OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT - PHASE 3 (NORTH EAST AND CUMBRIA)

FINAL REPORT ON THE PROJECT 'DEVELOPING AN ACTION RESEARCH-BASED MODEL FOR COLLEGE-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'

(Bishop Auckland College, SWD Training and Bishop Auckland Community Learning)

This resource was produced as part of Phase 3 of the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment programme which was funded by the Education and Training Foundation. To learn more about the programme and this project read the summary booklet. The programme was delivered in the North East and Cumbria by -

Contents

Developing an action research-based model for College-wide Professional Development

Project overview

This "umbrella" action research project encouraged 32 staff (including 13 Learning Support Assistants) across three sites and nine vocational and subject areas to trial improvements to their classroom and workshop practices.

The aims of the project were to:

1. Encourage new and established teachers to collaborate in practitioner-led research as individually-tailored CPD
2. Provide opportunities for new staff to establish their professional roles as research-active practitioners

Staff engaged in action research to promote their professional learning. The project was designed to support groups of teachers to regularly meet and share practitioner research outcomes as the foundation for a culture of organisational improvement.

Staff identified personal improvement priorities and then collaborated in Action Learning Sets in implementing and evaluating change.

Rationale

Prior to the project, a significant number of recently-qualified teachers did not register for QTLS following achievement of their DET (PG/Cert Ed programmes) and were not building on the significant personal progress they had made when following their initial teaching qualifications.

Local institutional research (Mattinson, 2018) had indicated that some staff were not benefiting from the generic CPD on offer (Scales 2012) which did not address issues that they identified as personal priorities. Also LSAs were not expected to engage in CPD activities.

Through this project, both new and established teachers, trainers and Learning Support Assistants engaged in a college-wide approach to improvements which practitioners had identified as personally important.

Project activities and outputs

This action research project encouraged teachers, trainers and support assistants across three sites and nine vocational and subject areas to trial improvements to their classroom and workshop practices. Staff identified their personal improvement priorities and then met in Action Learning Sets to implement and evaluate their chosen improvements.

A series of twilight CPD sessions were arranged to:
- Introduce the idea of staff doing their own research into important local challenges.
- Establish Action Learning Sets (ALS) and agree "change activities".

- Identify what evidence might be needed to demonstrate the impact of their changes to teaching.
- Write up their individual research experiments for others to share.

Recently-qualified teachers drew upon personal development points from their initial training programmes to inform their chosen "change activities", whilst experienced teachers reflected upon feedback from supportive walk-through observations. The participants from FE College, community learning and training backgrounds critically compared new strategies and approaches to uses of ICT, peer-assessment, setting high expectations and recording learners' planning activities.   Documentary evidence of their professional learning and changes in practice can be found in their individual reports. (See Appendix 1).

The teams of participants met at fortnightly intervals to plan and evaluate progress through their action research activities, and were also supported through regional practitioner research events.

The project leader encouraged accessible one-side research planning and reporting sheets, using headings of "Background issues", "Planned changes", "Findings", Next Steps" and "Research Consulted". (See Appendix 1 for a collection of 13 Reports which outlined participants' action research activities.

The project was led by a teacher-educator (confident with both teaching strategies and inspection requirements) who enjoyed a good working knowledge of participating teachers' practice. The supportive relationship was important for encouraging staff to write-up research and to persevere when planned changes met fresh challenges.

The project leader invested time assisting the first-time researchers to produce accessible reports of change that contained meaningful evidence of their learners' progress. These reports then became valuable for inspiring other participants on the project to write their own reports.

In an extension to the initial project, 11 LSAs working with higher needs learners shared their interests regarding the support they were offering to groups and individual learners. Working in pairs or threes they identified resources, strategies and activities to meet the needs of individual learners. The project lead and project mentor met with the LSA cohort every three weeks and additional support was offered during lunch time "drop in" meetings.

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

The participants from FE College, community learning and training backgrounds critically compared new strategies and approaches to uses of ICT, peer-assessment, setting high expectations and recording learners' planning activities.

Narratives of their professional learning and changes in practice are detailed in the reports of individual and collaborative research. (Appendix 1)

Documentary evidence was gathered from revised lesson planning and Schemes of Work; re-designed resources together with evidence of learners' planning, work and learners' achievement

outcomes; minutes from CPD and departmental meetings, departmental SARs for 2016-2017, and attendance and contributions to OTLA CPD events.

Key changes included:
- vocational practitioners from five areas developed student-centred strategies and resources to promote learner mastery of the assessment process;
- teachers using digital media to improve learners' proactive engagement with British Values;
- learners confidently addressing their British Values' responsibilities.

21 participants contributed to 13 reports. Practitioners systematically evidenced their developing research practice by providing samples of revised documents, together with targeted plans to "roll-out" their initiatives for both lower and higher-level learners.

In the extension to the initial project, 11 Higher Needs LSAs planned, implemented and evaluated resources, strategies and activities to meet the individual needs of learners against their Educational Health Care Plans (ECHP) and Vocational qualifications in a supportive environment that was all-embracing in an action research based CPD model. LSAs and teachers were able to reflect critically on their practice to ensure that sustained improvements were evident for their individual learners.

In this extension project, LSAs described how engaging in introductory action research activities had encouraged them to be more proactive with learners rather than wait to act upon managing teachers' directions.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Vocational specialists from across the organisation planned, implemented and evaluated practical improvements which were often tested and validated in their colleagues' classrooms and workshops.

Most importantly for organisational development, the separate practitioners' initiatives were supportively evaluated in the regular twilight CPD sessions which provided a forum for new and experienced teachers to share fresh thinking and to evaluate proposed practical solutions to use in their classrooms.

Following this OTLA pilot, College management has noted the transformational impact on the culture of the college of this collaborative activity and introduced the following enhancements to CPD:
- A revised CPD model has been "rolled out" across the college based upon the practitioner-led research initiative.
- There will be an annual bursary to support 6 teachers towards completion of QTLS.

The extension project has given the LSAs a sense of worth, permission to engage in researching their own practice to meet the individual needs of the learners and helped build trusting, professional relationships between themselves and the teachers.

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

Across all projects, teachers have gathered evidence of "distance-travelled" in improved learner outcomes, through measurable performance in sample assignments and assessed activities, and through observed changes in learner engagement, as evidenced in learners' outputs.

Level 1 and 2 learners demonstrated improved self-efficacy in these projects which has increased their participation in workshops and classrooms. These innovative self- and peer-assessment activities have resulted in more rapid independent skill development.

