

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 7 (ENGLISH) PROJECT –
RESILIENCE
Sheffield College**

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For further information regarding the OTLA Phase 7 (English) programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/>.

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Final report - Resilience

Sheffield College

This project addressed the issue of student resilience in the learning and teaching of GCSE English Language and Functional Skills English. Teachers focused on employing and refining a range of techniques to enable students to explore their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of themselves as learners.

Summary

The Sheffield College is a General Further Education college serving the socio-economically and ethnically diverse Sheffield City Region. The college has a large student population of over 14,700 studying a range of full and part-time academic, vocational, technical and apprenticeship programmes. The overarching aim of our project was to address the issue of student resilience in the learning and teaching of English at The Sheffield College. Due to an intrinsic lack of self-confidence, many of our students struggle to believe they can achieve in this subject area. For younger students studying GCSE English Language, such perceptions are often reinforced by a repeated 'failure' to achieve a grade 4 in this gateway qualification. The project involved both full-time and part-time students and was facilitated by a large team of English teachers, some of whom were new to the project this academic year.

Rationale

Prior to our involvement in OTLA Phase 6 in 2020 some teachers across our diverse college employed different approaches towards developing resilience in students, whereas others did not address this fundamental and underlying issue explicitly. Our action research project, which involved developing a resilience scheme of work with associated resources, proved to be highly effective in developing many students' confidence in their abilities. Importantly, involvement in the project was beginning to have a profoundly positive impact on tutors, their relationships with students and their perceptions of themselves as practitioners. This follow-up OTLA Phase 7 project has enabled us to refine and develop our approaches to enhancing student engagement and resilience. Importantly, it provided an opportunity for teachers to explore their individual areas of interest in this key aspect of learning and build on their excellent development work in OTLA Phase 6. Involvement in the project has also enabled us to disseminate our findings to wider audiences, both within and external to our organisation.

Approach

Working to the collective aim of developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning, teachers were encouraged to develop their own action research pathway according to their interests. Before the start of the academic year, teachers discussed, explored and refined their ideas with the Project Lead.

To summarise:

- Most teachers worked with the resilience scheme of work (OTLA, 6, 2020) and activities created at the inception of Phase 6, adjusting them to suit the needs of their students. Some teachers delivered the activities as a session starter, others at the end of the session or before the break. Activities were used to stimulate open discussions regarding attitudes towards learning.
- One teacher focused on enabling journaling within her sessions. She embedded reflective activities which encouraged exploration of the students' changing relationship to learning (See Appendix 2.4).
- In addition to enabling resilience activities most teachers focused on experimenting with their use of language when setting up tasks and giving both written and verbal feedback. They explored its power in developing students' confidence and self-belief.
- Some teachers focused on developing and delivering tasks which tackled the issue of resilience whilst also being closely aligned to the subjects' assessment objectives.
- One teacher focused on her questioning technique in drawing her students' attention to their thought processes regarding learning and self-belief.
- A significant emphasis was placed upon the value and importance of open dialogue and sharing of experience.
- Student voice activities were conducted to evaluate the impact of the work on their attitudes towards themselves and learning.
- Students' classwork, attendance and achievement data, in addition to observations of secondary behaviours, were also used to inform the evaluation of the impact of the project on their learning in English (See Appendix 2).

For further details about teacher approaches see Appendix 2.

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

Engaging in the project has had a significant impact on teachers' practice, most notably in their use of language in the classroom. A continued focus on developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning has encouraged teachers to consider carefully the connotations of their word choices. They have experimented with different language choices whilst setting up tasks and providing verbal and written feedback, observing the impact of their lexical choices on their students.

Teachers have found that adjusting their language to challenge students' negative perceptions of themselves as learners significantly enhances their teaching practice. They have discovered how subtle adjustments to the words and phrases they use when interacting with students both verbally and in writing can enable students to continue to engage in learning when they encounter difficulties and be particularly powerful in encouraging them to stretch themselves in learning (Appendix 2).

Involvement in the project raised teachers' self-awareness of habits they had fallen into when interacting with resit students, such as apologising for the potential difficulty within a task or over emphasising the compulsion for 16–19-year-olds to study the subject. They recognised such discourses were reinforcing some students' negative perceptions of learning English and of themselves in relation to it.

