

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT - DIGITAL
APPROACHES TO RETHINKING THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM IN A POST-16
GCSE ENGLISH RESIT CONTEXT, INFORMED BY STUDENT ACTION RESEARCH
Warrington & Vale Royal College**

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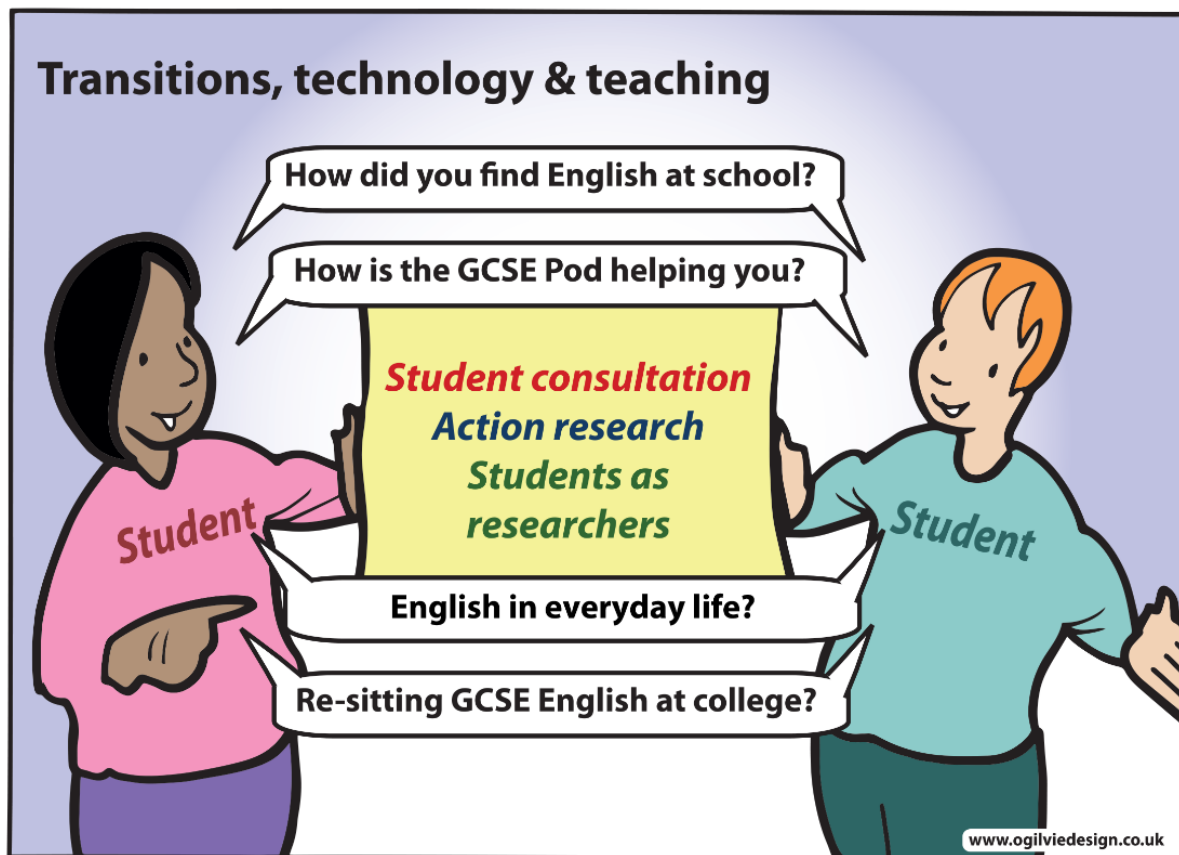


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Final Report - Digital approaches to rethinking the English classroom in a post-16 GCSE English resit context, informed by student action research

Warrington & Vale Royal College



This project has involved funded developmental work on pedagogically 'rethinking' the English classroom for post-16 provision in the challenging context of addressing the needs of the GCSE English resit student cohort.

Summary

We wanted to develop a particular focus on the digital aspect in our newly-formed approach to English, specifically into the potential impact this focus might have had on student engagement. We took the opportunities offered by the new 'holistic' Education Inspection Framework to inform our thinking as we set out to explore how to address the demands of the GCSE curriculum in ways that provided a different approach from that of an everyday school experience.

Part of our proposal included structural and content change: this involved a different timetabling strategy and also introducing the use of GCSEPod to our students. This project has also given us a rich opportunity to develop our student-consultation work through student action research.

Rationale

46% of our 16-18 cohort come to our college without English GCSE at grade 9-4, compared to 40% nationally; 17.6% of our students receive free college meals; 2.5% are looked-after children. Our cohort therefore consists of significant numbers of students who would be deemed vulnerable.

The demands of the GCSE English curriculum are significant for this resit cohort, many of whom struggled with English at school. We were keen to use this project as an opportunity to engage further with the cohort, find out more about their school experience and explore how it might compare to the regular English experience at college.

We know that our resit students are often quite disengaged and resentful at the compulsory nature of the GCSE resit, so we have been experimenting with finding ways to further engage them; this has involved exploring different forms of delivery and using more relevant content as a bridge to the exam-oriented school-based curriculum.