One identifiable benefit and validation of the self-and peer-assessment "change activities" has been the practitioners' roll-out of successful approaches from their initial research classes to their more challenging classes, thus engaging and motivating learners who might not have been expected to take this level of responsibility for their learning.

 "After experimenting with various techniques, one LSA supported an adult learner to write her name for the first time in her life"

"Two LSA designed a 'request and reward' chart to enable a learner develop independence in managing toileting"

"100% of Level 3 BTEC IT students improved grades from Merit to Distinction in a pilot study trialling the use of exemplar assignments."

Learning from this project

Effective CPD was based upon a commitment from the organisation at all levels. A supportive rhythm of activities – i.e. meetings based around research processes – ensured that the participants' individual interest was sustained into action. The invitation to external specialists to contribute to the in-house CPD programme helped motivate participants to research their own interests.

Several findings from this practitioner-focused project may have wider significance for the FE sector:
- The project was effectively managed by a teacher-educator (confident with both teaching strategies and inspection requirements) who enjoyed a working knowledge of the participants' practices from her supportive observations.
- Vocational trainers were guided through the practitioner research process towards a one-side report detailing aims, 'change activities', findings, and evidence from the activity leading to 'next steps'. They were supported through the writing process when relevant research evidence was discussed. (Examples of the focused one-side research reports are evident in the examples in Appendix 1)
- Staff across different areas usually collaborated effectively (usually supported by a peer from their specialism).
- This research activity has improved participating LSAs' perceptions of their skills and potential. Learning Support Assistants proved to be active researchers when given appropriate support. LSAs would benefit from being given dedicated professional development which recognises their role within the classroom and college setting.

- The college would benefit from the LSAs' findings about their work being disseminated to all staff in their organisation.   Managers need to draw upon the "craft expertise" of LSAs to educate mainstream staff about ways to maximise the contribution of support staff in teaching sessions.
- In relation to the supported practitioner research activity, it was found that staff needed support between meetings when learners showed resistance to changes being introduced by their teachers. Some participants needed extra encouragement from the project leader to persist with changes until the participant's new practices were accepted (and welcomed) by apprehensive learners. (See Trotter and Wade's reports in Appendix 1)
- Some staff made changes but did not develop the changes beyond the initial experiment, or they were reticent to gather evidence of change in the long-term, to confirm whether changes had a permanent effect – having tried something which worked, they directed their attention to resolve the next pressing issue.
- Honest explanations about those interventions that had not been so successful represent valuable contributions to sector research knowledge. (See Appendix 1, Smith's report on managing an assessor's caseload.)
- Very small-scale pilot activities involving one or two learners provided teachers with valuable insights into the potential of new ways of working with larger groups, without risking disruption to students' existing routines. (See Appendix 1, Staples' experiments to Increase the number of high grades in level 3 IT programmes.)

References

Mattinson, E (2018) *'Just Tell Me What To Do': The Challenges Of Facilitating Professional Judgement In Vocational Trainee Teachers* in Teaching in Lifelong Learning: a journal to inform and improve practice Vol 9 Issue 1 (forthcoming).

Scales, P (2012) *The end of sheep-dip CPD?* in CPD Matters, Vol 2, Institute for Learning, London

Appendix 1 - Bishop Auckland Practitioner Research Reports

This appendix contains 13 studies completed by individuals and pairs of researchers. It illustrates the template used to encourage practitioners to document the classroom experiments which were trialled in order to improve learners' experiences.

These templates were useful for those with little experience of writing to submit drafts, and the project lead was able to offer support in helping participants to find ways to best express their experiences.

Sometimes, as a result of writing a draft, participants began to rethink their research and made further improvements.

1. Establishing prior knowledge of L4/L5 HND Business Students. *(Alison Barron)*

This study is of great interest to other teachers of adults, who may feel uncomfortable about revisiting the basics of assignment techniques (how to answer a question) and assignment content (finding out how much the students already know). From experimenting with this exercise both the teacher and the learners became aware of potential barriers to their successful progression (i.e. having limited background knowledge and experience, or of feeling unsure about assignment terminology).

This promises to be helpful to teacher and students as they are beginning to recognise, and to talk about, where problems for individuals are arising.   With mixed ability groups from a diversity of backgrounds, we sometimes only fully understand the stumbling blocks for some students towards the end of the programme where it might be too late. This experiment with early experimentation will reduce this risk.

With this study, Alison is concerned about the pressures of time to allow this sort of initial assessment activity. However, as this activity has produced some valuable insights for the teacher, and increased the student's sense of responsibility for their own learning, does the question now have to be, "How can such programmes be redesigned to incorporate this important preparatory work?"

Background situation

The cohort for this course consists of a wide variety of students in terms of age (all 19+), prior educational achievements, employment history, current job roles and overall general knowledge and experience. Identifying starting points, I feel, is crucial to avoid making assumptions and to help the students establish their own current knowledge and as such determine their learning requirements in preparation for assessment for learning. As mature students, this can be difficult to do without the process appearing too 'school-like' or taking up too much lesson time that they have paid for and they just want to 'get on with the lesson'.

Making a change in my teaching

Using a basic template, I then customised this according to the Unit and the cohort – one consists of school leavers, others are more mature learners. Sometimes this would be the use of different action verbs in the questions, so as well as knowledge I could assess their comprehension of the verbs in question, which are the same as those used in their assignments. The second part of this initial assessment requires the students to apply their knowledge to a given organisation or to compare against the Learning Outcome of the Unit. The results could then be used by me to determine starting points and by the student to set their own SMART targets for this unit.

Findings from my experiment

- All students attempted the questions
- Some students gave more in depth answers than others
- Some students identified their lack of knowledge early on which helped with a starting point
- Some were unsure of the verbs – again useful when discussing the assignment requirements
- Some struggled to apply their knowledge to business organisations/scenarios and this was usually those with limited employment experience.

Next steps

- Continue using this document at the start of each Unit as a minimum
- If the Learning Outcomes are vastly different, then use again but vary the format to avoid it becoming repetitious and losing its effect
- Consider the feasibility of issuing the document ahead of the first session on the Unit/Learning Outcomes, if time allows. This will help my planning for delivery of the unit and assessment for learning.

Next steps

- Consult with students on their feelings about the document and this approach
- Encourage the students to be more aware of and focused on their own SMART targets so they can monitor their own progress and take ownership of their learning and develop their self-study, which they should be doing at this level (flip the learning).
- As this is a new approach this term, it is still in its infancy so I will monitor its effectiveness over the first two units of the programme and obtain student feedback.

