OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT - VISUALISE... WITH A VISUALISER!

Suffolk New College

Suffolk New College (2020) *Final Report on the OTLA Phase 6 (English) Project - Visualise… with a visualiser!* London: ETF.

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Final Report - Visualise... with a visualiser!

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This project aimed to explore the use of a visualiser in improving the way we model text annotation and different stages of the writing process. We hoped to improve our students' literacy skills, enhance their educational experience in the classroom and improve GCSE English high grades.

Summary

Suffolk New College is a mixed, further education college located in central Ipswich. The English Team consists of a Head of School (myself), a Curriculum Co-ordinator and 15 teachers with a mixture of full and part time contracts. The project has included all of the team, but focused primarily on those who teach GCSE English Language.

Rationale

I have been teaching literacy with post-16 students for 19 years. It remains a challenge. The condition of funding requires that all students enrolling at college with a grade 3 re-take the GCSE exam. The percentage of students on GCSE resit programmes in FE colleges that leave with a grade 4 or higher is low and dropping – 30% nationally.

As Project Leader I wanted to address the weak reading and writing skills presented by many of our students. Often, they have grappled with these skills throughout

school. A high percentage (approximately 30%) have additional needs including dyslexia and other barriers to learning.

I wanted to implement the use of a visualiser as a new teaching strategy and methodology with the aim of improving teacher/peer modelling, engagement and learning across the English team. I felt that this approach has been promoted and used far more effectively in schools than within FE. School teachers frequently make assertions such as, "`*My visualiser has been a game changer in the classroom!*" I felt certain this was something that could hugely improve our student experience. With nearly 20 years of teaching experience, how had I not used one before?

By increasing the percentage of students leaving with a GCSE pass at grade 4 and above, our hope was also to improve the career prospects and life chances of our learners, an aspiration which lies at the heart of our values and is the reason why we work in this area of further education.

Approach

As Project Leader I used my role as Head of School to purchase five visualisers and arranged for the accompanying software to be installed on our computers. I then arranged CPD to embed their use throughout the curriculum.

The timing of the CPD was key as it had to take place before the planned lessons were underway in the autumn term. We therefore arranged a twilight workshop session in September through the ETF Shaping Success programme.

The aim was to help teachers use visualisers to model the processes of text annotation and different stages of the writing process using authentic texts and exam questions. We planned to encourage students to work collaboratively with teachers and other learners by offering suggestions on the text in question.

The team had already been using the visualisers on their own and as they were of the 'plug in and play' variety they did not pose any difficulty in terms of displaying the work in the classroom. However, the CPD provided opportunities for staff to link their use to the GCSE assessment criteria and to demonstrate to learners how they could 'level up' their work.

Progress on the project was an agenda item on a bi-weekly meeting which monitored progress through the academic year using achievement data gathered from mock assessments, staff reflections, students' focus group discussions and comparison of student work pre and post project.

The research process was shaped by the use of regular reflective questionnaires, opportunities for discussion in team meetings and the facilitation of a student focus group.

We set up and used a Padlet board (Appendix 1) and Google Forms to enable teachers to provide ongoing feedback on their use of the visualiser and to share examples of resources they used.

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

Prior to the project, teachers used examples of pre-annotated texts but I felt that what students needed was to see and to be engaged in the planning and thought processes that went behind them.

The Padlet board provides an overview of staff members' findings which indicate the whole process has been extremely beneficial to all participants:

> *"Yes, I do think it had a positive impact on engagement – I think it was especially useful for learners who may not have understood the task as they were doing it. It consolidates the task very well."*
>
> *"Students seem to enjoy seeing me annotating work – and making mistakes!"*
>
> *"Great lesson using the visualiser today. The students were engaged throughout…Overall, it built the students' confidence as well as my own!"*
>
> *"It's definitely having a bit of an impact."*

Teachers have also begun to use the visualiser to make video recordings of text annotation activities with learners that can be shared with others after the session as revision resources (see link to video in Appendix 1).

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Increased modelling using a visualiser has now become a key feature of our English lessons and is included in our curriculum planning documents which have been shared with SLT.

As project lead, I shared the findings of the project at the regional English Practitioners Meeting at Cambridge Regional College in December 2019 which was well received. I was able to share examples of students' work prior to the implementation of the new approach and compare them with those that were produced after the introduction of the visualiser. The level of detail included and the first glimpses of their enhanced skills in language analysis were clear to see and incredibly exciting!