Through this project, we have attempted to find innovative ways to address the challenge presented by achievement gaps, especially in relation to vulnerable groups. All twenty-four participants had previously achieved either no English qualification or Grade 1 or 2 at GCSE. We wanted to find ways to bring about a step change in relation to their English skills, with a particular focus on reading skills, through a 'reimagined' approach. This, we thought, would raise student confidence and motivation to improve their performance and resilience. We hoped to find a more successful, 'fresh', relevant-to-students approach to teaching, learning and assessment of English which would have a positive impact on achievement, attendance and student experience.

One success is that we have achieved the time-tabling change, planned as part of our initial thinking when devising this project. English is now 'delivered' in three-hour sessions, to include a 'workshop', and we are establishing more creative approaches within these sessions. We intended to do this through developing collaborative and digital cross-college work, and by working with digital 'experts' at college, experimenting with targeted technology and consulting with our students to monitor, refine and review the impact we might be having in their learning. We believe we have achieved this to some extent.

Approach

We decided to adopt the following strategies: we would research and develop the GCSE English resit experience by exploring digital approaches in the classroom; ensure that training would be available for English teachers to facilitate this; devise a more holistic scheme of learning with a workshop approach; change timetabling to a 3-hour session.

In the autumn term, three English resit classes, made up predominantly of construction students (our most challenging area, including motor vehicle, plumbing,

carpentry and joinery, and bricklaying,) were identified as appropriate participants for the research project.

We purchased the GCSEPod (a digital English 'revision' resource that could identify which skills needed development and recommend appropriate tailor-made support, based on student responses) and introduced it to classes as a 'mobile' revision resource. The idea of the GCSEPod was to use it to support student learning inside and outside the classroom.

Student surveys were carried out at the start of the project with the three groups. The aim of the starter-survey was to explore students' prior learning experience of GCSE English, and their perspectives and attitudes in response to their English experience at school. It was also to gather information on their views regarding the effectiveness of using technology as a 'teaching, learning and assessment' tool. The survey responses were used to inform the students we were now calling our *students-as-researchers* in their own discussions about GCSE English.



Figure 12d-1: Students as researchers

This phase of student action-research involved twelve students; comprising a mixture from our student council and Level 3 courses, all of whom had already achieved GCSE English. We formed a student research group that would meet during Wednesday lunchtimes. The formation of this group took place after a one-day training day to 'embed' the project in the students-as-researchers framework; the aim also was to raise awareness about issues around the GCSE resits in a wider educational context and forge the group together as a 'working group'.



Figure 12d-2: Student researcher working group

These workshops took a participatory form, and were highly productive with a good deal of lively discussion. Each student was given a 'project notebook' in which to record ideas. Communication was sustained through the use of the *WhatsApp* group we created, as well as by uploading notes onto the student research site we had created on Google drive.

One-to-one interviews and focus groups were conducted by student researchers. After the first session we held a review session during which we reflected on how the process was proceeding and could be improved where necessary: for example, to arrange as focus groups with boy/girl mix leading the session rather than two boys or two girls. One of the reasons for this arrangement was that boy respondents seemed reluctant when faced with two girls leading the session.

The one-to-one sessions seemed to produce the most responses: students seemed more guarded in the focus group sessions, possibly because they were too aware of others so were not keen to speak out.

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

This work, once fully evaluated and disseminated, will inform our future planning and delivery of relevant training for teachers. The aim is then to roll it out to students within the English curriculum and as part of our embedding English skills cross-college. The changes we hope to see will be increased levels of attendance and better engagement in lessons; furthermore, we are already redesigning virtually all lessons. We hope to show a qualitative improvement in the work students produce,

both within and beyond the classroom (a further advantage of GCSEPod is that it tracks the degree of student engagement).

We hope these changes in pedagogical approaches to English teaching, learning and assessment will lead to a significant improvement in learner experience and translate into reducing current achievement gaps in the performance of our vulnerable students and improving the overall achievement rates of our students in terms of 'value added'.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There has been an increased amount of collaboration by many teams, and this has further enhanced the positive, supportive and working culture of our college: the teams include the English team, the 'Teaching and Learning' team, the Creative & Media team, the Pastoral team, the IT network team, the Construction team, the Catering department, the Health and Social Care team, the Performing Arts Team and the Enrichment coordinator.

We hope that these changes in pedagogical approaches to English teaching, learning and assessment will lead to a significant impact on learner experience and translate into a reduction of the gaps in current achievement, as shown in the current performance of our vulnerable students, and thereby improving the overall achievement rates of our students in terms of 'value added'. Strategies including end of survey responses, actual end of year results combined with student responses in focus groups, and one-to-one meetings will provide us with some idea as to the extent of the impact of our project on students' learning.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Evidence of potential improvement in learners' rates of achievement, retention and progression will, we trust, emerge throughout the course of this academic year. We hope significant amounts of evidence to show improvement in achievement will come through in August.

We can already see an improvement in attendance from last year, from its then 83.5% (among 16-18 year olds) to the current 85.2% for end of January 2020. This result shows that attendance has improved rather than declined, itself an indication that changes we have made in our approach could be having a positive impact. We trust we will also have evidence generated from student responses after an evaluation of our research.