Research Evidence:

1. Completed Initial Assessment documents
2. Student-set targets on their ILP (Giraffe)
3. Student participation in sessions

Research consulted

https://www.cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswafl/index.html

2. Overcoming Level 3 Sports students' resistance to peer-marking. *(Ben Trotter)*

Ben's work is a simple adoption of a peer-marking strategy, and his experiment benefited from the framework of the project to overcome students' resistance to a new way of working. With the support of his colleagues on the project, he persevered with a strategy that was initially resisted by the students – as they were nervous about risking unfamiliar ways of working. However, his resilience has been rewarded, and colleagues would find it useful to share examples of the worksheet together with some tips about what sorts of students use it more and less effectively.

One rewarding outcome is to see how an initiative like this one encourages the practitioner-researcher to extend this practice with other groups – this provides convincing evidence that the teacher finds it useful.

Background situation

My level 3 sport learners often did not proof-read work and hand-in with spelling and grammar mistakes, which takes lots of time to correct.

Making a change in my teaching

I produced a peer-marking sheet that the students would use before handing in work to reduce spelling and grammar errors, and they could provide recommendations about what could be added to the work. The students would then have the opportunity to make any changes needed and then still hand-in the work on time.

Findings from my experiment

- At first, the students did not fully buy into this; over time, this changed and now the students can see the benefits of doing this.
- Students provided critical feedback to others.
- The students have now adopted this approach in each assignment that they hand-in and it is now a normal part of the process.
- The students are taking more pride in their work and in peers' work as they are helping them with spelling and grammar.
- Feedback I have gained from the students is that it is beneficial having another set of eyes looking over their work.

Next steps

- Continue embedding the peer marking into all of the assignment hand-in process and trial this with lower levels.
- I will change the pairings round so that the students get the opportunity to work with others within the group and form new relationships.
- I will add further detail into the peer marking sheet to check for the correct layout e.g. leaflet and also add in a box checking for criteria used.

Next steps

- I will continue to use the work sheet as this is enabling students to gain higher grades and cutting out spelling and grammar errors.
- I will adapt the peer-marking sheet to use with level 2 learners and also adult learners and try it with them groups as I believe this will also enable them to gain higher grades.

Research Evidence:

1. Lesson plans embedding peer marking sheet.
2. Peer marking worksheet

Research consulted

(Goldfinch, 2000)

3. Increasing high grades in level 3 IT programmes. *(Caroline Staples)*

This is an excellent example of how a very small-scale investigation enables a teacher to reflect on traditional teaching approaches as a basis for trying a limited experiment to meet the needs of the students. By focusing on two students, the teacher has been encouraged to redesign materials and evaluate their use in an additional session. This has provided a safe and controlled setting for the teacher to explore her teaching, which might have seemed too risky and time-consuming to try with a large group where teaching time is increasingly precious. However, building on this, the teacher is now scheduling this important technique into the beginning of the course, and rolling this out more widely with less advanced learners.

Background situation

Most of my level 2 learners struggle to gain the higher grades, especially on their first attempt, as they find it difficult to write to the grading descriptors.

Making a change in my teaching

I selected two learners who had merits and had showed a good understanding of the topic covered but were missing out on the distinction grades as they couldn't understand what was required to meet the grading criteria, e.g. they were 'describing' or 'explaining' instead of 'justifying' and so were struggling to meet their targets. Previously, I had been marking draft versions and handing out feedback for them to resubmit which is time-consuming for both myself and the students.

I experimented by modifying and improving some examples of essays in the hope of eliminating this extra work. I then used these examples of essays to discuss and refer to in an extra session about essay writing, and this helped them realise how to write differently to meet the grade descriptors for units. This proved much more effective than just using written and oral feedback and questioning to try and redirect them.

Findings from my experiment

- Seeing actual examples of the style of writing helped them to understand how their work should look, rather than giving them a short sentence telling them what the descriptor meant.
- Once an example of the writing style had been given the work came in written in the appropriate format for the grading descriptor, therefore meeting the criteria with both content and writing style
- This meant reduced marking for me and reduced work for them in addition to achieving grades they had been struggling with.
- Working on their own had been difficult for them, they did comment after that they may have grasped it quicker if they had worked together and looked at what each other had been doing
- Learner 1 raised his grades from a predicted MM to a DD.
- Learner 2 managed to make his target grade of DMM.

Next steps

- Increase the range of grading descriptor examples – I only focused on the ones I needed for the two learners.
- Use the first week of term to teach learners how to write to the grading descriptor correctly.
- Use tutorial/ILP sessions to check understanding, run revision sessions on how to achieve higher grades.

Next steps

- Try out some group sessions to test writing skills.
- Use small groups to peer review each other's work.
- Pair learners up to peer review particular tasks.
- Try using the same strategies with level 2 learners.

Research Evidence:

1. Tracking sheets from month to month showing improvements and less draft attempts
2. Improved grades in the targeted units and improved grades overall
3. Feedback quotes from the two learners

Research consulted

Jean McNiff, Action Research for Professional Development

Further reflections

Would like to extend the project to whole group by teaching how to write for the relevant grading criteria at the start of each unit and extend to level 2 learners.

4. Teacher and Learning Support working together to help Level 1 Bricklaying students "close the feedback loop". *(Chris Lee and Charlene Simpson)*

This investigation conducted by a teacher and Learning Support Assistant shows how working together can help the teaching team to identify why teachers' feedback isn't always effectively used – why don't students always act upon the feedback they receive? By investigating students' record books, they have been able to start a discussion about the shortcomings of the current system and design a simple and effective wipe board focus that helps the teacher, the Learning Support Assistant and the student can clearly see the students' progress and discuss their "next steps". This activity helps everyone feel more purposeful in the classroom, as the current progress and opportunities for development are both reinforced and shared, so that the teacher and LSA have a clear idea about individual students' needs, and the student group has an appreciation of common sticking points.

Background situation

Level 1 bricklaying full time students often do not make full use of the feedback they are given by the tutor and Learning Support Assistant regarding their workshop practical tasks. This impact upon their progress as they do not use feedback to make sustained improvements to their own bricklaying skills.

Making a change in my teaching

The students were asked to evaluate the practical workshop booklet, which details the bricklaying task standards. As a result of their feedback, this booklet was revised to give students the opportunity to clearly identify their progress from previous bricklaying tasks and to see how they have addressed areas previously identified for improvement.

The students were then tasked with choosing their own key area for improvement in the bricklaying task from a workshop display board, which displayed potential areas to focus upon. (For example, "Improve plumb alignment to 3 mm from 5 mm".) They identified improvements relevant to their task and put their names next to it on the wipe board in the workshop.