Teachers found that making a conscious and deliberate effort to change their idiolect to the language of challenge and motivation to be extremely beneficial to their students. For example, one teacher was sceptical of the impact of the project upon younger students compelled to re-sit GCSE English; however, involvement in the project has enabled him to recognise the inherent value in routinely using the language of positive instruction. He has discovered that it gives students, who cannot see how the qualification is relevant to them and their future career pathway, 'encouragement' and enables them to 'be confident' in their preparations for assessment. Furthermore, he now perceives such a relentless focus on helping learners develop a tenacious and confident attitude to be an essential part of a teacher's practice. (Appendix 2.3)

Involvement in the project has had a significant impact on another experienced teacher's perception of the psychological dimension of learning. Working with students on activities and discussions which explore the attitude towards the self and learning has compelled her to carefully consider the potential impact of her teaching and learning strategies on students' confidence and resilience (See Appendix 2.1). For most of the teachers working on the project, engagement in action research has enabled them to engage more purposefully in self-reflection. It has also acted as a catalyst for the updating of educational research knowledge. They have valued the opportunity to develop their skills in evidence-based practice and are likely to develop further action research projects.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Our work on the project has stimulated some change to practices within our organisation. For example:

- Within the Academy of English at The Sheffield College we now ensure that any new members of staff receive discrete training on techniques to foster self-belief in learning. This training has been delivered not only to teachers but to individuals whose role is to support students in catching up on their skills in English and maths due to the impact of Covid-19.
- In the summer months we will be training colleagues in ESOL and Inclusion to embed a similar approach within their curriculum from September 2021.

- We have shared our practice with colleagues who teach maths. English and maths teachers met to discuss key techniques and strategies to develop students' confidence and self-belief. During the session, English teachers shared their approaches and the findings of action research. Whilst we are aware of the importance of not replicating activities in maths, as many students study both subjects, there is a commitment to ongoing sharing of learning from the project and experimentation with approaches.
- The project has enabled a foregrounding of professional discussions relating to the underlying issues of students' lack of confidence and self-belief in learning.

Additionally,

- Learning from the project has been shared with representatives from other colleges who experience similar challenges with their students.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Our focus on developing students' self-efficacy and resilience in learning continues to have a positive impact upon students' experiences of studying English and their achievements at The Sheffield College.

Students report and demonstrate:

- An increased confidence in themselves in relation to learning, including engaging in stretch and challenge activities.
- A greater ability to learn from mistakes and to overcome challenges.
- Engagement in mindset for learning activities has helped to engage them in the subject matter and better enjoy learning with their peers and teachers.
- Adjustments to teachers' language in the classroom has enabled them to make improvements in their learning, in addition to instilling a greater confidence in themselves as learners.
- A greater investment in their own achievements and progress.

Whilst we cannot isolate the impact of the above from the other improvements The Sheffield College is implementing in teaching, learning and assessment, it is difficult not to correlate the foregrounding of this approach to an:

- Upturn in attendance. This increase in engagement has been particularly marked for Study Programme students. Since this project began, their attendance is now consistently good in GCSE English Language classes.
- Upturn in retention of our adult students.
- Increase in first time passes for adults studying Functional Skills English at Level 1 and Level 2. Teachers' emphasis on not giving up, on developing strategies to deal with the challenge of examination questions, is encouraging students to see the exams in a more positive light.
- Increase in GCSE English Language high grade predictions for both adult and Study Programme students.

Learning from this project

The adoption of a whole team curriculum-based approach to the development of students' self-belief and resilience in learning supports the college's wider improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Importantly, it encourages teachers to:

- Foster better relationships with students and develop a more cohesive learning community earlier in the academic year.
- Focus on the critical importance of the language choices they make when interacting with students. They now consider in a much more consciously and careful way the impact of their language on their students.
- Develop a greater depth of understanding of students' psychological barriers to learning and in turn consider ways to challenge and break down such obstacles.
- Evaluate critically the impact of their Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) choices on students' perceptions of themselves as learners.
- Re-engage with educational theory.
- Engage and become an integral part of a culture of action research and critical reflection.

Crucially, working in this way, teachers enable students to:

- Gain greater insight and understanding of their relationship to learning and the steps they need to undertake to make progress.
- Acquire a more constructive relationship to learning, understanding that mistakes are a necessary and enabling part of the journey. One student, for example, reported that she has a *'more positive mindset'* than at the beginning of her studies when she believed she *'could not'* learn. Following work on her attitudes towards herself and learning she now feels 'happy and excited' when engaging in the development of her English skills (See Appendix 2.5).