We hope to produce evidence to show a qualitative improvement in the work students produce, by tracking engagement both within and beyond the classroom (such tracking is a feature of GCSEPod).

Learning from this project

This 'pilot' project demonstrates the need for a much longer stretch of time in which to conduct a lengthier study into how the resource may best be used. Our findings so

far indicate that the Autumn term is a difficult term in which to begin a project of this kind in the context of an FE College. The reasons for this could include:

- Students spend some weeks settling into their classes/courses of study.
- Changes often take place as students switch around courses and/or classes.
- Teachers and students need time to settle in before the possible disruption of any further external pressures and/or processes.
- Induction is a major time-consuming activity during the first six weeks or so of the Autumn term.
- The GCSEPod didn't really get going until after Autumn half-term. Teachers needed training prior to its introduction, involving a good deal of time-consuming administration followed by initial teething problems, all needing to be resolved as students signed up to the course.
- Realistically the student action research group could not be fully established until after the student council had been formed; there were unforeseen staffing changes here which delayed the establishment of the new student council, from which student researchers were recruited.
- And then inspection hit, though we had been anticipating it. As a result, a good deal of time and energy were understandably taken up, a factor that interfered with a number of new initiatives such as this project, given that our capacity is quite stretched. However, the student action research group did become established at the end of the Autumn term, even though it did not really get going until the first week of the Spring term.

The summary so far reports the reality of the situation and its consequences. The upshot was to show the limits imposed by an unrealistic time frame that did not fit in with the academic rhythms, capacity and pressures in our FE College working year, whether as students or teachers.

In the event, our ambitious idea of developing Google classroom as a 'whole-college' digital approach that would further embed the knowledge, understanding and application of spelling, punctuation and grammar skills did not materialise. Sadly, we simply did not have the capacity to achieve this aim.

However, what this project does show is that this is a very exciting and interesting field of study; there is a great need for researching the effects of the current English curriculum on post-16 students on vocational courses in far greater depth and detail than is currently the case.

It is valuable for us to hear from the students themselves, and their teachers, about how they think they could best develop their English skills to maximum effect in terms of their chosen 'vocation'. It would also be valuable to know, at least broadly, the extent to which the current system does or does not fulfil these needs and wishes.

It would also be useful to learn about the resit cohort's school experience of English and the impact this may have had on their engagement with English skills, knowledge and understanding. What we have learned so far from this project is that, given half the chance, students may have a lot to say about their education, to one another and to 'us' as 'educators'.

We have also learned that student-led action research has great potential; we have witnessed the energy, enthusiasm and ideas generated when students start doing their own research. Our experience was that students who participated as researchers in this project had greater opportunities to develop important necessary investigative and intellectual skills. They also broadened their engagement with the wider college community, worked with students cross-college and with teachers and other staff in a new, different capacity, now beyond 'the classroom'.

As part of this process, we have learned that using the GCSEPod has proved to be positive for most students and all teachers in the English resit classroom, albeit 95% agreed that they prefer working on their English and preparing for the exams in their GCSE English lessons with the teachers rather than using the GCSEPod.

We have also gained invaluable insight about the research process itself, the potential pitfalls and the strengths. One of the major pitfalls is lack of time, whereas social media platforms emerge as a major strength in terms of sustaining communication between our weekly workshop meetings.

Our '*Students-as-researchers*' strategy provides a useful and interesting research methodology to give us different insights into the teaching, learning and assessment process and the educational experience itself, from a student-led approach that is invaluable and necessary from a student perspective.

This project has served as an awareness-raising exercise, a means of reflection for those working both inside and outside a Post-16 context. It is important to appreciate what has been going on for these students at school and the way they bring this with them when they arrive in our classrooms. This helps us understand why the so-called 'failure' rate is so high.

From the student responses we gathered we are able to have some idea of what is faced, day in day out, by teachers and students as we try to break down the barriers that have been the experience of so many of these young people. When it comes to the subject of English, the alienating experience that has been enshrined in the GCSE English syllabus and its method of assessment is evident, experienced initially at school and then, unfortunately for many, continued at College. The responses from the students involved in our research confirm, to some extent, what we already know.

So many deeper and more probing questions and responses remain to be explored, discussed and acted upon. We have just managed to skim the surface in the limited window of time and resources available to us. So much more work needs to be done to address why it should be the case that school is not 'fit for purpose' for too many students, grounded as it is in the 'academic' model of education and which we in the Post-16 sector are left to try and fix.

Appendix 1 - GCSE POD response

In general terms, we have found the pod service to be really useful and have started to build some sessions around them. As part of the project we have utilised it in a number of ways:

- As a starter activity, e.g. on a creative writing workshop with learners using the pod to guide amendments to the work
- Session centric: using a pod on the subject of the session at the start, and returning to this throughout, using the multiple choice questions either within or at the end of a session (we have also used this alongside the printable versions of pods)
- As a plenary, just to recap on events or coverage of the session
- As a whole revision session: learners are given pods to complete throughout the session and feedback individually-this is often a facilitated part of a session (we have 3hr classes) and works well for the workshop duration of the session.
- Learners have been active outside of college for the first time since we introduced Pod last academic year.

