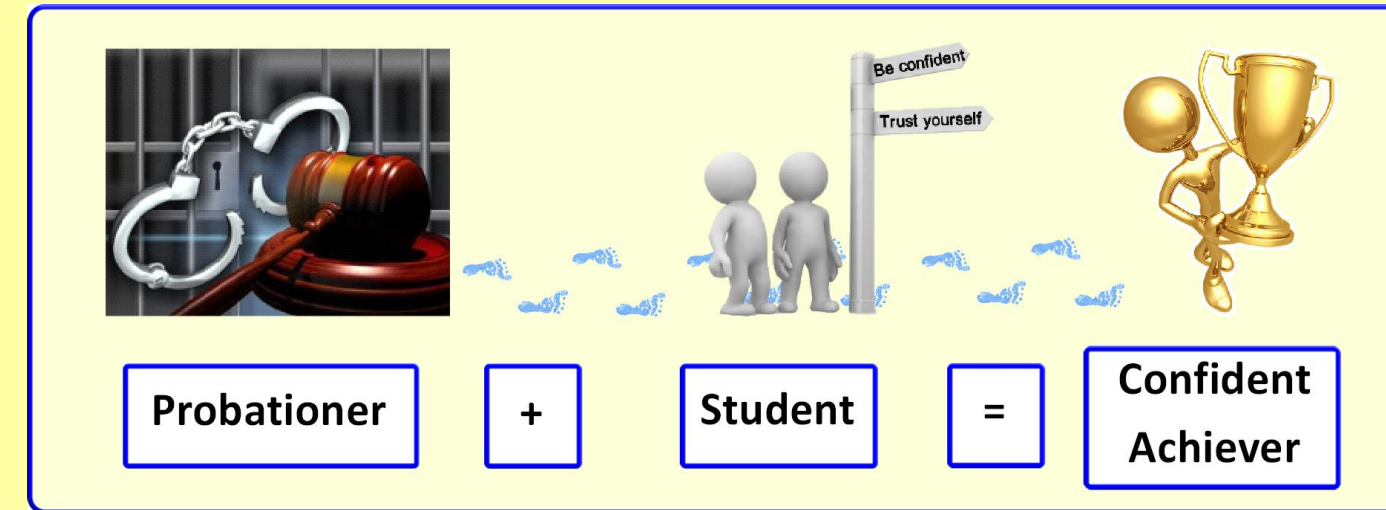


Unlocking Participation Problems Probationers' Experience When Communicating in Skills for Life Sessions

Project Aims

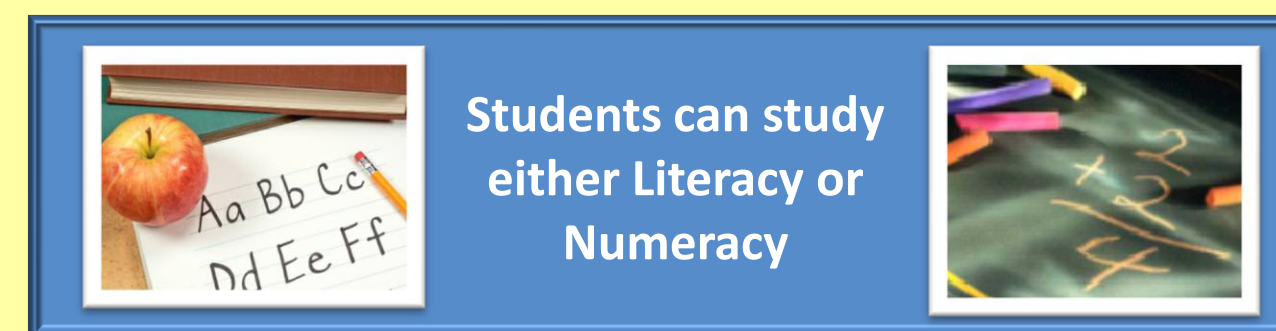
To explore interactions between offenders and tutors to inform new ways of person centred approaches to engage and motivate offenders