Findings from my experiment

- Students are now able to use the feedback from the practical booklet more effectively to identify weak areas in their practice that must be improved to work to industry standards.
- Students take the written feedback from their tutor and identify their own specific areas of improvement, hence taking ownership of their own learning.
- Students use the feedback from the tutor which is displayed in the workshop to make sustained improvement to their subsequent bricklaying workshop tasks.
- The tutor and Learning Support Assistant are able to tailor feedback to meet the individual needs of each student as the tasks/activities/tutor/peer feedback is informed by a shared knowledge of where they are.
- The workshop display board listing areas for improvement is an excellent tutor resource and gives the student the opportunity to clearly reflect upon and plan future bricklaying workshop tasks (rather than this reflection being written up afterwards in a different location).

Next steps

- Continue to use the practical booklet and gather student's feedback on the format and content of the document, revise as required to meet the needs of individuals.
- Research a visible progress tracker to be displayed within the workshop setting.

Research Evidence:

1. Practical booklet to gather student's feedback.
2. Students views on the effectiveness of the practical booklet.
3. Professional discussions between Learning Support Assistant and tutor

Research consulted

Black P, and Wiliam D (1998). "Assessment and Classroom Learning." Assessment in Education.

5. Encouraging Level 3 Healthcare students to engage with social issues and current affairs. *(Christine Evans)*

This research has successfully engaged students in contributing to discussions in current affairs, which has had a range of both intended and unanticipated benefits. These primary and secondary impacts on learning all contribute to give readers an insight into the importance of this change for energising the classroom and developing learners' engagement with the wider social world.

This experimental approach has gathered evidence from "soft" sources – teachers' observations and student feedback – and quantifiable sources – measure an increase in student contributions to the wall. Taken together, these reinforce the influence of this experiment and provide useful information for teachers seeking strategies to engage in British Values and other social learning.

The secondary impacts on learning will provide useful approaches for teachers needing to embed these challenging concepts, which are often only addressed in a tokenistic way. Teachers of other subjects at other levels should all be able to reflect on this study as a useful comparison point.

Background situation:

I found that many Health& Social Care students had a very limited knowledge of current affairs, and that when I attempted to open discussions about recent events which had relevance for their vocational area, there was little engagement or understanding.

Making a change in my teaching: "News Wall"

I created a "News Wall" on the Moodle interactive learning system and also as a physical entity on a display board in the classroom. At the beginning of the activity I placed some articles and reports on to the "Wall" and encouraged level 3 Health and Social Care students to research and contribute their own findings and examples.

I hoped that eventually the students would be the sole contributors, and that we tutors would then facilitate learner-led discussions relating to the current affair issues raised in a 30-minute session once a week. This would then bring the "outside world" into the classroom.

Findings from my experiment:

Teacher observations:

- Observed growth in confidence in students contributing to learner-led discussions and reflections
- Observed increase in level of knowledge and confidence in presenting examples which they had chosen.

Measurable responses:

- Student input of news items has risen to approximately 60% as opposed to tutor input of 40% after 6 weeks.
- Evidence of improvements in referencing and bibliographies, both in drawing upon a wider and more valid range of sources, and in using Harvard style when referencing these in assignments.

Reflections on the process

Action research requires that the students are encouraged to be an integral part of the process and not separate from it. Therefore, it was important that I tried to integrate examples of students' news into the lessons and not just leave them stuck to the "Wall."

Students needed to be encouraged to include their own choice and examples of information to allow them to take ownership of the task. This could lead to submissions that might be considered sensitive, which raised the question of censorship while at the same time I needed to be aware of safeguarding and "Prevent" issues. Tutors may feel uncomfortable discussing potentially sensitive or difficult topics, but these can be postponed until the next lesson (but not disregarded) so that the tutor has time to prepare a useful response.

Next steps:

Progress of action research activity is to be monitored and evaluated as we commence another academic year. I intend to roll out this activity to Level 2 students as well as Foundation Degree

students this year to see if the response to the activity changes in any way.

Research consulted: McNiff J (2017) *Action Research: All You Need to Know*, Sage, London

Implications for other teachers:

- Equality and Diversity including British Values; useful representations of differing cultures, but need to be mindful of the potential for discrimination to occur in discussions
- The ability to critique and recognise "fake news" has enhanced analytical and critical thinking skills
- Citizenship, Prevent, safeguarding; Wall presents sensitive but relevant topics for discussion in a safe and controlled environment
- Enhanced Functional Skills-communication, ICT, research, referencing, reflection, maths and English skills.
- "Ready extension task" within the classroom; students directed to choose a topic from the "Wall", then to summarise, using skim and scan skills.
- Increased student independent working with less reliance on tutor to provide examples

6. Assessing Level 1 students' starting points and distance travelled in practical cookery sessions. *(Graham Kennedy)*

This research shows the benefit of practitioner researchers conducting their own investigations to see what practices actually work with learners from outside of the mainstream who have particular needs which may not be addressed by general resources. This inclusive approach shows attention to a diverse audience and is particularly useful in demonstrating that trying to design resources that "work" is always a question of trial and error; the professional teacher has to experiment with different approaches and gradually develop responsive resources according to the learner feedback.

It is really useful to see that Graham offers possibilities for further development, which is how professionals continue to refine their expert practice. Attaching the simple template is a very useful resource for other teachers, as this provides a clear example which they can adapt for their own very specific contexts.

Background situation

I wanted to establish a solid starting point for my learners. I need this information to discover what they already know and following on from that obviously what I need to teach them.

I chose my Level 1 entry level catering group to conduct this action research project.

In the past I have always established a starting point for learners and differentiated accordingly. I have also assessed if learning has taken place by evaluation and questioning at the end of sessions. However, the purpose of this research was to make this learning "visible" – to evidence that this was happening and the learners are actively involved with assessment process.

Experimenting in the kitchen (Making a difference)

My learners in this group are very diverse and challenging. Three members of the group find that basic social interaction as in speaking or answering a question is very difficult. I have never experienced such an anxious quiet and timid group of learners. As a result of this particular challenge my original ideas have had to be adapted in order to get the learners to engage with my research. Initially I tried group interaction with a target to indicate what they already know before starting the session. This was unsuccessful due the learner's shyness and lack of confidence. I found that other strategies I tried still ended up being tutor-led and not learner-led as I intended.

Findings from my experiment

- Learning is taking place and can be evidenced by individual learners.
- Students did engage with the resource once I adapted it.
- When questioned retention appears to have increased.
- All the learners said they found this useful and that it helped them in theory lessons also.
- These learners have very limited academic achievements so they find it difficult to know how to improve and develop what they know or have learned.
- The latest version of the session work sheet I now use *(attached)* is effective although it appears a little basic or immature using smiley faces. However, my learners have all responded to using this format and it is proving to be a useful tool to start and end sessions.