Key findings, impact and outcomes

GCSE Pod was used with 3 focal groups consisting of construction and engineering students resitting GCSE English Language, with entry point qualifications of grade 1, 2 or 3.

Pod Feedback from learners and teachers:

- Excellent support tool for teachers, engaging learners with subject matter related to taught sessions.
- Revision tool used as starter/plenary/homework, effective in consolidating learning in the classroom (a strategy employed after feedback from last year's project).
- Multiple-choice quizzes, which self-mark, reduce workload for teachers, but offer instant feedback for learners.
- Boost playlists offer extensions on areas learners find difficult, offering further support to aid areas of development.
- Videos are accessible with subtitles for learners who require them.
- End survey key responses:
 - I like the option of working on the GCSE Pod as I can revise for my English at my own pace and select what I want to work on: 95% agreed with this statement*
 - I found answering questions on the GCSE English Pod was helpful: 95% agreed*
 - I'd recommend that students use the GCSE pod, throughout the year, to help them revise for the English exams:95% agreed*
 - Which part of the GCSE pod did you find the most useful? Videos 27%; Quizzes 18%; Both the same 45%; Neither 0*
 - I feel more positive about improving on my exam grade for GCSE English this year: 91% agreed*

Mixed response from student researchers' enquiry: some participants of the project found GCSEPOD helpful, and were more interested – those less 'switched on' were less interested, got the least from it, as exemplified in the following comments

- *Puts some stuff into context*
- *I want to do it because I want to succeed.*
- *It's just another thing to focus on.*
- *When I have used it - it does help me*
- *Don't like it, no motivation*
- *Yes, I think it's really helping me out - use videos- they help definitely.*
- *Tailored videos are boring*
- *They help how we plan out writing in the exam. Telling us what we need to add in sentences and that's really helping me out.*
- *Don't really help, used it a bit*
- *Extra help, a bit like revision – all good learning in class but then when you go home you end up forgetting so being able to go on that just helps.*
- *Video doesn't just tell you what it means – gives you examples, you're able to know what it is but also gives examples as well*
- *Yeah. They describe it more, explain it quite a lot, help you understand more.*
- *Videos help me understand specific subjects – if I misunderstand something*
- *Yeah, easier to listen to than like listening to the teacher going on*

Statistics:

- 552 total streams by learners (an increase from 357 last year)
- 100% participation
- Top performing student accessed 468 pods
- In-college usage was 87%, with 13% of access outside of college (this was 100% inside college last year)
- Top 3 pods accessed: Reading Fiction and Creative Writing; Reading and Writing Skills Identifying Inference; Comparing Texts. All 3 top pods are related to higher-weighted questions.
- Cumulative usage made steady growth throughout the project term: learners started to use the service more and more.

Outcomes:

- Main focal groups have accessed outside of the classroom for the first time since the service was introduced, suggesting a further willingness to engage in English revision in their own time (behaviour which is traditionally very hard to achieve/encourage).
- 65% increase in streams by learners in project focus, compared to learners in 18/19.
- Results analysis, when published, for 44 learners in the focal group (August 2020)
- Pod service rolled out to whole cohort (where applicable) encompassing an additional 410 active users from GCSE English resit courses.
- Outside of project focus, 259 pods have been accessed, with the top user streaming 48 pods thus far. 66% of this access has taken place in college, with

33% outside-evidence of Pod impacting on independent learning for learners not in project focus.

- Pod is adding to a culture of independent, focussed, individualised learning for re-sit learners

Appendix 2 - Student Action Research

Responses and key findings to GCSE English school /college experience

Preface to student responses

“More than a third of students failed to pass GCSEs in English and maths – and headteachers call for change; 35.6 % of students did not get a pass grade 4 'standard' pass or above in their English and maths GCSEs this summer” (2019)

Headteachers have criticised the exam system for condemning young people to failure after more than a third of state school pupils in England failed to pass **GCSE's** in English and maths.

Grade 4 is equivalent to the old C, and deemed by the Government to be a “standard” pass.

Geoff Barton, ASCL’s general secretary, said that the 35.6 per cent not achieving a grade 4 meant that more than **190,000** young people were judged to have “fell short” after 12 years of schooling.

“Every year this ‘forgotten third’ is a feature of our exam system not by accident but because it is baked in by the mechanism used to distribute grades,” he said.