Another student commented:

"I do believe that learning depends on accepting your mistakes as positive experiences because I feel like I have learnt from my mistakes by looking through feedback and correcting myself which also improved my English skills".

- Develop confidence and self-belief in their abilities which in turn enables them to develop strategies to face challenges in learning.
- Articulate more fully their needs and wants in relation to life and learning.
- Foster better relationships with their peers and teachers.

We have also learned:

- Teachers need to commit fully to the process, adjusting materials and approaches to suit the needs of their students and their teaching styles. The approach needs to be embedded within all aspects of their TLA, not limited to the delivery of the activities.

- It is not the resilience activities the students engage in that stimulate change; it is the ongoing discussions that arise from them throughout the student's learning journey.
- Of crucial importance to the success of such an approach is the deep critical reflection of teachers upon their practice, with a particular focus upon their use of language. To positively encourage and enable changes in students' attitudes, teachers need to scrutinise the language they use in all learning contexts, making subtle and ongoing adjustments where appropriate.
- Adopting such an approach is not a 'silver bullet' for all students. Students need to be emotionally ready to relate discussions and debates on resilience to their life and learning.

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Appendix 1 – The project team

Project Role	Name	Job Role
Project Lead	Emma Ireland	Head of Academy
Deputy Lead	Charlotte Bowling	Lecturer and Learning Development Coach
Project team	Thomas Barrett	Curriculum Team Leader
	Tim Boyd	Lecturer
	Karena Taylor Jones	Lecturer
	Zara Khan	Lecturer
	Emma Traxon	Lecturer
	Shelina Mawani-Markin	Lecturer
	Kelly Weston	Lecturer
	Emily Sheard	Lecturer
	Andy Wood	Lecturer
Project Mentor	Catherine McPartland (ccConsultancy)	
Research Group Lead	Sue Lownsborough (ccConsultancy)	

Appendix 2 - Teachers' Approaches, Reflections on Impact, Student Observations and Student Feedback

Teacher 1 – Approach

In term 1 the teacher's intentions were to:

- 'promote a growth mindset in my learners (adults and Study Programme) but also in myself;
- evaluate the impact of interventions on learner mindset;
- critically reflect on my professional practice and note changes in my mindset.'

Her aim in term two was to focus on *Building Confidence through Differentiation and Stretch and Challenge*.

She reported that her, 'interventions aim to evaluate a range of strategies. I will continue to track both my case studies. I am adopting and evaluating a 'teach to the top' strategy. Building confidence, differentiation and high expectations are key ingredients of the culture I would like to develop in my lessons. I want to instill in students the idea that their paths are not fixed. I am focusing on more inclusive language that reflects inclusivity. I am conscientiously not using terms like 'more able', 'fail', etc.

I am planning activities that give a learner the chance to fly and push boundaries / challenge their self-concept. I have been trying different strategies to stretch and challenge learners including using different questioning techniques and innovative strategies using Edtech. My aim is to probe for better, deeper responses, independent thought, and greater reflection – deep learning facilitated through careful and differentiated scaffolding.

I am using Kolb's model as the framework for my reflection.

Strategies include:

- Writing tasks that offer different experiences for different students – more open.
- Flipped activities that require students to research prior to my lesson
- Higher level questioning - targeted and to challenge - use of Why? and How?
- Edtech - more inclusive
- Recognising and praising valid contributions
- Breakout rooms based differentiation and challenge as below,'



Teacher 1 – Reflections on the impact on her professional practice

'I can see that some of the strategies I'm using are effective in building confidence and stretching students.

In relation to these aims and the professional standards, I feel that the project has developed my professional practice in terms of supporting individuals. This support has taken the form of developing knowledge and skills, and also developing a growth mindset in my students. The primary learning point for me professionally has been how crucial it is to address student mindset. The effectiveness and impact of my teaching and learning activities, including assessment and feedback, depend on how students perceive themselves and perceive me.

"When a student can compare the 'before' and the 'after' in an explicit way and can see that they have produced something 'better', they develop a more positive self-concept which is essential for motivation and building confidence."

I have been hugely encouraged, and humbled, by the feedback I have received from my students. It has cemented my commitment to professional development and, in particular, the OTLA project.

The project has made me reflect on the psychological dimension of learning i.e. the role my choice of teaching and learning strategies impacts on students' confidence and resilience - ability to face difficulty, struggle with it and overcome it. In recent months, I have focused more than ever on promoting and activating reflective practice, as well as engaging in reflective practice myself.

