**Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment: case study on operational project led by Clean Break**

# Introduction

Clean Break’s education programme offers a range of free courses and training opportunities throughout the year from studios in Kentish Town. It is a women-only space and their students are women with experience of the criminal justice system and women at risk of offending. All courses are taught by experienced tutors who continue to work professionally in the theatre and bring this experience into their teaching practice.

Clean Break has established good working relationships with organisations working with vulnerable women, particularly in the areas of mental health, substance use and addiction, domestic violence and probation. It is therefore an organisation which is used to collaboration, and well suited to a project of this kind.

Programmes offered include accredited performance-based courses – introduction to drama, and introduction to performance levels 1 and 2 that explore acting, singing and performance poetry. Writing courses develop students’ writing skills and build confidence working alongside a professional writer. Clean Break also runs an English course at levels 1 and 2 that helps support students’ learning across courses and in other areas of their lives, in addition to a number of personal development courses.

There are a range of workshops throughout the year dealing with all aspects of moving on from Clean Break which include: practical CV help, applications for further education/higher education, preparing for interviews, and ongoing personal support and guidance.

Clean Break have been working to embed literacy provision into performance arts course schema and delivery, and to embed performance approaches into literacy provision. It has purchased IT equipment (10 computers) in order to embed IT-based provision and assessment into literacy provision, with a view to collaborating with City and Islington College (IT/literacy specialists) to do this.

**Approach**

This project aimed to establish cross embedding of performance and literacy into schemes of work along with increased use of IT in functional skills provision and literacy assessment. Four computers were purchased and, given the relative lack of IT expertise at Clean Break, collaboration with specialists at City and Islington College was set up to facilitate this.

Clean Break operates in a highly specialised context - performance alongside language development for learners with, or at risk of, experience of the criminal justice system - and the project team felt that given this context, the impact of increased access to IT could have a considerable effect on learners’ motivation and orientation to language and literacy aspects of their courses. Many learners historically have little or no access to computer technology, and few IT skills: this impacts considerably on their ability to fully participate in and understand day to day literacy practices around them.

For such a small organisation working with a highly defined clientele, it was clear that development needed to be very context and person specific: for instance, a lot would depend on the single literacy tutor’s twin goals for professional development around the use of IT and incorporating the use of performance techniques in her literacy provision. Similarly, the performance tutors would have to become more adept at spotting and making more explicit opportunities for literacy development within their own teaching and schemes of work.

Twenty learners and five staff were involved in this project along with remote input from IT specialists at City and Islington College (and eventually, OCN). Students and staff come from a very rich mix of diverse backgrounds (the data has been collected by City and Islington College). Clean Break has a strong and well-established ethos of embedding and promoting equality and diversity within its teaching, learning and assessment practices.

**Outcomes and impact**

The project has achieved its main aim: collaborative planning between literacy and performance tutors, within the context of working towards outstanding practice, is now established and routine. This has resulted in making literacy elements more explicit in schemes of work and in teaching and learning in the classroom. It has also resulted in the literacy tutor making better use of performance techniques and practices in her teaching, leading to a much more coherent and holistic experience for learners.

But perhaps the biggest impact has been the introduction of the new IT resource, and its integration into literacy provision. As the project lead put it:

*“The greatest impact has been the purchase of individual laptops currently being used in the literacy classes and we aim to also use in performance classes in the future.”*

It is apparent that learners have experienced the new technology available not just as an opportunity to learn ‘IT’ skills, but as a gateway to access literacy itself. Learners appreciate the ‘reality’ of writing a CV for example on a computer, or learning how to complete a job application that may itself be online - previously, when these activities might have been undertaken with pen and paper, they were not nearly as realistic, or matched to learners’ real world experience. The technology has also motivated learners to approach literacy content in new ways - in one class, learners were asked to make short animated films dealing with common aspects of literacy. Learners commented in feedback how much they enjoyed this activity.