“We cannot continue to accept that one-third of pupils must ‘fail’ in order that two-thirds succeed.” (<https://inews.co.uk/news/education/headteachers-students-fail-gcses-english-maths-816205>)

In this small student research ‘pilot’ project, we provide a ‘cameo’ sense of the GCSE student resit experience, experience behind the data. Through hearing some students themselves – in dialogue with other students - we are given an insight into how they have arrived at this point and what they think of the GCSE resit experience. There are no surprises really, it’s what we in Further Education know. Significant numbers of those who ‘fail’ GCSE English feel disenfranchised at school – ‘annexed off’ in some cases. Then they turn up in our resit classes in FE colleges. If nothing else, this project serves as an awareness -raising exercise – a validation and mirror, sense of reflection for those both working in FE and those ‘outside’ of this context. This project shows the connection between what happens at school and how it effects F.E. It is important to flesh out what has been going on for these students at school and the way that this is brought with them when they arrive in our classrooms. This helps us understand why the ‘failure’ rate is so high. From these student responses we get some idea of what is faced, day in day out, by teachers and students as we try to break down the barriers that experience has constructed with so many of these young people. When it comes to the subject of English, the alienating experience that has been enshrined in the GCSE English syllabus and its method of assessment is evident, as experienced at school and then, unfortunately for many, continued at College. These responses below, to some extent, confirm what we know.

There are so many more – deeper and more probing – questions to be asked and responses to be explored, discussed and acted upon. This is just a skimming across

the surface that we managed in the limited window of time and resources that we had available to us. There is so much more work to be done here to address this monumental issue: where school is not 'fit for purpose' for too many students, fixed as it is on the 'academic' model of education and which we in FE are left to try and 'fix'.

Please note: The quality of student response acts as an indicator of (1) time limitations (2) the level of student interest in even talking about English and their level of fluency when it comes to dialogue on this subject (3) that this was the student researchers first experience of such a process and we did not have the time to carry out 'dummy runs', for example, from which they could refine, review and re-draft questions as appropriate to first responses. This is a 'pilot' from which as much has been learned about the process in an FE context, as from the responses themselves.

Participant cohort context: 24 students participated in this research as 'subjects'- they were all male, construction students: brickwork, motor vehicle, plumbing, carpentry and joinery, the majority were on either level 1 or level 2 diploma courses. They were 'researched' by a core group of 6 level 3 students (some from the Student Council) studying on Level 3 programmes: (Health & Social Care, Performing Arts, Graphics): 4 boys and 2 girls.

Start of survey responses data included the following:

- 79% agreed with the statement that they wish they did not have to resit GCSE English
- 30% are taking the resit for the 2nd (or more than) time
- 72% agreed with the statement that they felt 'overlooked' at school
- 63% agreed with the statement that they had other things get in the way of school life
- 67% agreed that they often had cover teachers in their English lessons at school
- 69% agreed that they need more support in English lessons
- 42% agreed that they find it hard to ask for help in English lessons when struggling
- 38% agreed that they find independent working difficult
- 91% agreed that college makes them feel more motivated
- 95% agreed that they feel they get the support they need at college
- 91% agreed with the statement that they are happier on their college courses than they were at school
- 83% agreed with the statement that they feel better understood at college
- 96% agreed that they want to do well at college
- 91% agreed that they are ambitious and know that with hard work they could do well
- 100% agreed that they feel excited about future possibilities in their lives after college
- 88% agreed that they feel their overall college performance will change their course of life significantly

End of survey responses included:

- 91% agreed that they found answering questions and thinking about their experience of English at school and college, in this project, was helpful and helped them engage more with GCSE English and why it is important
- 95% agreed that they prefer working on their English and preparing for the exams in their GCSE English lessons with the teachers rather than using the GCSE POD
- 96% agreed that they prefer their English work being kept separate from their core vocational course
- 91% agreed that they are excited about future possibilities for me after college
- 82% disagreed with the statement that they don't think you can revise for English
- 73% agreed that they find it easier to ask for help in their English lessons at college than they did at school
- 86% agreed with the statement that English been the hardest part of their study at college
- 72% agreed that they would rather the GCSE English course was more directly relevant to their vocational course
- 60% agreed with the statement that it is easier at college when you are in English classes without people you know
- 82% agreed that their overall performance at college will change the course of their life significantly
- 81% agreed with the statement that they are glad to have the opportunity to retake GCSE English at college
- 73% agreed with the statement that 3 hour sessions once a week are better than 1.5 hour lessons twice a week

Survey evaluation

The majority of student participants wished they did not have to re-sit GCSE English; had unsatisfactory experiences of English at school for a range of reasons, including instability in the classroom due to preponderance of cover teachers and insufficient support when they struggled with the subject. The majority responded more positively to their experience of college life and the study of English; they agreed that they felt more motivated and better understood at college.

At the end of the project the majority agreed that they found the opportunity provided by this action research project to think and talk about their experience of English at school and college was helpful; it aided their engagement with the purpose of English.

The majority also agreed that English was a subject that could be revised but that English is the hardest part of their study at college. This is not a surprising finding to us. It is also interesting that the majority preferred the teaching by teachers rather than GCSEpod; the GCSEpod is very much an 'additional' teaching resource and this was clearly understood by students and perhaps also enabled them to value the teacher input more. GCSEPod, itself branded as a 'revision' tool, maybe

reinforced the idea and possibility of revision, through a digital approach. Revision can happen both within and beyond the classroom. A particularly powerful message for struggling 'resit' students.

Most students agreed they would rather study English that was more directly relevant to their vocational course, albeit still as a 'separate' subject. Many also agreed that they would find it easier to be in English classes without people they know (having revealed in student research that often in class at school they would get distracted with their 'mates' rather than focus on the lessons; of course full engagement due to inspiration of subject is preferable rather than removing friends from classes).