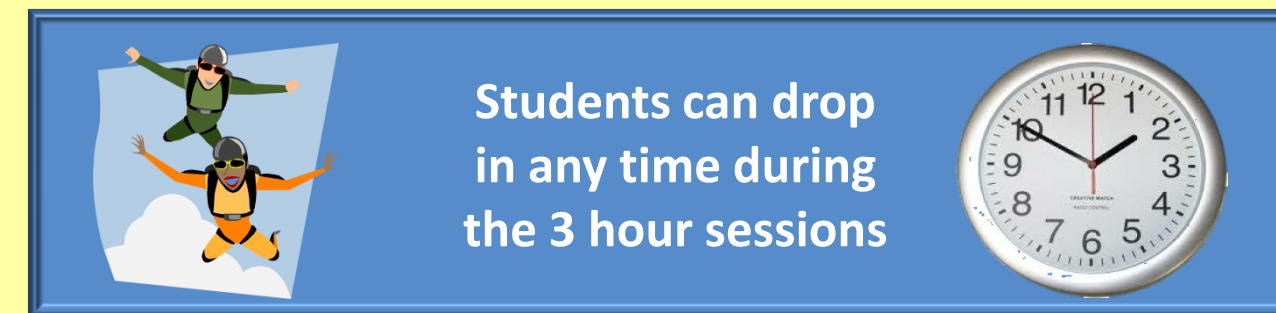
Method

Probationers complete a questionnaire to assess their confidence and their literacy and numeracy skills. Their preferred methods of learning, class or individual targets, is identified. They are given a choice of times of attendance and asked if they want to study Literacy or Numeracy.

The assessments are carried out in the normal working session. People meet each other prior to beginning learning. Visits to Probation Officers are planned to co-coincide with class attendance

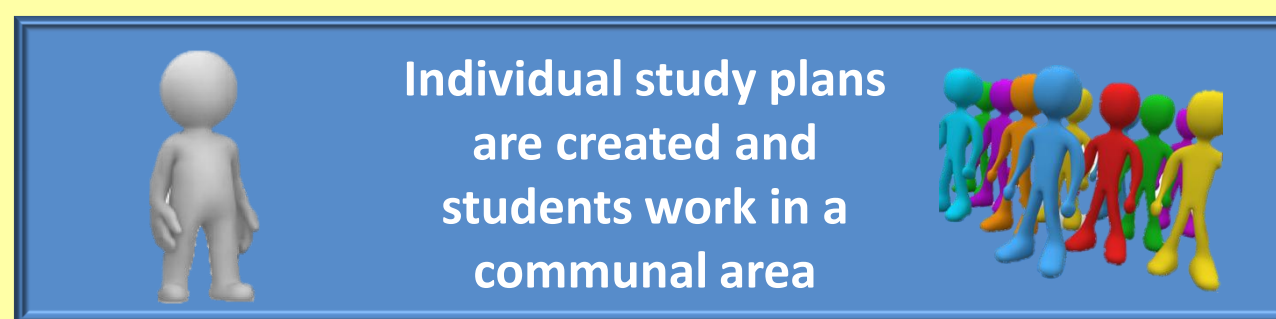


Both the literacy and numeracy skills courses are 'drop in sessions'. This means there is no set start time, the tutor will be present for 3 hours and people can attend as they can and at times convenient for them, or to fit in with a visit to their Probation Officer on the site.



Each Student has an Individual Learning Plan. They work to their own targets and no group teaching takes place. Students are taught the topic they choose by a tutor based on their individual needs. Their course work is prepared to meet each students personal target.