In terms of equality and diversity, the increased use of visualisers in modelling provides a 'step by step' approach to both writing and annotation that is particularly beneficial for those students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and other additional support needs.

Our approach will be rolled out and discussed with all lecturers across the college at a CPD event to take place before Easter as a practical strategy for embedding literacy skills and good classroom practice.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

I held a focus group at the end of November when students discussed their English lessons and the impact of the visualiser project in more depth. I carried out a force field analysis and supported them in recording their comments by offering some sentence starters.

Students were asked to identify three things that they felt helped them and three things that hindered them in the classroom. Some of their comments included:

> *"Annotations on the visualiser help me to understand the text."*
>
> *"The visualiser helps me to see where I went wrong."*
>
> *"It makes it easier to see where I have gone wrong on an exam question."*
>
> *"It makes it easier to understand my teacher's explanations when they are linked to specific words that I can see visually."*

Students' discussion points and examples of work have been collected and can be seen on the Padlet.

We gathered quantitative data that show an improvement in grades from Assessment 1 to Mock 1. For example, the number of students on a grade 4 at initial assessment was 38. This increased to 164 for the first mock (Appendix 2).

Additional observations by teachers indicated an improvement in student behaviour, a higher level of engagement and greater enjoyment of the lessons. Please see the Padlet for case studies of students' work.

Learning from this project

We felt that the facility to record text annotation activities using the visualisers was extremely useful as it enabled us to create an excellent catch up resource for learners who do not attend because of a range of difficult personal circumstances.

The main conclusions that I have drawn from the impact of the visualisers include:
1. The level of single word analysis has increased
2. The level of language feature analysis is greater
3. Connotations and associations are more clearly linked to a word or phrase
4. The accuracy of the identification of word classes or language features has increased
5. Students' confidence in writing a response to exam style questions with pertinent and appropriate quotations has increased
6. Higher order thinking skills are developed
7. Verbal feedback is more immediate
8. Students are more able to set clear expectations of book work
9. Students can compare work more clearly at Level 2 and Level 3 (grade 3 or 4).

However, our use of a visualiser has not led to an improvement in all our students' mock results despite the positive data recorded earlier in this report. For some, the level of annotation and analysis rehearsed in the classroom was not reflected in their

mock exams. Unfortunately, many students remain unmotivated and dis-engaged from the entire re-take 'journey' and this continues to be a challenge for me and my colleagues and a focus for any future action research activity.

A conclusion I fully endorse is that *"We cannot learn if we do not see it first"* (Larsen, 2020). Our learners need direct instruction in the skills of annotating text and the planning of writing and they need to be able to see these processes made explicit through teacher-led modelling. On that basis, our use of a visualiser is an approach that I will continue to promote and use across the department.

Appendix 1 - Padlet

https://padlet.com/c_collins2/9f3czi457gszlimd

nb This is a snapshot taken at the end of the project. The original may or may not still be available here https://padlet.com/louisabaddiley1/1th6aha6yxme and may have been updated since this snapshot was taken.

This Padlet contains –

- feedback from student group
- feedback comments from teachers
- links to PowerPoint slides containing exemplars of student work before and after the introduction of visualisers
- link to video recordings of text annotation undertaken with learners e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLVxjhRHrcUHBzBED6BwQafz5sZtY17N3n&v=czbAZ_mj-Rs

Appendix 2 - Student results from assessments

Ass	Course	Totals	Refer	1	2	3	4 +	Total
A 1	GCSE F/T	720	304	101	153	124	38	720
		%	41%	14%	21.5%	17.4%	6.1%	100%
A 3		720	223	56	79	198	164	720
			31%	7%	11%	28%	23%	100%
% inc						60.9	277	

Appendix 3 – Data from staff feedback of the CPD.

