

Benefits of targeted reading development sessions for Level 1 learners



CITY of BRISTOL
COLLEGE

Context

There are students on Level 1 vocational courses who cannot read or write simple sentences but are still able to complete their course without these vital skills ever being identified or addressed. Study Plus additional learning support tutors have the remit to work with learners with these particular literacy support needs and this project was aimed at developing students' reading skills using a structured phonics based programme then finding out what difference this made.

What we did

To identify these students more accurately we used Wordchains, a standardised assessment of reading focussing on decoding skills at word level, in addition to the BKSIB computer based initial assessment tool.

Word chains assessment placed 60/138 Level 1 students at Stanine 1 or 2. 25 students were identified for intervention after further interview and assessment.

We then offered phonics based reading tuition on a one to one basis, once or twice a week.

Feedback methods

1:1 interviews with all students who had completed a minimum of 6 sessions.

Interviews with Level 1 vocational and functional skills Tutors (17 in total) Questionnaire and group discussion with 5 Study Plus tutors.

Literature review indicates that:

"...literacy is important for progression in college / into employment"

Source: DEMOS

"...systematic phonics teaching in colleges is rare, despite the fact this knowledge is necessary to develop literacy"

Source: OFSTED Annual Report 2010-11

What people said about the project

VOCATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL SKILLS TUTORS

Barriers
Knowledge and understanding of project
Prioritising vocational qualifications
Managing different information

Relevance
My lessons don't cover reading
Little reading on course

Progress observed
Skills
Confidence
Independence

Progression
More confident about progression from Level 1 - 2 course

STUDY PLUS TUTORS

Barriers
Difficult to arrange regular sessions
Attendance, exclusion, classes sent home, timetable changes
Shared teaching space made it difficult to teach reading

Relevance
Allows tutors to work on skills required
Targeted intervention

Progression
Skills needed for Level 2
Some students stuck in gap between Levels 1 and 2
The project highlighted students' willingness to use support

Progress observed
Students enjoy the sessions and make progress
Aids early identification of need

STUDENTS

Barriers
Self organisation
Have to stay in class to complete work
Attendance/work/time keeping
Group work in voc. classes make it hard to leave at agreed time.

Relevance
Aware of difficulties and effects
Positive response - want to improve skills
All would tell others to take part

Progress
Skills & strategies to use elsewhere
Reading more at home
Independence
Offering to read in class

Progression
Most students applied to Level 2
Most were now confident about progression to Level 2

What the students said:

- It was really helpful for me. I have improved a lot. I've been reading books at home. I never used to.
- I've learnt a couple of new things- to break words up and stuff.
- I am willing to have more of a go now
- You've shown me the ways I can read words. I'll try and read it.
- I'm improving with bigger words.
- It goes back to the basic stuff like no one else has done with you.
- I would try to convince others to take part because it is helping me and I think it would help them
- I would take them straight down here myself because it does help people.

Findings:

- Wordchains assessment did help to identify a core group of students with difficulties in basic reading skills.
- Students were aware of their difficulties and keen to have teaching to improve skills.
- Intervention did make a difference to students taking part; the vast majority made progress with reading, evidenced by re-testing, students' self assessment and tutor feedback.

- Students gained more self-confidence, self-esteem and in their abilities to progress to a Level 2.
- More girls than boys were consistently involved. Most tutors noted improvements in the students' skills, confidence and independence.

Strengths of the project:

- The project has:
- provided Study Plus with data and evidence to identify the extensive needs of a significant number of learners.
 - been positively received with progress recorded.
 - increased team cohesion and student engagement.
 - demonstrated that Study Plus and vocational tutors can work together to ensure that students achieve on their course and develop skills at the same time.

Where do we go from here?

We will repeat the process next academic year, with ALL E3/ Level 1 students across ALL college sites.
We will use our positive student feedback to encourage participation. Discussions have taken place which will ensure that this work is an integrated part of the curriculum offer for students who have not yet developed basic literacy skills.