

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT -
LISTEN TO LEARN**

New College Stamford

New College Stamford (2020) *Final Report on the OTLA Phase 6 (English) Project - Listen to Learn*. London: ETF.

© The Education and Training Foundation
(2020)

This resource was produced as part of Phase 6 of the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (English) programme which was funded by the Education and Training Foundation. To learn more about the programme and this project read the summary booklet <https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3157>

The programme was delivered by -



CLAIRE COLLINS
consultancy



Contents

Final Report - Listen to Learn	2
Case Studies	7

Final Report - Listen to Learn

New College Stamford



This project report details how New College Stamford aimed to introduce a different dimension to the teaching and learning of GCSE English resits by producing and using audio recordings of written texts as a resource to engage learners and develop their reading and interpretation skills.

Summary

The development of audio recordings as a teaching and learning tool has emerged as a successful development although we feel that we still need further time for this approach to be fully embraced by our students.

Our project team consisted of the Head of Department and two English lecturers who between them developed the new resources and implemented the development plan. We worked with 2 classes of students from a mixed vocational background who had achieved a GCSE English grade 3 and were currently resitting their GCSE.

Rationale

The aim of the project was to use audio versions of GCSE texts to engage learners' interest and then use them in different ways to support the development of learners' comprehension and interpretation skills when tackling the written versions.

The students would have access to recordings of the texts with a focus first on using their listening skills to understand and interpret the content. As their confidence grew through familiarity with audio versions of the texts, we would then focus more fully on reading and interpreting the written versions.

We also hoped that the project activities would generally improve students' reading skills and thereby enhance their interpretation of articles, reports, scenes and speeches in other curriculum areas.

In our original project proposal, we planned to develop a set of recordings of the texts used by lecturers in GCSE English lessons and make them available to a chosen set of students to act as a pilot study.

The plan was for recordings to be produced in-house by students to encourage their engagement, and for these resources to be shared prior to, during and after lessons via Google Sites to encourage independent learning.

Approach

The project was designed to generate qualitative data by means of semi-structured interviews with staff and students, and quantitative data through the review of attendance data, the impact on achievement and the level of access to the resources. The impact of the study would also consider the active engagement of our students and their involvement in recording the texts to be used in class in the autumn term. The research process was facilitated by the project leader while our Head of Department for English & Maths and English lecturers formed the project working team and led on the implementation plan.

The project was split into 2 parts:

The first part of our study was planned to begin before autumn half term and focused on the introduction of a chosen English text into a GCSE English resit lesson through small group discussions centred around the techniques used by the writer. Our students were asked to consider what the text would sound like if it were being acted out on the radio, or if it were an audio recording. They were then encouraged to consider how the writer had written the scene. This was followed by an opportunity for students to produce a recording of how they felt the piece should be read out and how a 'listening' audience might respond.

As part of the activity students were asked to share their views and to consider:

- How useful did they think it would be if they could listen to the piece as well as read the text?
- Did they find the activity useful in helping them to interpret the text and identify the writer's techniques?
- Did they feel more confident having carried out the group activity? And so on ...

The second part of the study introduced a new piece of text with students first listening to an audio recording of the chosen text. The lesson then carried on as per usual. The purpose was to discover whether listening to the text first might aid our

students to become more engaged with the material and responsive to learning about the writing techniques used by the writer.

Again, as part of this activity our students were asked to share their views and to consider:

- How helpful did they think it was to listen to the new piece of text before reading it?
- Did listening beforehand make the piece of text more accessible?
- Was the activity useful in helping the students to interpret the text and identify the writer's techniques?
- Is this something the students would readily do again?

We also planned to post the recording to a Google site so that students could access the recording outside the classroom. This would give them opportunity to listen to the text before they came to class, and again in class before reading and engaging with the questions set around the text.

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

Our aim was to introduce an element of team building in the classroom with students working in small groups and attempting to record their own interpretation of one of the English texts introduced in their GCSE lesson. However, it soon became obvious that it was too early to introduce such an exercise as our students gave a mixed response to it and struggled to fully comprehend what was expected of them. Consequently, we reconsidered our plans and introduced an element of flipped learning to the lessons instead. This allowed our students to access the audio version of the GCSE text and carry out some independent study in order to become familiar with the text. It was also an opportunity for them to trial a different learning format and become more confident and prepared for their next lesson.