Next steps

- Continue to use the resource to build their confidence and overcome difficulties with learning.
- I will experiment with developmental ideas to encourage learners to improve stretch and challenge what they know and understand.
- Share this resource and my findings with colleagues and colleges to adapt as they wish.

Research Evidence:

1. Practical session plans
2. Scheme of work for 2017-18 showing where the resource was used
3. Completed practical session work sheets
4. Recap tests at beginning of sessions
5. Students' feedback

Further reflections

Are there ways that tutor feedback to learners could be given orally so that learners could record their feedback on the form?

7. Helping Level 1 Painting & Decorating learners record and act on live feedback. *(James Wade)*

This research account shows how practitioners in workshops and classrooms have to persevere in ensuring that good ideas from above can actually be translated into workable practices in busy workshops with learners who have not always been successful in their studies. It is important that the teacher persisted to help overcome learners' reluctance to begin writing, but the eventual success of the initiative gave both the teacher and the student confidence.

It is important to record the encouragement from the project leader to keep going with the experiment despite the learners' reluctance at the beginning. It is also useful to reflect on the value of the quotes from published research which appear at the end of the research. James' research has tested these ideas in practice and showed how the overarching ideas can be modified and adapted to meet particular settings. James' work validates the theory, and his "Next steps" – rolling the trial out to other groups – shows he has confidence in the practical results of his experiment.

Background situation

There is pressure to find new ways that learners can take control of their own learning, so it was proposed that during workshop development sessions, learners would record live, feedback about improvement points from the tutor/assessor, and plan how they are going to implement any actions from this live feedback, showing how their performance could possibly improve if these actions were successfully implemented.

Making a change in my teaching

The creation of this change would hopefully serve two purposes: firstly, the learners' performance would actually improve and in final assessments for the units gain a higher grade. Secondly, by the learner actually improving their performance in a task, they may take a greater pride in their progress at college and extend this 'ownership' to other parts of their vocational qualification, and hopefully, to the whole of their study programme.

Results from experiment

A new document was created and trialled with some level one learners. Not all learners were keen on this initially as they viewed it as 'extra work', claiming that "it was a practical session so we shouldn't have to do any writing!" However, with a little gentle persuasion, many learners started to use this document to their advantage. The feedback which they recorded often helped them to improve, such as "holding a paint brush correctly", or "increase cutting-in accuracy from 5mm to 3mm" which would then increase their grade from a pass to a merit.

During workshop practice sessions a measurable improvement was noticed in 'cutting in' accuracy with many learners. This has been documented in workshop assessment planning books, and although final assessments for this unit have not as yet taken place it is anticipated that the vast majority of learners will achieve high grades.

Next steps

If this trial proves successful I will extend it to cover the wallpapering unit with the current level one cohort and I will use it with all groups (L1, L2 & L3) on full time study programmes.

Research consulted

'Students need to know how to improve, not how they compare'.

http://geoffpetty.com/grading-students-work-degrades-their-learning-use-medal-and-mission-feedback-instead/

'A necessary precondition for a student to act on a gap is that she/he is given a comment that enables her/him to do so: the comments must be usable by the student. Consequently, it is the quality, not just the quantity, of feedback that merits our closest attention'

(Sadler, 1998, 84)

8. Helping Level 3 childcare students broaden their awareness of child care and education issues in the news. *(Karen Hopkins)*

Karen's study shows how teachers can find ways to engage students in those wider social issues which subject specialists can find problematic to address. Karen used attention-grabbing headlines from news stories to capture students' interest in social and political issues. She then used her role as teacher to steer discussion so that students were able to appreciate the relevance of current affairs in their subject, and improve the students' understanding about democracy in practice.

Her approach meant moving outside of the mainstream educational traditions of books, newspapers and television, and being willing to accommodate students' preferred technologies by using apps. She has developed students' confidence to draw on current affairs so that they can show their understanding of social and political issues, but she has also helped them develop independence in using QR codes for academic purposes.

A feature of this practitioner research is the evident surprise that teachers experience when their research alerts them to students' hidden potential and improves their expectations for involving students more actively in future activities.

Background situation

My eleven 1st year and ten 2nd year Level 3 Childcare students don't view the News as a source of research, so they are never aware of news stories which could potentially affect them in the working environment.

Making a change in my teaching

Initially I brought in a holistic round up of subject relevant topics that had appeared in the news,

'London Private School may let boys wear skirts'

'Cost of Tories 'free breakfasts' could treble'

'Schools to decide on going ahead with exams after attack'

'Free school dinners and why they may be scrapped'

'Britain the nation that can't even boil an egg'

'Top Steiner school ordered to close by government over child safety fears.'

I asked the students to read the headlines and asked them to choose the ones that had captured their attention. We then discussed what had caught their attention and why, and proceeded to develop points of interest out of the story, showing how it would impact on their particular professional practice.

Findings from my experiment

- These topics helped students to immediately "buy in" to discussions on equality, diversity and poverty
- We also discussed acts of terrorism and knowledge of PREVENT and British values and showed the relevance of some politics!!
- We then looked at our subject knowledge, such as quality time parents spend with their children teaching them 'independence skills' such as boiling an egg, with some surprising answers from students
- Students used sources of news, other than the TV. They looked at apps, showing use of technology
- Encouraging students to occasionally look at apps and to bring in a news feature that has interested them, or is topic related
- This was very good at helping the students open up in discussions and finding their voices, I have found that now when presenting work to the group, they have more confidence in speaking up.

Next steps

- I will continue to encourage students to look at newsfeeds which are relevant, and at the start of a new unit of study to try to find historical newsfeeds that will fit, e.g. safeguarding, *'Father's agony as he tells inquest how his one-year-old daughter 'choked to death on jelly cube during playtime at nursery'*
- To encourage students to use QR codes, so other students have to activate the code, to ensure all have viewed the story

- I will also make sure that different student's present news feeds, so that all students demonstrate their awareness equally, to prevent the same group of students researching all the work.

Next steps

- To encourage wider thinking, ie, links to E + D, local communities with regards to children with disabilities.