The majority agreed that they are glad to have the opportunity to retake GCCSE English even although at the start of the project most wished they did not have to retake it. This demonstrates that they do see value in the qualification, if not so much the actual course and content of study. Perhaps the process of the project helped them 'come around' much more to this way of thinking. Also, in terms of our rethinking the structure and timings of the sessions for English, the majority preferred the 3 hour 'workshop' slots we have created this year rather than 2 separate sessions throughout the week.

The attention of the research project itself in all probability informed some of these responses. The focus of the questions steered their thinking and certainly provides a substantial glimpse into their GCSE English re-sit worlds.

English skills overall questions - responses from students 1-1 and focus groups

1. Do you think English is important in everyday life? Why? (explain answer)

- *Basic English is alright...nothing like hyperboles, when are you going to use that?*
- *I have no idea*
- *Depends on what you're doing, what job you take on...writer – need them, computer job, use a lot – plumbing, brickwork – won't need them so much*
- *Never use it at all*
- *Use it to write down what you need – materials*
- *Don't use it that much*
- *Yes when you have to write letters and stuff like that – reading – just general stuff*
- *Need it for jobs and later on in life, social*
- *Just general knowledge, isn't it, obviously. When you're going about you might be able to understand most grammar and signs and you know be able to read, like say for instance if you work in an office you'd want to be able to read a power point. It's just basic skills really.*
- *Kind of - you talk it don't you so it's important*

Evaluative comment: not very forthcoming responses, vague generalised comments suggest disengagement and disinterest with English and anything it offers, signals that English GCSE is an irrelevance to them.

2. What opportunities do you think those with good English skills have, compared with those who don't have them so much?

- *Wider variety of opportunities*
- *Have a better chance of getting a better job*
- *You need your GCSEs to get the chance of getting a higher skilled job*
- *If you have to get a better job- if you have higher than someone with a grade 3*
- *You need decent English skills to do anything*
- *I'm not bad at English but exams are stressful, in the actual exam I just can't do it – I have a grade 2*
- *More likely to get into uni and better colleges and stuff and better jobs*
- *If you're good at English – you'll get further in life- more stuff you're able to do, compared to some who don't know English - not able to do important stuff – like stuff you'll need in further life – like writing letters- opportunities – higher paid jobs – working in offices*
- *Can get a job quicker than those who don't have GCSE*
- *Depends. A* compared to low grade obviously have more of a chance of understanding complicated language - obv with certain jobs you have to have certain qualifications so obv would affect your life - they get more opportunities in the future.*
- *Better jobs – leads to more well- paid jobs*

Evaluative comment: overriding awareness that good English skills bring better job opportunities and higher pay; responses make the point that 'failing English doesn't mean you're bad: exams are stressful'- and yet exam 'failure' makes people 'feel bad'.

3. VISUAL PROMPT OF PICS OF PEOPLE IN PROFESSIONAL WORK

Q: Looking at these pictures , how relevant do you think English skills are to these occupations –

Builders on building site

- *English not important*
- *Don't need any, just talk to colleagues*
- *Communication re Health & Safety*
- *Doing planning, team- work skills, health and safety forms*
- *Need to be able to write what they need for the job and need to communicate with people that work on the construction site*
- *Obv got to have communication with people. Obv got to understand a blueprint layout of what they have to do and stuff and that they have to be able to communicate, in a builders job obv you're like a cog – you have to work together – there can't be any communication things to effect it. More maths.*
- *Need to read stuff*

Paramedic

- *Vocal communication important*
- *Need English for that – to help calm patients down*
- *Loads of communication*
- *Fill out forms – need to be good on writing and spelling, good communication, be a good reader*
- *They need to keep people calm who've been seriously injured and communicate with co-workers, managers and write the incident up*
- *If you've got someone on the floor and you don't understand what they're saying if they're saying something, it's not really going to help. Obv you need to understand all different crowds of language and obv be able to speak to people confidently. They'd have to read medical forms and stuff like that I assume*
- *Need communication with other people*

Working in retail

- *Definitely, yes. Talking to people. All computerised now.*
- *Customers, stocking shelves – communication skills matter, polite, well-mannered and helping*
- *Not really*
- *Customers – giving them help*
- *Communication with customers, managers, co-workers*
- *In retail and stuff more mathematical problems an' that. It depends what she actually does, stacking shelves you don't need much English. Pretty basic stuff, not like it's that complicated.*

Dancing

- *You don't write much, using your body*
- *Communication by dance*
- *Not sure, don't need English for dancing*
- *Need to know what the routine is of what the dance is they're doing and they need to communicate with the others who are dancing*
- *Similar to most of other ones; you have to work together, choreograph, set a plan out and stuff – make sure there's a lot of communication going on, mostly communication – team building thing*

Music

- *Yes – like Stormzy*
- *Have to project your voice, be well spoken*

Pilot

- *Talking/introducing – can't have a dull voice. Give impression that he likes the job, talks to people in the airport*
- *Yep – talking*
- *Write down coordinates, people on board*
Communication with people on board the plane, also the writing what they need to do

- *I don't know. Pretty high qualifications I'm guessing. Similar to NHS people – got to know what they're doing - understand different crowds of English, confident speaker*
- *Need to communicate with people*

Evaluative comment: Again, responses reinforce disengagement with English skills, what they are, what they bring, their necessity and value in any job. Not very forthcoming responses, vague generalised comments suggest disengagement and disinterest with English and anything it offers, they consider English skills an irrelevance.