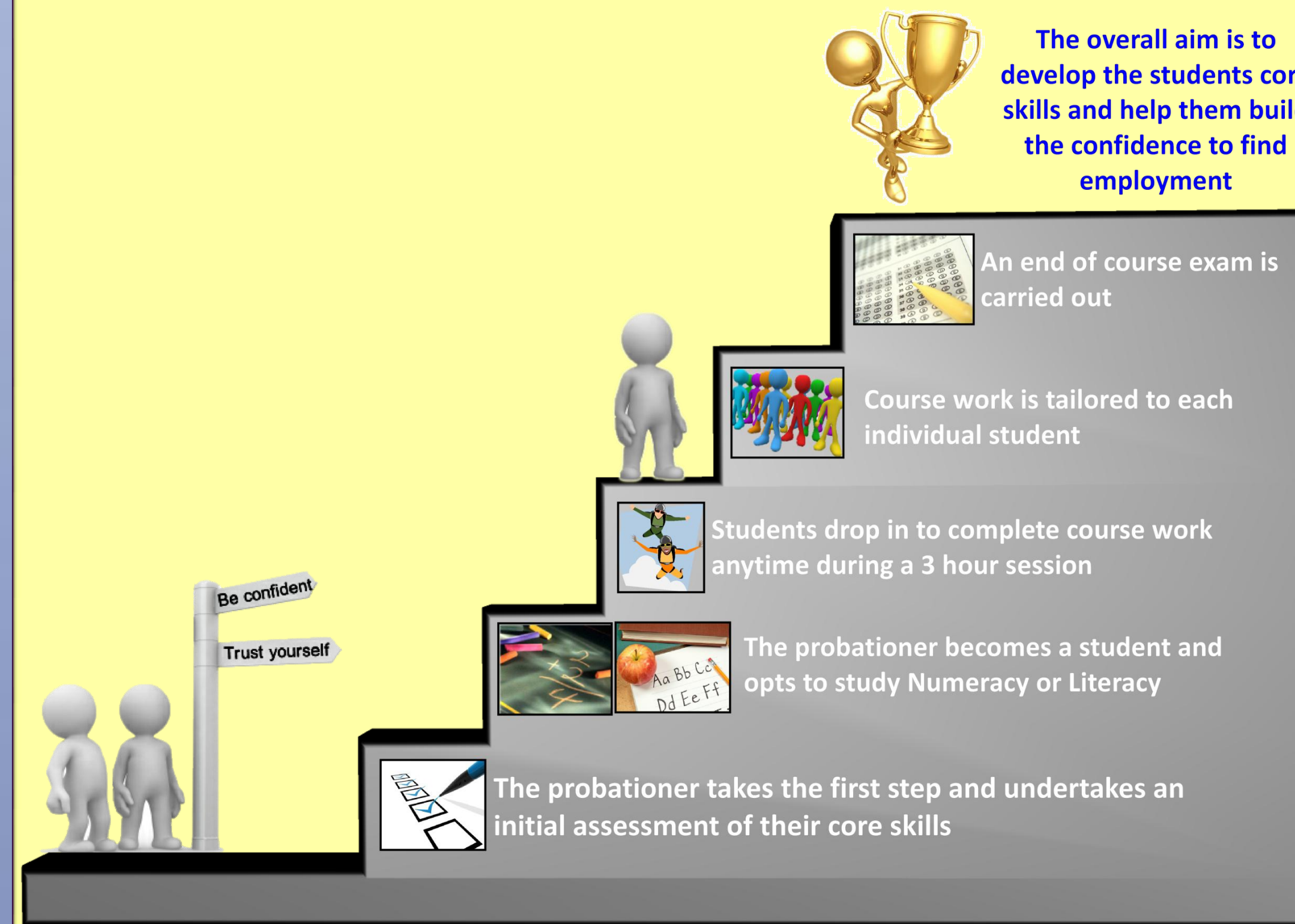
All teaching sessions take place around a communal table, i.e. although students may be working at different levels they are encouraged to work in a group environment. During the session students are encouraged to interact and discussion topics will be introduced and the learners will be encouraged to put forward their own points of view, thus boosting their confidence and generating a better understanding of what they have been taught as an individual.



A course diary is used to record relevant comments made by students during the course and these are added to the data sheets at the end of the course. When the course is completed learners will be given back their questionnaires and asked to update them. They will be invited to make comments on their learning journey and asked if they feel that they have benefited by the experience and in what way.



Summary



Strengths of the project

- The use of questionnaires means that responses are clearly displayed and give relative data in the written form
- People can be observed at all times during the sessions
- Responses to topic led conversations can be observed by tutor during the session and the comments recorded in the diary used to aid assessment of interactions and participation
- Learning outcomes and learner responses can be recorded on 'end of course review' sheets

Limitations of the project

- A very small group surveyed
- Too short a period of time to complete reliable results
- Learners may be held in custody for a period of time
- Learners may attend court and be sentenced to a term of imprisonment
- Initial resistance of learners can take a period of time to overcome
- Attending Skills for Life in a Probation Office
- Long periods when the college is on breaks
- Not being able to offer evening classes for people who cannot attend during the day