Research Evidence:

- Initial collection of newsfeeds
- Unit of study related newsfeed to be used as research starting points.
- Classwork 1 : Examples of students' QR code newsfeed

Research consulted

Patel N (2003) "One example of a method is the holistic approach itself. It was conceived as a method of interaction to develop learners into critical, confident and independent individuals whilst disseminating discipline knowledge. (A Holistic Approach to Learning and Teaching Interaction: Factors in the Development of Critical Learners)

9. Improving "Kick Start" attendance, punctuality and engagement for learners on an Entry level Course. *(Kim Sheil & Graham Bristow)*

This collaborative research emphasises the benefits from tutors and LSAs using the research opportunity to review their practice and to address the fundamental challenges which students present to staff. The "meet and greet" ritual has proven effective, and the systematic study of the effects has helped staff appreciate how students' low self-image might be addressed and how initial attention to individuals can have a very positive effect on the subsequent session.

This was consolidated through the introduction of students' personal learning records, which also helped address students' perceptions about the status of their programme and encouraged students to value the lesson and invest in the programme. The success of the initiative is validated through a simple measure that has credibility with teachers – punctuality has improved, and this is indicative of a fundamental change in the attitude and motivation of the whole class.

The research also indicates that collaborative research does not only give improved insights about the learners; it also helps staff learn about how to improve the working relationship between teachers and support assistants, and the benefits of working closely on meeting learners' needs.

Background situation

Kick Start students have generally enrolled on the course because they have been unable to progress to the next level on their chosen course of study, are unsure of their career path, or have been removed from another course due to behavioural issues. As a result, some students come to us with a feeling of low self-worth coupled with a false image that the course is of low status. This can lead to poor attendance, punctuality and failure to engage in lessons.

Making a change in my teaching

1. There is strong evidence that the first five minutes of a lesson are critical. We decided that rather than be waiting in class for students to arrive we would meet them at the door with a smile, greet them by name and praise them for their punctuality and attendance.
2. To give them a sense of achievement we introduced individual learning records. This is the students own personal notebook where they record at the beginning of each lesson what they understand about the topic and at the end of the lesson what they have learned.

Findings from my experiment

1. Students appeared to enjoy the interaction before entering the classroom and the lesson starting.
2. Students had an opportunity to discuss any issues before the class started whereas in the past these would often emerge during the lesson causing disruption.
3. Attendance has improved compared to the initial period in previous years. One student commented that they look forward to coming to class.
4. Punctuality has improved compared to previous years and students have a clear understanding the even one or two minutes late for class is still late for class.
5. Students are using the individual learning records and are able to monitor their own progress.
6. Students have said that being able to clearly see their own progress gives them a sense of achievement.

Next steps

We will continue with the "meet and greet" as it has now become an expected ritual at the start of the day. Individual Learning Records are also something we will continue with and encourage students to expand their use of them by perhaps making notes of areas they are having difficulty with and using it as an additional form of communication between student and tutor/LSA. We hope, by continuing to expect the same standards of behaviour and engagement as any other course, that Kick Start students will view the course as of value and status and as a valuable rung on their career ladder.

Research Evidence:

1. Attendance records
2. Lateness records
3. Individual Learning records
4. Student feedback
5. Feedback from Learning Area Manager

LAM Feedback.
"Compared to previous years there has been a noticeable improvement in both punctuality and attendance in the Kickstart 17 A group. I believe this is due to the efforts made by the tutor and LSA to make the group feel welcome and valued."

Research consulted

Dix, P. (2017) When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour

10. Managing an assessor's caseload more effectively whilst providing an "outstanding" visit to a work-based learner. *(Leanne Smith)*

This is a very good example of an intelligent attempt to improve practice by piloting an experiment with one learner. Although the initiative wasn't completed as intended due to technical problems, the process of setting up the research created a valuable opportunity for the assessor to reconsider the process of better managing her caseload, and to better appreciate the differences between observation of practice, and professional discussions with learners.

It would also have been useful to explore further some of the student's reflections on this process; how did planning for a "FaceTime" discussion change the student's degree of preparation for her assessment? Had she needed to be more prepared? What had she learned from this experience?

The real contribution of this honest attempt outlining "what *didn't* work" as planned, is that it also provides a valuable starting point for other practitioner-researchers thinking of using video-communication with learners; how might they build on this?

Background situation

As part of my assessor role within Bishop Auckland College I spend a lot of the time on the road visiting placements (which I thoroughly enjoy) and this takes up a good part of any day. The background behind my idea was that this could potentially cut down travelling time and mileage expenses and it could also mean I manage my caseload more effectively over time.

Making a change in my teaching

I booked my visit as normal with my learner a month in advance. However, rather than the visit taking place face-to-face we had arranged a date and time for us to carry out the "FaceTime" call. Initially I had planned on using skype to carry out the assessment, but from the outset this proved difficult to record. I therefore thought FaceTime may be the better option. I gained consent from my learner and she was happy to go ahead with this. I explained the process and what it would involve. At this stage I also asked my learner's thoughts/opinion on this approach.

Findings from my experiment

- Although the planning of the visit went well and the learner was happy to carry out the assessment via facetime the actual recording of the assessment method did not work.
- I tried two ways of recording the call. Looking into the face time function and also using a separate app that I have on the iPhone whilst using facetime.

Next steps

- Although this method did not work for the guided discussion I feel that this would be an ideal opportunity to use through observation rather than guided discussion. As long as the individual learner is happy to be recorded as part of the observation I could write my notes as I am using face time and I can also provide feedback to both the learner and the employer so that the full assessment cycle still takes place.

Next steps

- I would still be very interested in finding a way to use FaceTime or Skype to carry out a guided discussion. We do have a similar function on an e-portfolio which we use however, this does cost money due to licencing.

Research Evidence:

- Visit template on smart assessor
- A witness statement can be provided by the learner to discuss her findings and thoughts on the process

Further reflections:

On reflection even though this assessment process did not work as well as I had hoped it has given me food for thought about how I can manage my caseload more effectively and still provide my learners with an outstanding visit whilst reducing costs.

11. Helping Level 3 Pre-Uniformed students to gain higher grades and improve their studentship skills. *(Rachel Thompson)*

This research attempted a variety of parallel activities in order to improve students' commitment to the academic aspects of a practical Pre-Uniformed Services course, and her emphasis was upon raising students' expectations of themselves as effective students. The related activities were synchronised so that students attended to the various aspects of being a successful student – effectively interpreting the assignment requirements; planning their assignments: showing awareness of their personal learning goals; and working with their fellow students to get effective feedback before submitting their assignments.

This is a good example of how teacher-researchers (unlike researchers working in a laboratory) cannot separate all of the different factors influencing their experiments, and Rachel also became aware of how she needed to rethink how she organised her classroom activities, and had to think more about how she taught, rather than what she taught; for example, she prioritised students' attention to the criteria verbs for achieving merits and distinctions, and scheduled peer-checking activities at a crucial time before submission dates. Her improved awareness of her practice was stimulated by gathering a range of evidence about her students' performance and ensuring that the students were also aware of the implications of this evidence to help them take more responsibility for their learning.