I feel more confident in applying the mark scheme to model to learners how to improve their responses
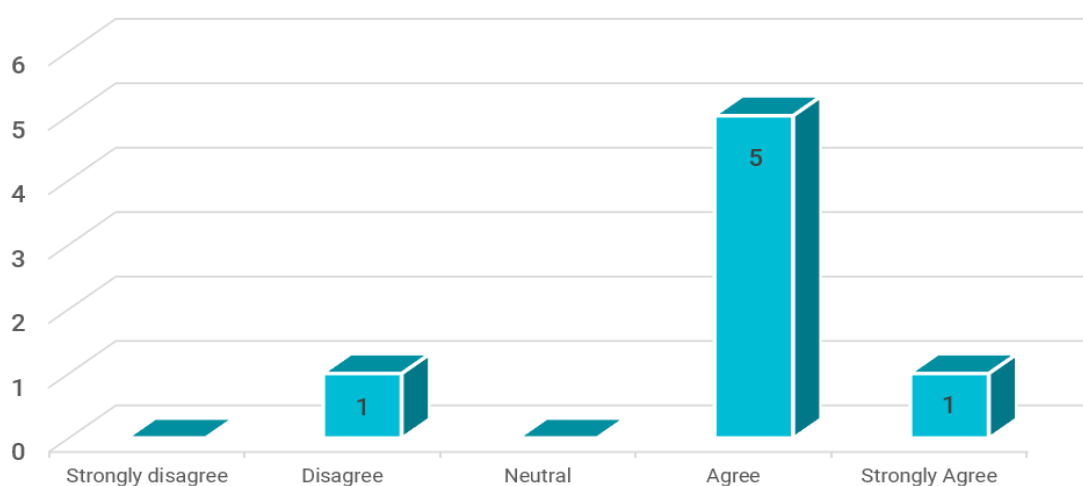
7 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

28.6%
71.4%
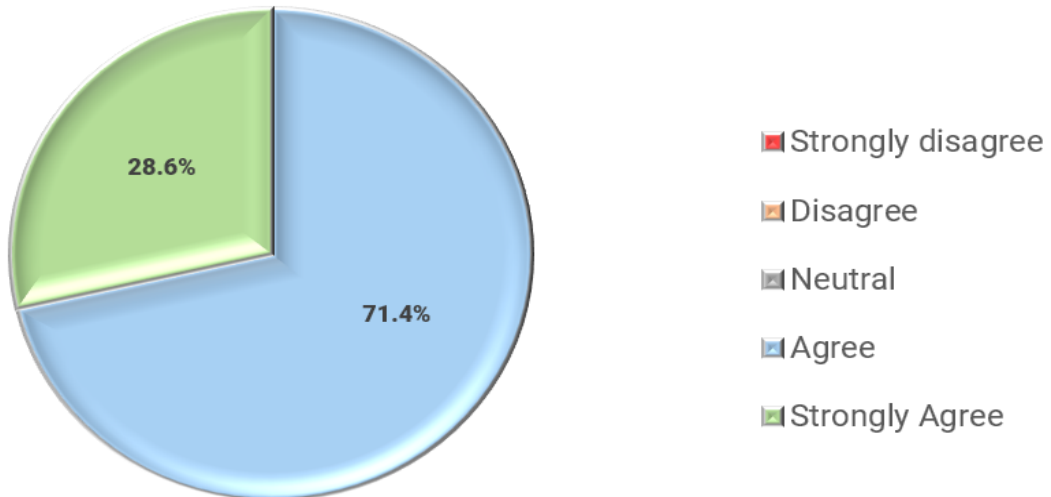
I feel that increased modelling will improve my teaching practice

7 responses

Chart Area

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

42.9%
57.1%
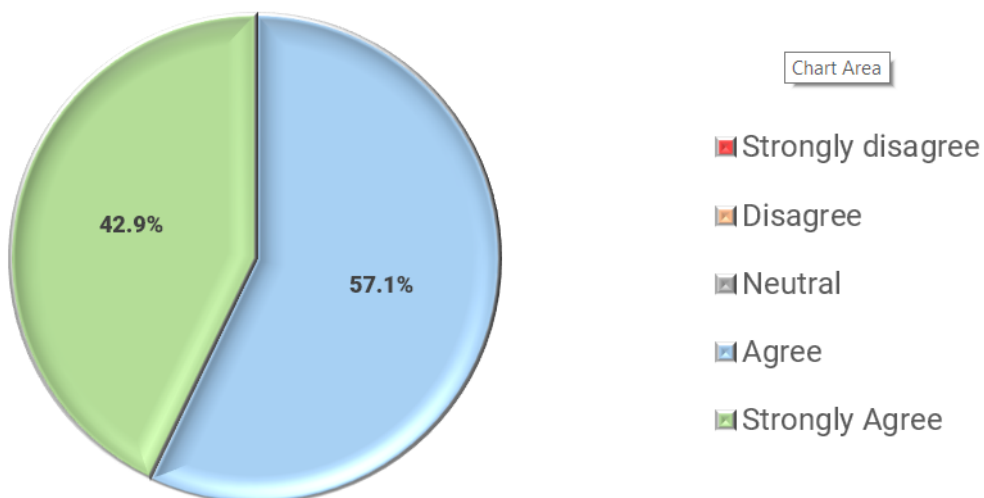
I gained some ideas on using the visualiser

7 responses

Any other comments you would like to make?

