the digital skills, knowledge and aptitudes they need to be successful, happy in their future lives and realise their next steps in education and employment.

- To remove digital skills exclusion, to enable residents who need to access basic digital skills course to increase employment opportunities, access online resources and information.

At a local level, the need for developing valuable skills in this area was exemplified during the 2020 pandemic when the delivery of our programmes in ACL Islington were largely carried out online. It quickly became apparent that there were many learners who were not secure in their digital skills which prevented them from participating and benefiting from our new online mode of learning.

This was a responsive, short-term project to support adult ESOL learners to build their confidence and skills with the devices they had to enable the learner to engage in learning. The project revolved around a set of co-created interactive PowerPoint resources, which moved PowerPoint from a linear process to being learner led. Tutors would be able to apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment while drawing on the research and learner feedback.

Rationale

It is important that learners are able to make meaning from their online learning. The team were focused on developing responsive resources that helped to address specific needs that learners were bringing. Many of the learners involved in the project had been excluded from other opportunities due to not having the appropriate digital skills or access to devices; reaching them and supporting their digital development was especially important.

Approach

ESOL tutors identified 26 learners from ESOL spring term 2021 programmes who required urgent support with digital skills (Beard & Wilson, 2006:16). The learners were split into two groups Group 1 (ESOL Pre-Entry and Entry 1) and Group 2 (ESOL Entry 2 and Entry 3).

The following were identified as the greatest areas for skills development within the ESOL Pre-Entry – Entry 1 cohort. They are as follows:

- devices
- Zoom
- pictures
- WhatsApp
- Internet

ESOL Entry 2/3 cohort required developing skills in the following areas:

- Zoom controls
- Device & internet vocabulary
- Zoom chat & reactions
- Online search
- Moodle
- Email
- Attachments

Before the course went live the tutors developed resources that were able to be used with different devices.
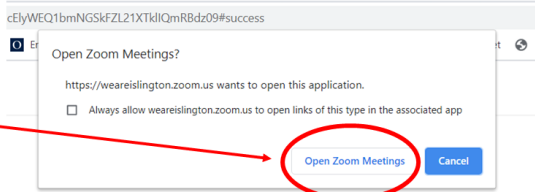
The course delivery was via Zoom and the tutor used interactive PowerPoint presentations. As our learners used a range of different devices to access online courses, we did not want to restrict the project to just one device. Although this could have been easier to deliver the project it would not have reflected our learners who use different devices to access courses. It would have been another barrier and further digital exclusion.

The project was to develop resources and teaching methodology that could be used not only for ESOL learners on this project but also wider use across the service. Before the course started, the tutor contacted the learners to find out the type of device they would be using to access the sessions. The tutors were then aware of the different types of devices that learners were

using and this in turn informed the resources that were developed to support them.
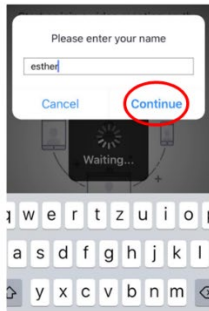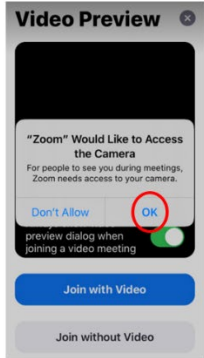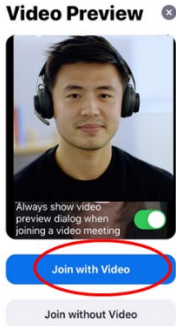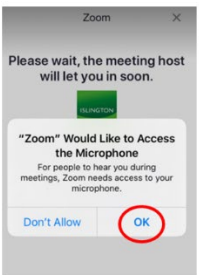

Figure 43.1: Joining a Zoom meeting using different devices

Each session was designed to take into account scope for free practice. Learners were given time away from the lesson to enable them to practice the skills being taught in the online lessons under the tutor's guidance. This was a logical approach to support the development of the learners' digital skills from the start of the course through to completion.

Reviewing each session at the start of the next and giving the learners the opportunity to practice using their own devices, what had been covered in each session. The tutor started each session with a review of what had been covered in the first session and asked if the learners had had the opportunity to use the digital skills they had learnt from the previous session.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The action research project enabled the tutors involved to reflect on what worked in their own delivery of the material, to meet the individual needs of our learners. Tutors developed their research skills and evidence-based practice. They also gained opportunities to network, collaborate and form professional relationships with other colleagues from different ACLs during research sharing events.

The project gave the tutors more freedom and encouraged the tutors to be more creative in developing new resources and using different teaching and learning strategies. This had a positive impact on our learners and encouraged them to be more confident to try new skills and improve existing skills.

Tutors are now more confident to try new teaching strategies and also support other tutors, who were not involved in the project to develop their own resources, developing a culture of self-evaluation through Teaching Learning Reviews and removing the fear of trying something new.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project was a collaboration with tutors from two curriculum areas, ESOL and digital specialists. The combination of tutors from each specialist area was important to help address language barriers and to meet learners' needs effectively. Teachers worked together to develop resources, with another member of the project team meeting learners after their sessions to collect and collate learner accounts.