Findings 1st questionnaire

33% learners prefer teacher led informal group work

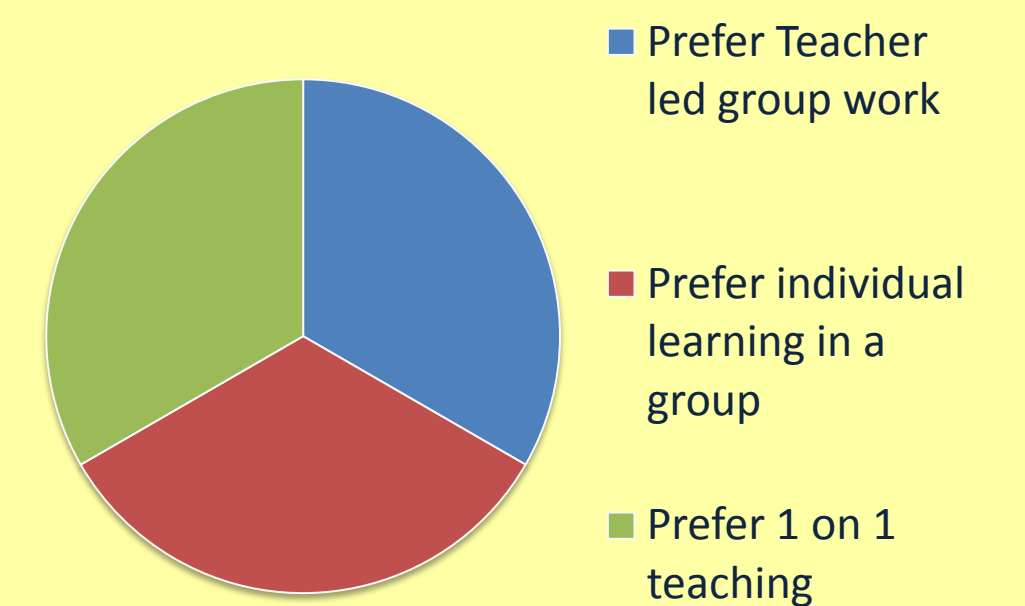
- These were the most articulate people, and did not mind what time of day they attended

33% learners prefer individual learning in group

- These people were much quieter and tended not to socialise in the group and seemed less confident in themselves
- They did not mind working in a group

33% prefer 1-1 teaching

- These learners were poor readers and a lower Entry Level standard and did not mind what time of day they were asked to attend



All learners had poor or no learning experiences.

All learners felt that the courses should NOT follow the standard term times of the college, but should run throughout the year with just short breaks for Bank Holidays and a short break in the summer.

Communication and confidence wise the lower the literacy and numeracy level of the learner, the lower the level of confidence they had when communicating and in their own ability to take part in interactions with other people especially in group situations.

Staff in the Probation office felt that the course should run throughout the year and not follow the traditional academic year. They also felt that informal group learning was the most beneficial to the learners.

Initial Research Reading:

- Transactional Analysis- A Model for Understanding Human Behaviour. Dr Eric Berne.
- Maslows Hierarchy of Needs. Abraham Maslow
- Kolbs Learning Styles. David Kolb.
- Key Principles of Adult Learning. Malcolm Knowles
- The Id and Life. Sigmund Freud
- Principles of Adult Learning. John Goodland
- Its not like Normal School, The Role of Prior Learning Contexts in Adult Learning Aliza Belzer
- How to Teach Delayed Gratification to Ex-Offenders Noreen Wainwright

Results

- Learners felt that the college terms should not apply to probation; breaks were too long and affected their attendance and completion of orders.
- RF spent weeks in the quiet room, working alone, after the change to less formal learning he moved into the main room and is communicating well.
- SP Insisted on 1-1 teaching, because she was a non-reader. I gave her ½ hour prior to the session, now she stays with the group. When a new learner arrived who could not read or write, she told him she was the same and would help him .
- MB was a very angry young man, Entry level 1, did not want to attend. After several weeks he was leaving, he came in and asked if he could take all of his work and books with him because he wished to continue with his learning elsewhere.
- LC, leaving the session one day said that coming to the group had helped her; she had gained so much confidence from attending.
- All people were positive about their learning experience, some were pleased to complete and leave, others wished to continue away from the probation setting.
- There is a need to look at the success of this project and to decide how much of it was due to the informal running of the session and how much to the tutor and their approach to the learners and their needs.
- The Probation Liaison Officer has been long term sick for much of the project, therefore it has been difficult to arrange any activities outside of the probation setting to further the learning experience.
- This style of teaching and learning needs to be repeated over the next term in the academic year to verify if the results are reliable and consistent. The learners are responsive to being given greater autonomy within the learning environment, however this can be attributed to many individual factors and therefore can not be taken as the norm.

Recommendations

- College terms should not apply in this setting
- Learners should be encouraged to work in pairs or as a group in an informal manner
- Learning should be individualised but some should be in a group where points of view are put and people encouraged to input
- To continue with assessments in an informal manner when the class is running
- Officers and Sfl tutors to arrange visits to the Probation Office on the same day to maximise attendance

The College of West Anglia

Project Researchers

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