Teacher 1 – Examples of Student Feedback

'Yes, I'm confident in my skills and knowledge. Studying and practising made me confident. Yes, I believe I have a more positive mindset, as I made mistakes I was able to correct it and made sure I didn't make the same mistake. The discussions I've had with teachers gave me a different perspective. The positive mindset helped me to be more focused on any given situation. I try to approach the good and bad in life with the expectation that things will go well, but everyone makes mistakes. I

found the feedback very useful, as I was able to go back to improve my work. I could improve my planning, by simply writing it on a booklet or something.'

'I do believe that learning depends on accepting your mistakes as positive experiences because I feel like I have learnt from my mistakes by looking through feedback and correcting myself which also improved my English skills'

I think I cannot pass my GCSE, because it's really hard" but Shelina said "come on Nasro you can do it, do not think that now, it's just started, you will pass, and every time I did some work, Shelina gave some positive feedback, Well done Nasro, you improved. After I saw all that she encouraged me I decided to be strong and change my negative attitude to positive. Also she gave me If I need extra help to attend support sessions, I did every day.

'I feel much confident in my course now compared to beginning because of your teaching skills have been very useful for me.'

'My learning skills and knowledge is much improved now than before I start my course. My mindset positive towards this course and I learned different useful methods of learning from your excellent teaching.'

'I've found your feedback amazing it's helped me come along on the correct path to continue learning and wanting to improve my skills.'

'Yes I have more positive mindset. At the beginning I thought I could not do it but now I feel happy and excited. I think the most thing was helpful is lessons and practice with Shelina. With my life now I can do everything by myself for me and my baby such as contact with doctors or any professional people. Also, I could email them or write letter.

'From failing we learn, from success not so much, is actually one of my favourite Disney quotes. So this statement reflects the same message. I openly welcome constructive feedback as a tool for self improvement'

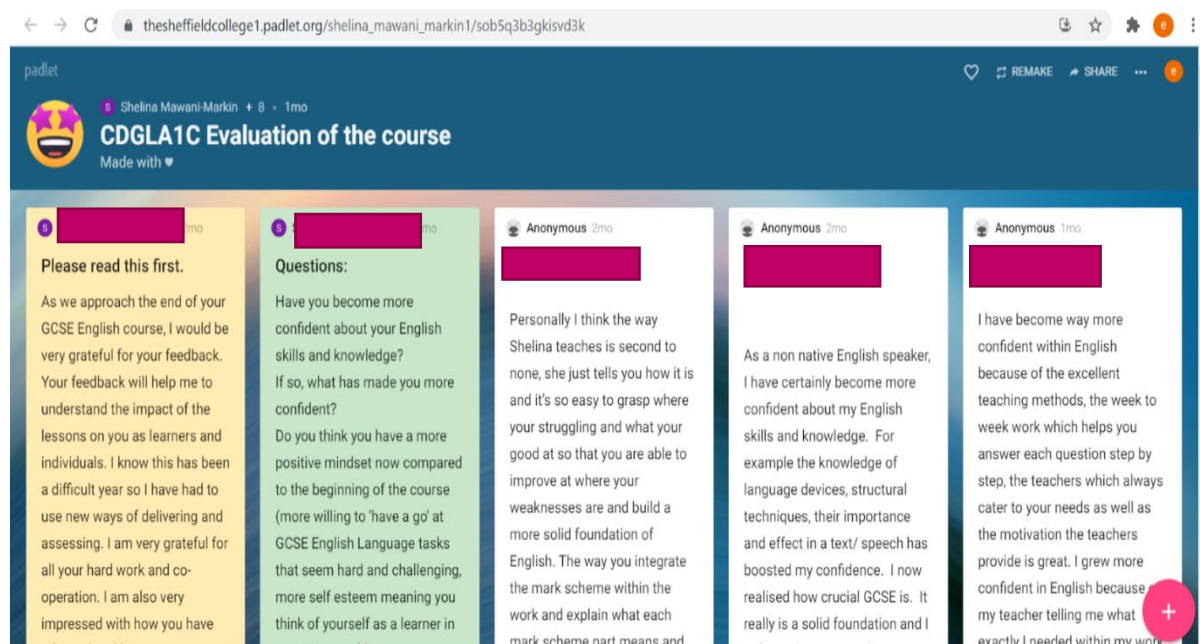
'I would like to mention that the idea of doing GCSE English as an adult was daunting. One thing that really encouraged and motivated me was the introduction of flip mindset by Shelina, where we were also given the anecdote (story of herself, having to flee Kenya as a pre-teen). It has completely changed my approached to learning and shall forever remain with me. I think myself as a learner in a positive way, I am also inspired to study further and I believe I can do it. Now that I have a good knowledge of GCSE English, I am also confident my grades would be better if I had to re do GCSE English.'