*Q (from mid-project class feedback) ”What did you enjoy most about today’s class?”*

*“Being hands on and getting to know the computer.”*

*“I know that [computers] is the way the world works, and I am part of it.”*

*Q (from final evaluation) ”Has the quality of the teaching improved with the computers?”*

*“Yes, definitely.”*

*“I hate writing pen to paper so writing with the computers is brilliant.”*

Some students also commented how much they enjoyed learning about grammar and apostrophes in this way – in other words, literacy activities that are often perceived as routine or ‘boring’ produced much greater learner engagement when approached via digital literacy practices.

Project outcomes and impacts have been monitored throughout via student and teacher focus groups, student log books, and ongoing student feedback, some examples of which have been included in this case study.

Internal observation by the project lead has identified improvements in classroom teaching, and the ongoing discussions between the teaching team and project lead have identified the key Professional Standards that have underpinned the changes made via this project:

* Reflect on what works best in your teaching and learning to meet the diverse needs of learners
* Evaluate and challenge your practice, values and beliefs
* Inspire, motivate and raise aspirations of learners through your enthusiasm and knowledge
* Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn
* Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners
* Evaluate your practice with others and assess its impact on learning
* Motivate and inspire learners to promote achievement and develop their skills to enable progression
* Plan and deliver effective learning programmes for diverse groups or individuals in a safe and inclusive environment
* Promote the benefits of technology and support learners in its use

**Lessons learned**

Although the main collaborative aspect of this project has been the teachers at Clean Break working together to cross-embed their specialisms, it is also clear that the introduction of technology has been crucial to the impacts achieved so far. For this to happen, the literacy teacher has had to upskill her own IT abilities. Collaboration with City and Islington College was planned for this, but unfortunately – aside from some remote support – fell through. However, she was able to obtain some training from OCN and other colleagues, which has enabled her to develop the approaches and techniques needed to make the best use of IT equipment. One general lesson learnt from this would be, for large organisations in particular, the necessity of very strong forward planning of cross-organisational collaboration at ground or practitioner level - checking that the staff who will actually do the work on a project will be available and resourced at particular times. This is in no way a comment on the management of the project, which has been inspirational throughout, more a reflection on the hierarchical organisational structures sometimes displayed by larger institutions that can somehow interfere with the best of intentions.

A second challenge was the timing of the project which resulted in a clash between a desire to embed new forms of potentially outstanding teaching practice and the need to prepare students for functional skills and other exams. This meant that although new approaches to embedding and planning practice were established in principle and in schemes of work, it is probable that practice changes in ‘everyday’ teaching and learning in the classroom will achieve their main impacts from September 2015 onwards.

That said however, there is definitely more collaboration going on generally within the organisation on a day to day basis.

One other aspect of this project that we would be sharing with other organisations, in terms of what outstanding teaching learning and assessment might look like, is the very learner-centred approach taken by Clean Break staff. This clearly existed before the start of the project, but the team ethos of ‘starting with the learner’ and the deep commitment of the teaching team has driven the project forward throughout. Learners get a lot of individual attention, and tutorials are built into the provision, and highly valued by the learners.

One learner commented:

*“We all enjoy our one-to-ones …. as it really has helped alongside [our regular classes].”*

**Sustainability and transferability**

There is no reason why the new practices around embedding established by this project will not continue into the future. Teachers and learners have all gained from the sharing of practice, perspectives, and specialisms, and have seen the benefits of a more holistic approach. The IT equipment has also enabled greater access to both literacy and performance content and has also increased learner motivation to engage. In this sense, the project achievements are entirely sustainable.

In terms of transfer, this project has revealed that learners very much see (and experience) literacy as highly intertwined with digital practices. One very easy aspect of this project to transfer to other contexts and organisations would be the principle of approaching literacy practices through the technologies that they are most often realised through in modern life – for example, the often online (and nearly always digital) nature of job applications and CVs. Put more simply, a move away from pen and paper in literacy/English classes towards more relevant technologies.

**Case study written by John Sutter, Peer Advisor, supported by Laura McCluskey, Clean Break**