5 responses

It was really useful to reflect on how we can support our learners to boost their points to push them over the grade 4 boundary

V. useful hints and tips on the applications of the markscheme. Just need to practice using the visualiser now. thanks for a great training session.

I wish it had been a full day of training as I think increased practice applying the mark scheme--with and without the visualiser--would have been really valuable for the whole team.

I would still like to know of any new ideas/innovations in terms of using the visualiser to help support learning in the classroom.

Thank you for providing the training - it was really useful and gave me lots of ideas to put into practise

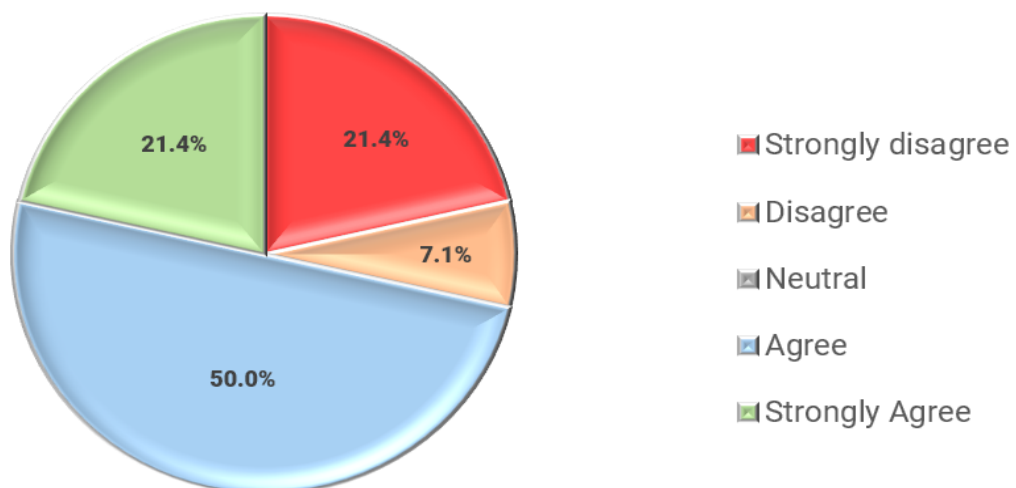# Appendix 4 - Initial Student feedback from focus group

## I am attending my English lessons regularly

14 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

28.6%
71.4%
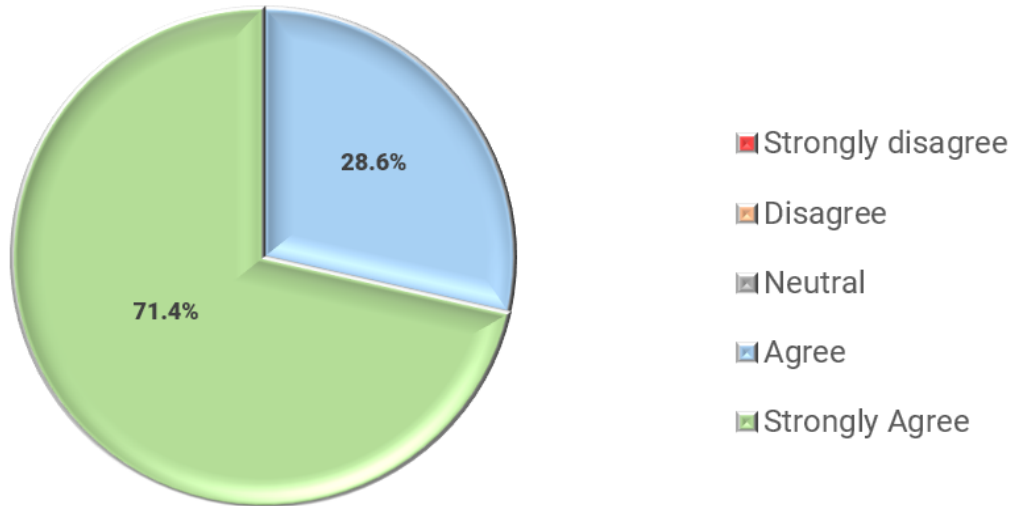
I find it beneficial when my teacher uses the visualiser to show me how to annotate a text