'The continuous support, the real-life relatable examples given during lessons, detailed feedbacks and a sincere desire for us to do better, answering emails promptly all helped me do better and think positively.'

'My positive mindset has helped me in my personal life. Now that I have learnt the language techniques/ devices I am able to hold strong decent conversation and not fear of being judged. My articulation has improved and am able to impress people!'

'I fully agree, "learning depends on accepting my mistakes as positive experiences." Yes, I can think of few occasions for example, I believe I could have done better in paper 1 but not giving enough time for revisions even when I could have let me down, it's my own fault.'

Teacher 1 used Padlet to gather the feedback from her students as outlined above.



Teacher 2 – Approach and reflections on its impact on teaching, learning, assessment and classroom dynamics

Teacher 2's approach was to:

- 'Develop and adapt more Padlets as they are popular with students according to feedback. I would not use them every session as I feel the sessions need to be varied.
- Link the OTLA activities to the sessions, such as the topic used to enhance their relevance for students.
- Focus on activities which develop students' critical thinking and boosting their self esteem and confidence.
- Link activities to dealing with the specific needs of students' current situation e.g., lockdown and working online rather than in college.
- Use jamboards as an effective way to discuss and share everyone's viewpoints and ideas.
- Be consistent in delivering regular OTLA activities at the beginning of the session.'

Teacher 2 reflected: 'I have developed more OTLA resources which are linked to the topics and themes for GCSE sessions. For example, an activity based on flipping failure into a success mindset before they received their Paper 1 mock feedback and results so I felt this helped to prepare learners and support them in what can be a difficult session. Hopefully it helped them to deal with their results in a positive way, whatever their results.'

This year I prioritised working on a short Mindset activity every session and naming the activity clearly as a mindset activity. I wanted to use clear terms such as 'growth mindset' and 'fixed mindset' (Dweck, 2012) as I hoped that this would make it clear for the students and they would feel they are learning and engaging.

This was successful as I could plan it into sessions. The online element of the sessions had both a positive and negative effect. I felt that the discussions and conversations were much more detailed and engaged when the class returned to the classroom and discussions were face to face. However, I think that for some students the more anonymous aspect of online learning suited them and they could open up during the online Mindset activities. Tools such as Jamboard and Google chat definitely assisted in the delivery of Mindset activities and increased whole class participation as they were easy and straightforward to use.

I did not include Mindset activities into in the final few weeks as it was difficult to include them into assessment sessions. I was focused on running assessments for the Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs).

I think that this year has been particularly challenging for many of our students and the mindset activities have been very important to help students build resilience and deal with the anxiety and resentment of the year. It has allowed a space for students to talk about their issues and I think that this has been very important this year in particular as students often feel distanced and isolated and perhaps resentful that they are not getting the 'full student experience' in college. I think I have prioritised mindset and space for discussion as learners need to feel listened to and that the classroom, online or in college, is a safe space for them to explore ideas and opinions. In that way the mindset activities have fed into my planning as I have planned time and space for discussion and idea development through directed questioning and student led discussions.

I find it interesting that often these discussions, particularly in college, have opened up space for students to discuss wider issues, which in a global pandemic have highlighted how vulnerable some students are to things like conspiracy theories. I think that perhaps I am now more open to having these discussions and talking about wider issues with students as I feel a responsibility to raise awareness and not see them as separate and disruptive to student's learning.

This year has confirmed to me how essential it is to have a clear scheme of work (SOW) for Mindset activities to follow throughout the year. I particularly liked the re-set activity for the first lesson back in January 2021 as I think it was important to take time to think about what had been achieved and think about what we wanted to achieve for a new year and how we were going to break down these goals. Going forward I want to have a clear final activity and summary activity to give the year a clear end point.

Teacher 2 – Observations of students

'TF engaged really well with the initial activity which was all about introducing yourself and getting to know each other. His attendance and effort dropped as he really did not enjoy online learning and often asked when he could learn in college. I phoned him to discuss things further as in an OTLA activity he revealed a lot of anxiety and worry, so I sent him a message with my work phone number. The OTLA activity and message boards opened up opportunities for talking about his worries and thoughts. Since the discussion his attendance and effort has definitely improved, although he still does not enjoy online learning. In one recent activity we discussed what has helped all students' mental health and I think this helped him to open up and feel supported. He has been engaging in discussions and offering his point of view more regularly in sessions. The activity on flipping the idea of failure elicited some interesting ideas and input.