Another activity that was positively introduced was for our students to access the audio recording of a GCSE text in a 15-minute starter activity prior to a mock assessment. This approach has proved to support our students in developing the confidence to engage with the materials, giving them another learning strategy to help their progress and development in the autumn term. It was seen as a successful student engagement tool to help boost their confidence while developing their skills in the interpretation of texts.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Following the project, we have initiated the following:

Prior to the November assessment, we decided to play the audio recording in the first 15 minutes of the lesson to act as a stimulus and a focus for our students. From observations it was clear that this starter activity helped to engage students in directing their attention to the text.

It was also decided that our Study Centre, which offers 1-1 and small group support for English, would also become involved in taking the pilot forward into the winter term.

Additionally, the audio recordings evolved throughout the term: initially they were recorded in silence with no background noise. After feedback from our lecturers and students, another recording was produced with a natural or white noise background.

Our Head of Department observed that the recorded audio acted as a 'class stabilizer' as students quickly settled to the task. The activity also acted as an interesting, shared, inclusive and social event with all students paying attention and taking part in a class-wide shared exercise that generated discussion.

Interestingly, our students engaged more with audio produced with background noise for several reasons. For example, they said it was easier to imagine the scenes in their minds and from a technological point of view the audio was easier to edit.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The project has enabled us to develop a new approach to helping students understand and interpret GCSE English Language texts.

Feedback from our two lecturers involved in delivering the project highlighted the following key points:

- several of our ESOL students have shown an improvement in their assessment marks after listening to the recordings prior to their mock assessments;
- our Construction students showed a positive improvement of approximately 3% increase in a mock exam in the autumn term;
- the use of the activity helped to support some students with their time management and these students were able to complete all questions without running out of time as they had previously for the Paper 2 question.

It is important to note that this teaching tool was used as part of a stepped approach to supporting the development of skills for reading and interpreting text. It was considered that the teaching tool was appropriate for the autumn term to improve student engagement and support the development of interpretation skills.

Additionally, the approach is to be extended and used in 1-1 support sessions, again with the aim to build student confidence and act as an aid to develop and build reading and interpretation skills. Two of our GCSE English classes took part in the project. One group was a mixed class of students from across various curriculum areas and the second class was made up of Construction students. There was a mixed response from the students in regard to the introduction of the use of the audio recordings.

Student observations included:

"I don't think listening to the words improved my understanding but it did help me focus more on what to do."

“I could understand some complicated words when they were read out because when I read them, I did not know how to say them.”

“Reading was quite slow at times which is boring but relaxing.”

“The voice was more natural than the reading pen ... it flowed better.”

Learning from this project

What went well

Key feedback from the project which demonstrates learning includes:

- A number of our students felt it was a novel and engaging way to connect to texts
- students that were not happy reading or did not find it an enjoyable exercise felt this was an activity that included them
- less confident students felt they could access the audio for clarification instead of asking for support
- students who read slowly felt they could access the text more quickly than if they were initially reading on their own

Even better if:

- Going forward a greater adoption of the whole approach of the project within the team and the college is necessary if it is to have continued impact through the academic year.
- More planning will be required to identify texts and have them recorded and published in good time to produce an effective resource bank.
- More practice is needed in technical skills of recording the audio files to improve the sound, pace and vocal output. For example, most students preferred a musical bed or background to accompany the text, which requires more time and effort. If the resources are popular, we hope that our students would become involved in the activity themselves and therefore have a stronger sense of ownership.

Case Studies

The project followed an action research approach which in this case meant implementation of a key idea centred around the introduction of audio recordings and a review of the impact on teaching and learning. Two classes were used as a basis for the action research.

Case Study 1

Case study 1 will consider the processes that supported the classroom practice of developing the audio recordings, upskilling lecturers to access the resource in class and the Head of Department's generation of the materials.

The original plan was to work with Performing Arts students to create the texts as part of an engaging induction exercise. This would also continue to promote positive English and maths links to vocational areas. However, there were challenges with the logistics of implementing such an activity within the induction timeframe.