School experience questions

1. How did you find English at school?

- *Horrible; boring*
- *Teacher very interactive, funny, made it good – just that one teacher*
- *Didn't concentrate that much*
- *Lessons boring*
- *Bad teacher*
- *Got passed around a lot, teacher to teacher*
- *I got in an argument in every lesson*
- *Kept getting messed about*
- *Didn't know what to do*
- *The way they taught us is not the way I do it*
- *Put paragraph on the board and asked us to add to our story, then he's sat there marking books*
- *I didn't mess about that much compared to others- got moved about a lot- had loads of English and maths teachers – probably why I've not done that great – they all teach us different so...just kind of hard to keep changing*
- *Weren't great*
- *Boring*
- *Couldn't be bothered*
- *Behaviour'n that- mine- just wasn't interested in the subject*
- *Really annoying, the worst thing ever*
- *Weren't good at it. Always a couple of marks off passing, just couldn't get it*
- *Good. I had same teacher for 5 years so they knew how I worked – I built a relationship up with them so they know how I work and I know how they work*
- *Pretty good. Better than college is. English was alright; I just wasn't really that interested to be honest – it was just basic stuff – I felt like every day I was learning stuff I already knew and obv they'd sprinkle stuff then that you wouldn't know but it wasn't that interesting to get me hooked or anything. I didn't really enjoy it to be honest. I enjoyed messing around and stuff obv just fun to fuck about. I didn't really think anything else of it – just a bit of messing around.*
- *Pretty crap. I had about 8 teachers in year 11 so went through teachers so I didn't really turn up to lessons.*

Evaluative comment: Overriding sense of: instability, insecurity, boredom, irritation and not having their needs met, not being listened to; sense of conflict in the classrooms coming through and negative opinions about teachers and the ways that they teach; 'bad behaviour' means poor experience of English, disruption for all in the class, poor learning and poor attendance.

2. Were there any behaviour issues in English classes? Do you know why?

- *A few yeah*
- *Yes. I was in the higher sets – knuckled down –*
- *Lots of disruption - normally me making all the noise*
- *My school open plan, no sound boundary - if watching film in another class you'd end up watching the film*
- *Lots of messing about, just didn't want to be there.*
- *They didn't want to be there did they, so they just messed about*
- *Mainly ourselves.*
- *Can you blame yourself? Talking, not interested – so didn't turn up*
- *Really couldn't be bothered – missed English*
- *Many, really annoying – hard to communicate with teachers. Pupils interrupting, annoying people*
- *Not really disruptive but I was in classes with a lot of my mates so I was probably quite talkative to be fair.*
- *Yeah I was one of them ...the school what I was at thought I had ADHD but I weren't – I was just purely energy and I can't stay to sit down for ages , I've got to get up and move then I can sit down and concentrate. I was just when I can't concentrate I get distracted easily*
- *Yeah of course there was. You'd always have the person in class that mess around but it wasn't just – it was mainly the majority – the minority were the people that wanted to learn and stuff..and there wasn't really that much focus on pushing the actual learning ...feel like a lot of it was sort of just messing around. A social thing. ...obv we learnt along the way ...but not as much as we'd have done if we'd just cracked on with it to be honest cos in my high school it was such a local small town that everyone sort of knew each other so no matter what class you were in you'd be mates with like everyone pretty much in the class -so -if you wasn't- I just feel like – we'd just mess around and stuff and it wasn't really – learning wasn't the main push in the class that's all.*
- *New teacher every month – pretty bad. Teacher didn't really have an interest in trying with students- to focus-m cos they were going to be gone in a month anyway.*
- *Yeah, in set 4 everyone was screaming, it was like a joke.*

Evaluative comment: responses give a sense of lack of boundaries in lessons, disruption a regular feature of English lessons, lack of focus or concentration – prefer talking to their 'mates' ; 'bad behaviour' means poor experience of English, disruption for all in the class, poor learning and poor attendance emphasised in responses.