CB was a late starter as she seemed to struggle to access the resources and the Google Meet. It was difficult to tell if this was resistance to accessing the learning or technical barriers. I met her and another student on a Google Meet to specifically go through, in detail, how to access all the resources and offer re-assurance and I think this has helped with engagement. CB now engages with the OTLA activities - I think that I need to ask her to develop her ideas and thoughts in more detail, through appropriate questioning.'

Teacher 2 – Student Activities

Mindset task

Watch the following video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g&feature=emb_logo

1. Name a time your mindset changed about your college life 1) Bricklaying how I have molded into picking up new skills.
2. Name a habit of your own that you would like to change 2) Been on my phone all the time.
3. Does this mean our view of the world can change? 3) Yes because everything can change and adapt to make anything happen.
4. What are you proud of yourself for this year? 4) Still attending college and adapting to changes to life for a number of months and just pushing through till the end.

How can you change these to be more positive?

- "I don't believe in myself."
- "I'm not smart enough to do that."
- "I'm not good enough to _____."
- "I don't have good ideas."
- "I'm not very strong."
- "I'm not an exceptional person."

I believe in myself.
I am smart enough to do that.
I am good enough to be a astronaut
My ideas are great
I am strong enough.
No one is naturally great, through hard work i'll be exceptional

Teacher 3 – Approach

In addition to delivering discrete activities, this teacher consciously adjusted his use of language and the way he gave feedback in the classroom to encourage student resilience. He invited students' perspective on his approaches. Here he outlines his approach this academic year.

'I started by using some of the mindset activities that were used last year and have also created some of my own linked around the idea of resilience and adopting a positive mindset. These were often short activities that I would use at the beginning of the lesson but sometimes I would use a text based around resilience/mindset and it would be the theme of the whole lesson.

One of the activities from the previous year focused on the students using more empowering language in the classroom. I focused on this further, also in relation to my own language that I use in the classroom when teaching, and especially when providing one-to-one feedback with the students.

My focus widened in January to promoting more discussion around some of the topics that had been impacting the students. This was especially true of my adult students who appreciated having the opportunity to discuss the challenges they had been facing due to the lockdown.'

Teacher 3 – Reflections on changes to practice and wider professional development

'The project has given me further opportunity to develop as a teacher. More specifically it has made me reflect on the language that I use with my students and the impact it is having on them. It has made me realise how easy it is to get into habits with using particular phrases or vocabulary with learners as although I did make a conscious effort to avoid using words such as 'try' I would occasionally catch myself using it. It has made me consider other language I use and experiment with other phrases.

Overall, I think the project has helped me build more positive and collaborative relationships with my students. This was a particularly difficult year to achieve this due to having to teach remotely but the discussions that took place in the classroom around mindset, resilience and the challenges of lockdown helped to promote a positive classroom relationship.'

The whole idea of a positive mindset and developing resilience is something that I have been utilising in my personal life over the past year or so and through this I have developed a deeper appreciation for the importance of this for our students and within the organisation as a whole. This has led me to read a lot, particularly around the topic of shame, which perhaps is one of the underlying factors of many of the behaviours that the project has been attempting to address. I see my own personal development as a major factor in what I bring to my students, to the classroom and what I bring to my colleagues. The project has made me realise how important it is to model the behaviours that we are attempting to instil in learners. I have therefore begun to monitor my own response to challenges and obstacles even further both in my professional life and personal life, and I think using some of these experiences,

albeit selectively and while still maintaining boundaries, would be powerful for the students moving forwards. I would be interested in exploring activities related to shame in the future as I think this could be quite powerful. From my own perspective the project has provided me with an understanding that it is ok to fail and to not be 'perfect'. The whole process of moderation is a good example of this.'

Teacher 3 – Observations of impact of alterations to his practice on students and their achievements

'I have just had the results from the first round of Functional Skills exams and I have several students who passed both reading and writing for Level 1, as well as several who passed one component and were very close to passing the other. One of these students, who was one of my case studies, was extremely nervous about doing exams and this led to us having a talk about how to cope with stressful situations. We talked about not putting so much pressure on the situation and I recommended she treat it more like a practice test as she would be able to take them again the following month. I also used the topic as an activity to promote discussion in the class and provide a supportive environment as other students had also expressed concerns when facing exam conditions. One of the other students in the group who had talked about mindfulness as part of her speaking and listening talk offered some tips on focusing on breathing, and this all helped to create a very positive team-like class environment. The case study student went on to pass her exam first time which was very encouraging.