Background situation

My BTEC L3 uniformed public service students generally hand their assignments in on time but some learners do not include the correct information to help them gain the higher grades. I wanted to find a way to improve their studentship skills to help overcome some of the barriers they face when writing assignments.

Making a change in my teaching

I decided to implement a few things to enable the students to be more focused in their studies.

- Each learner has been given a student file in which they must organise in a way I have specified, complete with contents page. This is to help them with their studies so they are not losing their notes and so they understand how to keep their work organised and tidy – this will also help them in the RWE.

- Each learner had to do a task in week 1 whereby they were taught about the differences between the key grading criteria verbs – "describe", "analyse" and "evaluate". In previous years, similar tasks were carried out once assignments had been issued; I realised this practice was too late and I had missed the golden opportunity doing this in induction week.

- Within each file, students have been given their higher grades target and this is in the front of the file so it is in their eye line as soon as their files are opened and their SMART targets linked to this are being addressed more often. They are required to print their SMART targets once updated and this print out goes in their files (this task is built in to their e-learning session).

- For every assignment - as a class activity (in small groups, normally around tables) learners create an outline of their assignments and start to think about which sub-headings etc should be included in their work. I have tried this firstly with no worksheet, and then also supplied a pro-forma worksheet to each group. They found the task easier once I gave them a structure and process to think through.

- With each assignment, the students as a small group must create a list of 'what the teacher is looking for'

- I as the tutor have created my own list of what should be included – like a tick list for each assignment

- Lastly we are using peer-reviewing a week before the work is due to allow students to identify errors in each other's work.

Findings from my experiment

- Learners feel more organised having a file and like that they own it and have somewhere safe to keep their notes. They are clear of their target grade and have set themselves SMART targets to achieve these.

- The verb word task has certainly helped with learner work as in sessions we recap on them often and learners are understanding them more and more each lesson. A couple of learners still struggle with the differences between some words but it is hoped that with reinforcement, over time they will become second nature to them. I have also tried to explain these words in familiar contexts to them i.e analyse which Simpsons' character is the best or evaluate which TV show is best out of two options

they gave. This has made a big difference.

- I have insisted that every time a student logs into their computer they open Giraffe and Emails every time so they can get into the habit of checking their targets and email updates – this does not happen with many of the learners yet, so obviously needs more 'selling in' to them and my expectations made clear to the learners from the start of the new year.

- The learners' creating an outline of their assignments has been received very well. It is completed as a small group, then whole class activity. The small group aspect gives students the confidence to speak, if they are normally shy. It lets them think about their work instead of me just giving them an outline. I do give them a process to think through but I try not to give them the sub headings etc.

- Students came up with a check list of what the tutor is looking for in their work. I found this very vague and they had included spelling and grammar and just the P/M/D criteria as opposed to breaking this down which is what I was looking for. However this was the first time they had composed a tick list so I hope next time with my guidance this will improve. For the first assignment of the year I created my own tick list for them to use in addition to their own. In time I hope their lists will replace mine.

- Lastly, using their tick list and mine, they have peer reviewed each other's work in a 30-minute session the week before their work is due. I have found this very valuable to the learner and to myself as it has improved the standard of learner work and has reduced the amount of re submissions, however if the learners do not bring draft work then this task is not very valuable.

Next steps

- Continue with all of the above new practices as they all seem to have had a positive impact.

- Re iterate the need to open Giraffe and student emails every day to check these as it is the student's responsibility. It is about making them responsible!

- Mix up the groups for the small group activity to ensure the stronger learners are not 'taking over' and letting the learners who are struggling to sit back too much.

- Work with the learners for their next assignment and encourage them to create a more specific check list using mine from assignment 1 as a template.

- I may change the design of the peer assessment form with each assignment but this is a work in progress.

Resources I used:

- Student files and dividers

- TES resources for assignment writing

- E learning tasks to show SMART targets have been completed as learners have to take a screen shot of their work for their files (under the E learning section)

- Learner check list for first assignment

- Tutor check list for first assignment

- Peer assessment form

- Student verbal feedback to enhance the process throughout

Research consulted

Various resources from TES website

Mike Gershon consultancy

Further reflections

It is about raising their skillset, aspirations and expectations of themselves. It is important to encourage them to arrive at their own conclusions and not always give the learners the answers straight away just because it is the quickest option. Resilience and determination must also be developed through their studies – not just knowledge.

12. English teachers collaborating to encourage a college-wide approach for increasing grades in GCSE English. *(Sadie Briggs and Marian Robson)*

This large-scale project attempted to have a college-wide reach, and the approach is ambitious and purposeful. The learning from this project comes from feedback from vocational tutors' and students' descriptions of how they have practised English in subject relevant settings. The writers intelligently identify a collection of individual case-studies as providing evidence of how far the initiative has been realised across a range of areas.

It would be interesting to try and monitor where tutors and students still require further help as this year-long project is rolled out, and also to track which English topics require most consolidation to help vocational tutors embed these features with confidence. An unintended, yet very welcome benefit, is that vocational and subject specialist teachers are beginning to understand, and tackle, the challenges faced by English teachers; this can only lead to more productive relationships benefiting learners.

Background situation

The GCSE English Language course is taught over three hours a week, for 30 weeks from September to June. This can be a challenging task especially with mixed ability classes and sporadic attendance from many learners. The GCSE English syllabus has changed from the legacy A*- G to the new 9-1 syllabus and this is the first year in which we are implementing this at Bishop Auckland College. This is completely new to many of our learners, as they have no background from this at school because they have attended college for the last 2+ years and studied either the legacy GCSE or Functional Skills.

Attendance to lessons has been an issue over the last few years and consequently due to controlled assessments now being removed from the new GCSE English syllabus, students have two exams at the end of the year. Everything a student needs to know for the exams is taught in lesson and if attendance is failing, they will miss vital information which is needed for the exams in June. The new GCSE English qualification also has 20% awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) in the writing section. This is now a graded section of the exam, which is higher than previous years. SPaG is a skill many learners have problem areas with.

Making a change in my teaching

At the start of the year the students have all undertaken a screening test on BKSB to assess their learning abilities. These results have been logged and disseminated to individual tutors. Alongside this the students have undertaken a piece of independent, free writing to assess writing ability and spelling, punctuation and grammar. In addition, all students were given a 'starting point on language features' sheet in September 2017. On this the students were asked to honestly grade themselves as either:

- **Green** – Very confident to describe the meaning and give an example of a language features,
- **Amber** – I have an idea but still a little unsure, or
- **Red** – I have no idea ☹.