3. Did you feel pupils were pushed aside if they were in lower sets at school? Why do you think that was?

- *A few yeah.*
- *I had a mate who could knuckle down, teacher would help – but could be a bit of a clash and then teachers didn't want to know*
- *Setting was fair*
- *Teacher focussed on those doing the work*
- *The higher up sets, teachers get better pay grade if they get more to pass*
- *No*
- *They weren't doing so well, just couldn't do well*
- *No, got more help, more one-to-one work*
- *People in lower sets didn't put enough into it. Upper sets more advanced, found it easier than in lower sets. Lower sets just didn't care, messed about.*
- *No. It was just the way how they worked. The people in lower sets and the people in high sets were – well- their brain was more developed than the people in lower sets. They knew how to work, they knew what to do with the work, what the teachers set and that they had more expectations. No-one was left aside, they all taught the same but they just had people who had more expectations than others.*
- *Maybe cos they want higher success rates obv they'd focus a lot more on the students who weren't doing what they were supposed to be cos obv someone who's on the right track in doing everything, you don't really need to push them to do the right thing , you'd focus on the one's that aren't doing the right thing wouldn't you. You'd try to fix the bigger faults but..*
- *I think they were pushed to one side but not in a negative way but in a positive sort of way. I feel like there was a minority of people that they'd go : 'right well these are the people that learn the least' and they'd go ' right we want to push them with the most support we can to get them up to same level as everyone else just so that we've got a higher pass rate..*
- *We had this massive building of maths and English and the group that I was in wasn't in that building so we were just in this other sort of building so that when Ofsted and all of that would come in they wouldn't come to see us because they wouldn't know we were in that lesson so they'd all just go to the other big groups...we got support and that because everybody in my lesson kept messing about so there were about 4 teachers in one lesson.*
- *Yeah. Put in a lesson like stupid set for idiots.*

Evaluative comment: sense of hierarchy as consequence of 'setting': those in higher sets 'worth more'; relationship with teacher important – if you 'clashed' you would forgo getting support.

Student responses highlighted sense of rebellion coming through, negative views of lower sets – lower sets not interested in the subject.

4. What was the teaching like in school in your English classes? Can you give some examples of what you can remember – positives/negatives...?

- *I'm not going to pass this exam.*
- *Maybe I wasn't taking in all the information – switched off.*
- *Whenever people messed around the teacher sent them out.*
- *Teachers were shouting all the time.*
- *Bad, we had a rough group by year 10...in year 11 had to clear up the mess*
- *I would mess around – but teachers would still try to help me*
- *I got bored, then sent out.*
- *I hated school with a passion... Just the way they taught, all they'd do is write things on the board and say 'do that'.*
- *I was in isolation most of my time.*
- *Most of my time it was just lap top, watching a movie*
- *Our form teacher – he helped more in form - taught me how to structure for exams.*
- *Higher sets got better equipment and that.*
- *I was more focussed on what I wanted to do.*
- *With my teacher I couldn't be bothered listening- they didn't really teach – I just wanted to do what I'm doing now, I wanted to do bricklaying. I don't really need English or maths but I do really, well I don't really need English but I need maths...*
- *Teacher blanked me as I didn't want to go to (local sixth form college) like my mates.*
- *Everyday writing, I can do, memory stuff is difficult.*
- *Alright – teacher was fit – hate the voice*
- *Doing too much at once.*
- *Endlessly talking, in a positive mood, taught us what we needed for exams, technique*
- *Good, one-on-ones.*
- *How she presented herself was good and stuff like that. In other ways like she could lose her temper a bit and the class would just all fall to pieces really.*
- *Positive. Because you had teachers who were like laid back but strict at the same time. So like if you weren't getting on with your work they'd tell you to get on with your work but they were laid back, so if you'd done your work they'd let you sit there and wait for the others to catch up and not just that, the way how they spoke to pupils more than just individuals ...*
- *Depended on how student felt about the subject, for instance I enjoyed PE rather than English or science or whatever – I'd do a lot; I'd be a lot more interested in it; I'd do a lot better in it. I'd be good at it and stuff. I don't know what it was. It's different hobbies and interests obv. Some people prefer English to everything else; some prefer maths and stuff like that.*
- *Teachers weren't trying hardest – felt like it was mediocre- 9-5 sort of everyone was just getting along really. The English teacher we had - like we used to be quite bad for her – but then it all turned and like she became our favourite teacher and you were just glad to go to English. We had one teacher for 3 years and we all got along quite well...made me have interest in English*
- *Alright but went through that many I don't even remember one good one – we went through the same stuff each time – all the time.*

Evaluative comment: sense of disruption, boredom, irrelevance and perhaps being overwhelmed by demands of English: 'too much'. A lot depends on teacher /student relationship. Negative attitudes towards teachers, how the teachers taught didn't seem to get through to them; negative experience could be due to other students messing around.

5. Was there equal support for those doing well as for those who were struggling with English at school, can you give examples?

- *There was support for ones that needed help*
- *Probably more support for those not doing so well*
- *Struggling ones got a lot of support.*
- *I was struggling and I got a lot of support. Exams really hard and really difficult. I used extra time but just couldn't get it done. Too hard.*
- *Yes all treated the same, given the same amount of work, unless you said you need more work*
- *Yeah quite equal. There was this one lad he was smart but when it came to work he forgot what to write and like I was the same. I'm good at my English and good at other subjects but when it comes to writing something down if I haven't seen it before I forget like...they'd jog my memory and say go back to the lesson what we was doing... and I'd get help*
- *I wouldn't say equal. People falling behind trying to be picked up ...everyone had to work*
- *Pushed aside pretty much in my school.*

Evaluative comment: Support available – but when it came to the exams it didn't help; support to deal with exam pressure not there/effective – struggles with exam very much there.