Another student's work on progress assessment 1 was flagged for plagiarism which was disappointing. I tried to reinforce the idea that mistakes are a part of life as I imagine it would feel quite devastating for her as she is hoping to complete her final year of her foundation degree at Hallam next year. Unfortunately, her work was also flagged for plagiarism when she completed the resit for progress assessment 1. I wondered again whether there was an element of this being a high-stakes situation as failing would potentially mean not completing her final year at Hallam. Her attendance did improve throughout the year and it was positive to see that she really put a lot of effort into the responses to some of the questions during the mindset activities. It shows she did engage with the activities and that there was a positive impact on her engagement with English. It is difficult to identify whether the attendance improvement was due to the mindset activities or whether other factors were involved.

There is some evidence to suggest from the student voice responses that the project did motivate them and raised their aspirations for passing English. It is difficult to tell, however, whether these were genuine responses or just responses that they felt they 'should' write.'

In January of this year he reported:

'I have made it a major part of English this year and this has led to interesting conversations with students which is really positive. Especially my adult Functional Skills students who have appreciated topics linked to mental health, mindfulness etc. I have found students seem to really want to share their experiences and I imagine this is very therapeutic which is making me want to shift/widen my focus to that idea of generating rapport and community in a class. So just introducing a topic into the classroom has seemed to have a very positive impact for some students.

One student has improved their attendance which is positive and is engaging more in lessons. There has been an issue in regard to plagiarism for her mock exam though which is disappointing. Concerned that the shame linked to this may have negative impact so plan to reinforce ideas of the importance of making mistakes and moving forwards.

Another student has left the course but had shown some improvement in their belief in their English abilities. Through conversations with them and response to feedback I have given them there was definitely a change. There have been other issues that influenced their decision to leave linked to their homelife but I there was a slight change in their self-esteem.'

Teacher 3 – Student feedback

Teacher 3 conducted student voice activities as detailed below. It is important to highlight that in the introduction to his survey he makes explicit to students the conscious adaptations he has made to his use of language in the classroom.

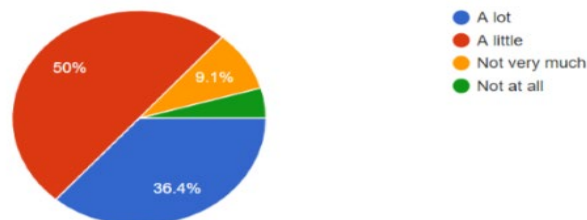
Learner Voice

Since September we have been completing short activities in your English classes linked to mindset and resilience. I have also been adjusting the way I give feedback and the language I use in the classroom. I would really appreciate your feedback on your experiences during the year by answering the questions below. Please be specific when answering the questions and make sure to explain your responses and give examples where possible. By completing the form you are also giving consent for us to use your responses in writing up a report. All responses will be anonymous. Thank you!!!

Student responses are shown below:

How much do you think the mindset activities have had an impact on your learning and understanding of GCSE English?

22 responses



Comments included:

it is usefull

They help me because they get me ready for exams

learnd more

I found the activities helpful because it helped me to have a understanding so if the question is on the exam it will be easy the answer.

i think the mindset activities have impacted my GCSE English course positively as it has broadened my perspective on how different people think.

I am unable to answer because these activities haven't helped me during this lockdown

I don't know

I think a lot of the topics have been political and I have found this quite uncomfortable when I have wanted to learn more about different genres of writing.

because i learn a lot more in little bunches so mindset activities help

It helps me to improve

Some of them helped me still motivated and have a more positive out look.

i dont think it has impacted my english too much, but it's good. i think this is because i just dont understand exacatly what it is trying to do.

I think that they have improved my overall knowledge throughout the English subject

It helped me to learn and discover new things and languages in GCSE English course.

It helped to keep me in a positive frame of mind and calm my nerves during the speaking exam

.

Allowed me to get into the right frame of mind to complete my work

It helped to keep me in a positive frame of mind and calm my nerves during the speaking exam

.

Allowed me to get into the right frame of mind to complete my work

I havent honestly looked at these set by the college, I do practice my own mindfulness though

The activities we've had with our teacher were very helpful; all the short videos, texts, group activities have helped me to improve and understand English language better. It'd prepared me for my assessments as well as my speaking and listening exam.