The 2 lecturers were able to identify suitable texts for recording rapidly. As a result, the Head of Department (having a background in audio technology) was able to secure simple resources in order to create the audio files and ensure they were readily accessible.

Initially the recording of texts proved challenging. The reading and editing of the texts proved time-consuming. Background noise was a regular interruption as was some unfamiliarity with the software. Concerns about the overall quality of the audio resulted in several re-recordings that also contributed to the time factor.

Once several of the recordings were created there was some staff CPD to ensure the team could confidently access the recordings and play them in their classrooms. This involved setting up audio equipment and identifying a shared space online where everyone could access the material.

This proved to be key as increased lecturer confidence ensured they were more willing to engage with the material. Equally, over time the purpose of the audio recordings evolved as the lecturers identified more uses for them.

Initial feedback was positive overall however there was key feedback received on a regular basis that had a significant impact on how the material was recorded:

- The pace of the recording was too slow.
- The voice used was 'boring'.
- Many students fed back that the lack of background noise was distracting.

After taking the feedback on board the texts were reworked with background noise (such as news beds and environmental sounds like winds and waves) to create more immersion and interaction with the recordings.

Feedback was more positive after this alteration and student engagement visibly improved according to the lecturers.

As students and lecturers became more comfortable with integrating the resources into lesson the recordings evolved into a both a flipped learning exercise and a focussing resource prior to a timed writing assessment.

Using the audio recordings to focus students before the writing task proved especially successful, with good feedback from both students and lecturers.

With regards to specific progress, one lecturer fed back that there was 3% improvement in mock exams results from September to November 19 and the other lecturer reported that her 2 ESOL students had improved by a minimum of 4 marks.

Other observations included that overall, most students were able to complete the written exercise when compared to previous tasks and that attendance did not appear to be impacted by this project.

Head of Department and lecturers both found the project to be engaging and are keen to manage the logistics to ensure more resources and a greater range of talent are used for next academic year.

What Went Well ...

- Students fed back that audio felt more natural than using the reading pens.
- Students explained that they could understand some complicated words when they were read out because they did not understand how to pronounce them.
- Lecturers noticed that ESOL students improved their mock exam scores once the recorded texts were introduced. They fed back that they felt more familiar with the texts.
- Some students reported that could focus more on the text by listening to the audio.

Even Better If ...

- Greater variety of voice talent needed to keep students interested.
- Can take a long time to produce to material, making it challenging to work to deadlines.
- More integration into college platform software and system (Google Sites / Classroom)

Case Study 2

Case study 2 will look at the impact on the teaching role in the classroom.

One of the key focuses of the project was aimed at reviewing the changes that the 2 lecturers implemented in their teaching and learning approaches as they introduced the audio recordings into their lessons.

There were 2 focus points for the lecturers:

1. "What went well" in the project,
2. and "Even better if" ?

Initially, the audio recordings were played as part of the lesson either prior to reading the text or part of reading the text itself. This proved to be an interesting activity as an introduction to the project and set the scene.

However, the activity quickly developed and the two lecturers found that an element of flipped learning could be introduced by referring to the texts in the lesson prior to which they will be studied. This allowed the students to access to the text (as an audio file or as a reading document)

By releasing the material early there has been positive feedback from the students who need more time to process large amounts of text effectively. This has enabled a flipped learning approach although has required more planning on the part of the two lecturers to ensure material was prepared for the right lessons.

Additionally, a second successful adaptation included revising the teaching and learning approach to setting up and supporting an in class practice assessment.

As part of the practice exam week in November, the audio recording was played for the first 15 minutes of the lesson. This activity appeared to help focus students and acted as a good starter activity to engage the class to focus on the assessment.

What Went Well ...

- Some students explained it was a novel and engaging way to connect to texts.
- Students that had not enjoy reading felt this was an activity that included them.
- Less confident students could access the audio for clarification instead of asking for support.
- Students that read slowly felt they could access the text quicker than if they were reading on their own.
- Material was accessible via lots of media

Even Better If ...

- Initial issues with the accessing the technological resources to record.
- Still have preference for tutor to read aloud the material and clarify points throughout
- Greater adoption is necessary to have continued impact through the academic year.