

Functional skills delivery within ESOL provision

A whole organisation approach to managing the transition to functional skills

MTC Learning, Swindon



Summary

MTC Learning was originally a Migrant Training Centre and was established to provide language skills development for people entering the United Kingdom. It has kept its original name although its focus has since changed. MTC Learning is a long standing partner of New College, Swindon. In 2010, new managers refurbished the centre, providing two new IT suites, a student area and additional classroom resources. They also increased the range of programmes offered, recognising the need to offer alternatives and progression routes to their learners.

There was an increased demand for English through Jobcentre Plus, passers-by and word of mouth which led to a shift in learners from a traditional English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) cohort to a mix of ESOL, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English learners. An Entry 3 English class then became a mix of 85 per cent ESOL, five per cent English and ten per cent EFL learners.

From originally offering ESOL classes, MTC Learning now offers in addition English, maths and IT classes and there is scope for learners to progress from one course to another in both the level of the course, and from English to maths and/or IT before progressing on to college if appropriate.

Implementation

Planning our approach

The support from Learning South West (LSW)

Learning South West was able to give MTC Learning three days of support, provided by a functional skills and ESOL specialist. In order to achieve the maximum impact in a short time, the following approach was agreed.

Supported provider MTC Learning

Judith Hamer, Quality Manager
Daniela Amorim, Maths Lead Tutor
Lilia Pritchard, English Lead Tutor

Improvement partner Learning South West

Diane Rawlings, ESOL and functional skills specialist

- Diagnostic discussions between the Quality Manager and the specialist from Learning South West in order to agree an English and maths/functional skills strategy.
- A couple of half day workshops for all staff led by ESOL, maths and English specialists. Our aim was to review current practices for English and maths delivery and reach a consensus on how to move forward.
- A follow-up workshop in which English and maths specialists would work together to co-create practical solutions for initial and diagnostic assessment, learning materials, delivery models and summative assessment.

What we did

Following the initial meeting, the English and maths teams met separately. The maths session concentrated on the development of interactive resources suitable for the skills development for functional skills and the development of problem solving strategies. The English session focussed on the delivery model and integration of English and ESOL learners working together.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved in maths

From our first cohort of learners taking the functional skills maths course, twenty seven out of twenty nine learners achieved the qualification. A further sixty-two learners have recently taken Level 1 and Level 2 and there was a pass rate of 93 per cent.

We increased our bank of resources, developing interactive resources. One group of learners came from Swindon Town Football Club as apprentices needing to improve their maths. Contextualised resources were developed to engage and motivate the learners. As a consequence, these learners have now achieved Level 1 Functional Skills Maths and are working towards Level 2. An example of a presentation used with the football apprentices has been included as part of this case study.

We developed diagnostic assessments which took problem solving into account. These are based on the original assessments but are more functional and include problem solving. Because of the high proportion of ESOL learners, we ensured that the language used was accessible to these learner, for example by avoiding complex sentence structures.

What we achieved in English

From our first batch of twenty-three learners, ten achieved at Level 1 and twelve achieved at Level 2. We have another batch of thirteen learners who are awaiting Level 1 results.

What we learned

Having English speaking learners in the speaking and listening sessions was initially considered to be quite challenging. However it became clear to teachers and learners that the mix of learners in the group was beneficial to all. English learners were picked up by ESOL learners when using slang or colloquialisms such as '*me bag*' '*init*'. English speaking learners soon took on the role of supporting the weaker ESOL learners.

The move from the adult literacy and numeracy tests to the functional skills test at Level 1 and Level 2 was hard for some learners. Keen learners did extra work and asked for advice.

A blended learning approach has been encouraged as learners complete their homework and if they are unable to attend a class they email or post it to the tutor. One learner is not able to attend the classes so a tutorial has been arranged for her every two weeks. The learner studies at home and attends tutorials on a regular basis. The maths tutor regularly uses Skype to communicate with learners.

The English tutor was familiar with the demands of the criteria as she had taught GCSE English previously. This meant that she was familiar with different types of text, the features and the different purposes of texts. She was able to teach the differences between compound and complex sentences. She encourages the use of a thesaurus to prevent the repetition of words. When supporting learners with writing, she encourages them to paint a picture in their heads to use their five senses, to describe it and to use punctuation effectively.

Although we had not intended offering functional skills at Entry Level until September 2013, we have now decided to implement it straight away. The learners will benefit more from the transition to a higher level if they are already considering problem solving in maths and 'real' functional approaches in English.

The main issue in delivering Functional Skills Maths is the reading. We have introduced more activities and discussion work to develop reading skills. The learners say that the classes are now more enjoyable and we have more students now because they are keen to learn English through maths. Problem solving offers real life situations and is an excellent way to learn English and maths.

What we are taking forward

ESOL teaching is functional so the shift to functional skills is straight forward. ESOL teaching would naturally analyse different types of reading material to understand the purpose. The use of persuasive language would be tackled to explore the most effective way of asking for something. Writing, too, becomes real when learners have to practice writing letters or sending emails. Some ESOL learners are able to communicate (in English of course) with family, which has opened up new horizons. The writing becomes real when an ESOL learner is able to email her son during the English class.

Maths is also embedded naturally into the English class when sessions focus on using the bank or the Post Office, travelling by public transport or shopping. Mixed maths classes have proved to be beneficial to all learners. English learners who have weak maths skills and who lack confidence in their maths have participated fully in classes because of their strong English skills. These learners are able to explain the English to the learners with poor English skills. This has help raise their confidence levels.

The use of IT in English classes is extremely valuable. When new vocabulary is introduced, learners can use Google Images to identify unusual fruit for example. Email can be used to make writing real. The internet can be used to research topics for discussion. One learner did not understand the meaning of capital punishment. They offered an explanation; *'It's when you are punished for not using capital letters.'*

ESOL learners will work towards Entry Level Functional Skills qualifications whilst the English and maths classes at Level 1 and 2 will have a mix of ESOL and English speaking learners. All learners can progress to the next level or move to the maths or IT classes as appropriate.

The previous Level 1 group were unable to progress straight away onto the Level 2 class because some of the original group were now working or had returned home, so they were

encouraged to still attend the Level 1 class (although they were not funded.) They are able to support the new learners and benefit by reinforcing their own learning.

We try to accommodate all the learners, to take account of their different personal circumstances. We offer day classes from 9.30am–3.00pm to meet with childcare needs and 5.30–8.30pm on Monday and Thursday evenings. The day time classes take place every day but each group comes in twice a week. We try to be flexible, allowing learners to swap classes occasionally because of family commitments or shift patterns. Learners consider us to be like a family. They genuinely appreciate the support we offer outside the classroom and see us as a stepping stone. Because of this learners often encourage other family members to join us. As a consequence, we often have wives, brothers and fiancées joining classes. We offer good progression routes within MTC and support learners progressing elsewhere. Our strong link with the College encourages progression on to college courses.

'We want to squeeze every little bit of learning out of them.'

'We are preparing them for the world, facilitating their entry into other education or work.'

ESOL teaching has always been interactive but the use of i-tools has improved the interactivity in classes.

Further reading and resources

[Functional skills case studies and films](#)

[Functional Skills Starter Kit](#)

[Being Functional](#)

[Functional Skills Criteria](#)

[Fit for the Future – interactive functional skills resources](#)

[League Football Education – interactive functional skills resources](#)

[Thinking through Maths](#)

Contact information

Date published: June 2013

Provider: MTC Learning, Swindon

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