14 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

21.4%
21.4%
7.1%
50.0%

I find it beneficial when my teacher uses the visualiser to demonstrate how to write a response to a question

14 responses

- 7.1%
- 35.7%
- 57.1%

Legend:
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
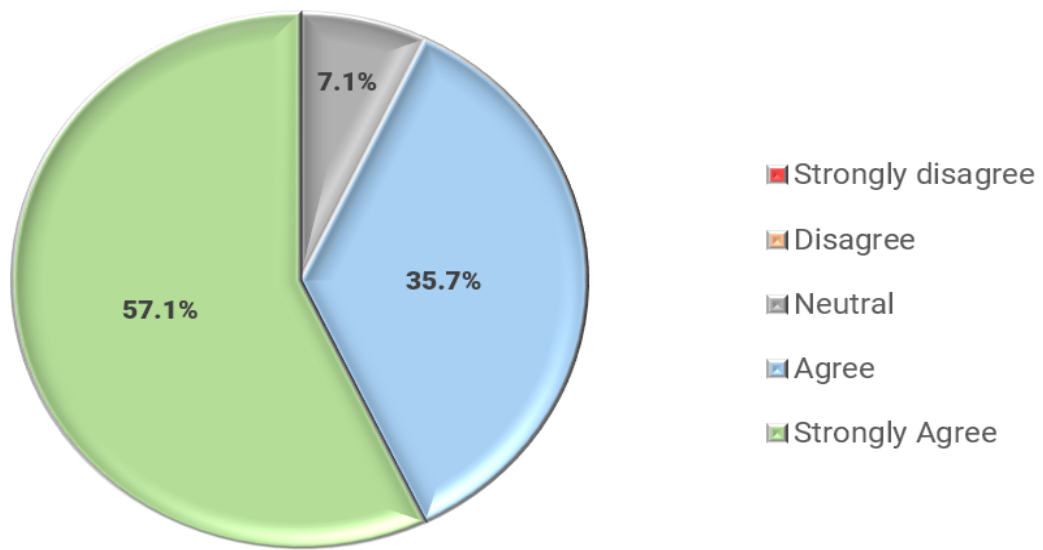
Appendix 5 - Questionnaire used to gather staff feedback

Staff reflections – OTLA visualiser project

Reflect back over the past term:

1) How confident do you feel in using the visualisers from a practical/technological perspective?

2) What have been the high points of using the visualisers?

3) What have been the low points of using the visualiser?

4) What have you found to be the advantages of using the visualiser?

5) What have been the disadvantages of using the visualiser?

6) How has the visualiser evolved your personal best practice?

7) Case study – choose a class and consider their learning journey. Use the back of the questionnaire to map this out.

Consider:

1) Their start

2) When you first introduced the visualiser

3) This week

Appendix 6 - References

- A blog post by Sarah Larsen

  Visualisers - how they can be used to live model and give immediate verbal feedback

  https://sarahlarsen.school.blog/2019/09/24/visualisers-how-they-can-be-used-to-live-model-and-give-immediate-verbal-feedback/
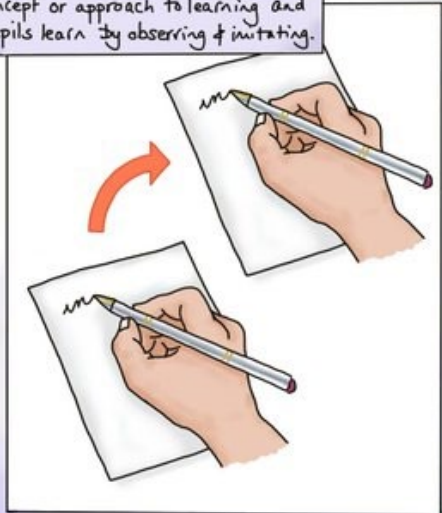
- A useful infographic from Impact Wales

  https://twitter.com/ImpactWales/status/1059011211159916544