The project encouraged and provided opportunities for staff to work together on a research project. Staff have an opportunity to lead in gathering the information, conducting the research, interviewing learners and tutors and presenting findings. The project also provided the opportunity for staff to work together to evaluate each other's practice, including how the strategies implemented during the project impacted on learning and outcomes for learners.

Tutors on the project have shared resources developed with other areas not just ESOL and Digital Skills. The resources can be used across all curriculum areas for learners with low digital skills to enable the learners to access courses. Tutors are contributing to quality improvements within the organisation, delivering CPD sessions to tutors firstly about the project and then three training sessions to help tutors improve their own digital skills and develop specific resources' that could be used in their sessions and shared across the service. This has been an important part of the Quality Assurance for the service, enabling staff to utilise their skills and share good practice across the service.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The project team arranged an initial introduction and a brief survey to find out what level learners were working towards, and which devices they would be using to access their course. However, the resources for the

Week 1 sessions were prepared in advance of meeting the learners and having a clear picture of their needs.

As a result of this, the materials focused on giving learners a basic understanding of the technologies/ devices they have in-hand and improving their confidence to engage and navigate their learning environment using Zoom.

Tasks were successfully evaluated and tracked through tutor observation of the Zoom participant panel, as well as learner feedback (yes/no). Learners used Zoom chat to send messages to their tutor and other learners in the class. They were also shown how to use WhatsApp to send messages and pictures. This helped provide feedback in sessions and for the tutor to evaluate their learning.

The original course outline was initially considered ambitious for this level of ESOL learner. However, tutors adapted the resources after each session. Using the revised resources, that were easier for the learners to understand and linked to different devices being used, there were an adequate number of practical opportunities for the learners and time to complete them. To check learning, the learners used their own examples of topics and keywords and considered how it could be used outside the classroom. At the end of the course, all objectives were met, and attendees demonstrated and fed back their understanding sufficiently to consider all aims as completed satisfactorily.

Though starting from a basic level, learners were now able to use their own devices to begin accessing courses:

> *"I learnt how to send message in Zoom chat, how to listen. Which phone is latest, which phone is an old phone, I didn't know before. I know how to send pictures message, how to search and find everything online."*

Using the ACL Moodle VLE, learners and staff were able to share their experiences of the project. This provided a safe environment for learners to provide feedback and tutors to develop the resources for learners to access. Tutors were able to manage and encourage positive learner behaviour and learner experience. Removing the barriers of digital exclusion, similar to when learners' opportunities are improved as their literacy and language skills improve and open up a world of opportunity, not only further learning but also able to access both social and employment opportunities.

The project gave learners from different social and cultural backgrounds (including those with limited or no access to digital technologies) opportunity to access and participate in learning. Teaching strategies and the resources developed by the tutors motivated learners to use technology, making the learners more confident in accessing learning. Learners were also no longer afraid to practise or make mistakes when using Moodle or attending sessions using Zoom. The project became more learner led as it progressed, and as learners' digital skills improved, tutors responded by developing resources that would further stretch and challenge them.

The project focus was on improving ESOL learners Digital Skills and accessing online course EDS and ESOL, the soft skill was learner confidence, and this can be seen in the case studies.

> *"I learn how to find anything how to search, how to write my name in Zoom. I comfortable, I try by myself and I'm happy to teach computer because I want to do learn by myself and I didn't want to ask my friend all day, what can I do what is this. It is hard sometimes to ask all day, 'what is this?'. I'm happy now".*
>
> **Learner H**

> *"Nobody can come to you and teach you…struggle, very struggle. Now a little bit better than before because you can go to talk with them, you can talk with them, you can help you in office but because of corona, nobody helped you. Now I know three or four things, I know how you use it…zoom, email. I use it by myself. That one is important, if you learn more, you can do."*
>
> **Learner A**

Learning from this project

What Went Well

- This project will help shape the landscape for developing the skills our learners need to navigate around the web safely and will greatly enhance their lives in the U.K. Following this discrete programme, learners now have the skills to conduct everyday things such as online browsing, shopping online, and accessing learning materials. Also, importantly, preventing further social exclusion by enabling learners to stay connected through online platforms. Both courses had a positive impact on the learners who attended, and they were able to link the gaps in their knowledge to the newly acquired digital skills. They now have an understanding of the technical language needed to recognise and identify skills needed for future development.

- Learners were able use the skills learnt to access online services that previously they were unable to, providing a new outlook for the learners. This was really important, and in a way, a light bulb moment for the learners; Bridging the gap between what they wanted to do and what they were instructed to do by others. This gave them a deeper contextual understanding.

- Learners had particular areas of EDS that were especially aspirational such as transacting online. The project enabled an exploratory approach that was able to tap into learners' interests and motivations.

- The interactive and non-linear design of the resources enabled learners to 'take their own route', which was surprisingly successful.

Even Better If

- The learners made huge steps to improve their digital skills. If we had more information about their level prior to starting the course, it may have helped designing and developing the resources.

- Through the course of learner sampling, it became evident the skills to be taught on the course had to be scaled back to the bare basic. It quickly became evident after the first session that the starting point for the course is vocabulary used in digital skills delivery.

- Learners and teachers would appreciate more time to work on digital skills.

- Learners stressed that 'you don't know what you don't know' and it is important for teachers to remember this.

Where can I find out more about this project?

You can find the full report (including appendices) for this project at **https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/eds/cluster-2/IACL/**

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