This has been used as a tool to assess the students starting point and where they feel they are in September. Going forward through the year, as a starter of each lesson we have been teaching a different language feature, starting with a basic noun and then progressing to more advanced features such as personification and onomatopoeia.

The assessments at the start of the year has allowed English teachers and tutors to learn where a student is starting so that we can assess progress throughout the year and finally where they are following the final exams in June. We have concentrated on language features and SPaG as they are reoccurring issues in GCSE and there is a large emphasis on this in the new exams.

To promote a collaborative college approach, the English team have sent out emails to all staff at the start of each week outlining what will be taught in the GCSE English lessons and how they can help to embed this into their teaching in vocational areas. This multi-disciplinary approach will support areas covered in English lessons and will enable student to have the information reinforced in their learning areas. This will also increase the main tutors' knowledge of what is being taught and help them to think of ideas how they can embed the new GCSE English syllabus into vocational areas. As many tutors have varying literacy skills, this will be reinforced with resources and posters. We also plan to circulate around staff weekly meeting, to discuss any

questions or concerns they may have.

We are creating a culture of 'working together', involving all vocational and English teachers. We would like tutors to help the learners to succeed. The importance of this is the effect on entries to level three courses, which require grades 4 or 5 and higher education as many universities are asking for a minimum of a grade 5 for entry in GCSE English Language.

The collaboration to stretch and challenge learners and bringing what is being taught in GCSE English into subject areas, helps the learners to think about how GCSE links to subject areas and increase awareness of how necessary achieving in English is to their future prospects. This way tutors can also see the progression of the learners and are more involved to identify weaker areas which they require support.

Targets on Giraffe have been set to reflect areas which they require more help and support. Once written work is given back, students have to set their own independent targets based on feedback from the English tutors. This is to help students to self-reflect on where they are and areas which they need to improve on to reach higher grades. This should help students to understand their targets more clearly than a tutor setting them. It is also accessed by vocational tutors who can see how they have performed. And areas of improvement.

Case studies of students gaining C grades are to be given to tutors and uploaded to Moodle and notice boards. This will allow tutors and learners to see distance travelled by learners. We have had many students come to us on Entry Functional Skills courses and progress to gain GCSE grades.

This year we are including the spoken language task in the learners EEP session. They are to create a PowerPoint on a subject on their choice in the independent learning time. This means we are bringing GCSE English into every area of the students' experience in college.

Department technical dictionaries are to be encouraged across college to not only help students learn technical language but also help with spelling.

In the teaching and learning sessions, which are held weekly, the maths and English specialists are on a carousel with the other Advanced Practitioners offering 'Top Tips Maths and English Workshops'. This is to give the vocational tutors quick ways of how we teach certain subjects such as volume, area, apostrophes, language features and how they can embed them into their main subjects. It is also an open discussion to find out different methods in which staff use and to share good practise.

Results from experiment

- Tutors regularly replied to the weekly emails expressing thanks to the summary of what is being taught in the week and how they could use this to embed into vocational areas. – link to CIF.
- Students have mentioned that they have been practising language features and SPaG in main subjects and so evidence of this is being embedded.
- It is encouraging main tutors to think of ways to support the English team in order to increase grades.
- It is increasing the awareness in the college of the difficulties which the English team face and tutors are being supportive.

- It is useful for staff to understand what is being taught and what students need to know in order to pass their exams.

Next steps

- We will **continue with the project throughout the 17/18** academic year.
- Students will complete their personal opinion on whether they have expanded their knowledge on language features/SPaG from where they started in September.
- Students will be asked whether they noticed a change in their learning. Case studies will be created from vocational tutors and learners on their English experience throughout college.
- Rescreening following exams to assess progression.
- Analysis of GCSE results in August 2018.

Research evidence

- Scheme of work for 2017-2018 showing each language feature and focal point through the year.
- Common inspection framework
- Self-evaluation sheet from the students.

13. Helping Adult learners to assess their starting points in a Community Learning session. *(Sue Richards)*

This research explored the practical challenges of trying to get mature students to self-assess and produce reliable estimations of their starting points. It is very interesting to see how an approach gets mixed reactions from different groups of learners, with "success criteria" producing a mixed response, and some learners attempting to adapt their responses to the questions.

The learning from this pilot has been productive, with the researcher redesigning the self-assessment tool to try to cater for the differing needs of Entry-level and Level 2 learners. The researcher is using this initial research to try and engage with the higher level groups and enlist their support in finding a more appropriate way of gaining accurate and confident initial self-assessments. Students' insights will help the teacher provide the right amount of support and challenge for new learners on Community Learning programmes.

Background situation

I work in Community Learning with groups of adults studying Functional Skills, maths and English. When students are beginning a new topic they need to assess their starting point so that appropriate and individualised resources and activities can be utilised. I have found that my maths and English students quite often underestimate their knowledge after looking at the topic and the success criteria or have asked for clarification on what will be covered which has led to an extended explanation of the topic and content that virtually becomes a taught session. As the groups are made up of adults it is important that they assess themselves based on their previous experiences and knowledge and do not allow their self-confidence, or lack of it, to set the level.

Making a change in my teaching

I developed a set of 5 short questions that reflected the content of the topic to allow students to test their skills in relation to the topic with more confidence. I then trialled this with small groups of students at different levels by asking them to assess their starting points using my usual resource and then offering the questions and an opportunity to amend their starting point with reference to their successful answers. I then asked the students to comment on the process to allow me to develop further.

Findings from my experiment

- Entry level learners found the questions helpful in understanding the topic and deciding their starting point. The same learners did not find the success criteria useful.
- L1/L2 learners appreciated the purpose of the success criteria and most found the questions excessive when assessing their starting point.
- Using 5 questions was not appropriate as some learners chose their starting point to match the number of correct questions.

Next steps

- Extend the use of questions with entry level students to cover maths and English topics.
- Adapt the number of questions to cover the topic but not relate directly to the starting point score.
- Continue to work with higher level groups to determine a more appropriate way to allow a more confident self-assessment.

Research Evidence:

- Example of self-assessment sheet
- Feedback from students

Research consulted

- "Andragogy – Adult Learning Theory (Knowles)," in Learning Theories, September 30, 2017, https://www.learning-theories.com/andragogy-adult-learning-theory-knowles.html.
- Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning: Pillars of Adult Learning Theory
  Sharan B. Merriam