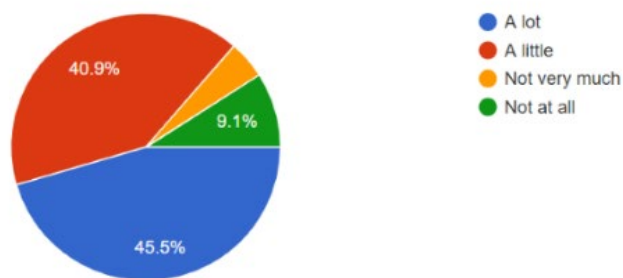
The mindset activities encouraged me to put in great effort to challenge and succeed.

I think it had an impact on how we think and inspired us to think outside the box and to have a positive mindset which can lead us to have more determination in life.

In a good way

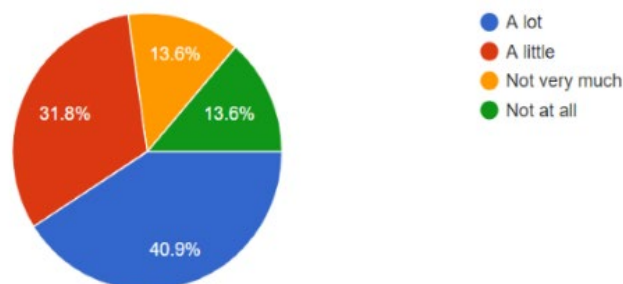
How much have the mindset activities impacted your ability and/or willingness to overcome challenges related to your learning?

22 responses



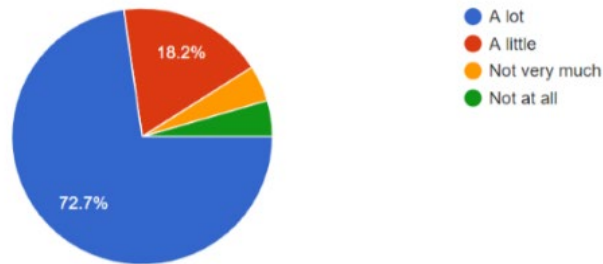
How much have the mindset activities impacted your ability and/or willingness to overcome challenges in other aspects of your life?

22 responses



How much has the feedback and the language I have used in class impacted your confidence in your learning.

22 responses



Comments include:

'The language he used was easy to understand and clear and empowered my confidence.'

'Your positive reinforcement and guided feedback really helped me focus on what I could improve without making me feel I had failed'

Teacher 3 – Professional learning from the project

'It was a challenging year to complete the project due to having to teach online. There was a lot of learning taking place on my end in how to deliver online lessons which perhaps impacted the attention that I could give the project. I did manage to gather data but I think I could have been more systematic in this. I was also unsure how to approach the whole positive language approach in terms of communicating this to the students. I was quite explicit about the mindset activities and they promoted natural discussion but I wasn't explicit in telling students that I was changing my approach in terms of the language I used in class and when providing feedback. This was partly due to not wanting students to provide feedback later that would just reiterate my expectations. From previous experience students will often provide feedback that they think the teacher expects. I found the Student Voice activity quite challenging to construct and, in the end, I did point out that I had been attempting to use positive language. Next time I would conduct the Student Voice activity in class with them. As it was, I emailed students the link to complete and I think many rushed it, which was disappointing.'

Teacher 4 – Approach

Teacher 4 was new to the project in 2020-21. Here she summarises her approach:

- 'My initial approach was to address TLA needs of adult learners through andragogy and adult learning theory.
- Use mindset starter activities at the beginning of lessons to encourage students to understand why they were learning about or developing a particular skill, which often linked to the real world.
- Moved focus to address lack of confidence in adult students as this barrier was becoming increasingly apparent due to extensive time away from formal education.
- Journaling and positive self-reflection mindset starter activities to promote self-esteem and resilience.
- Reflection activities at the end of the lesson to encourage target setting and self-awareness regarding academic progress'

In terms of her professional practice she discovered:

- 'A huge shift in focus to building confidence in all students that I teach to inspire, motivate and help raise their aspirations.
- Giving students more opportunities for stretch and challenge both academically and individually.
- This is made possible through building students' confidence, resilience and fostering positive classroom relationships through mindset activities.
- Better understanding of adult learning needs than this time last year e.g. the need to understand 'why' and that instruction should take into account a wide range of pre-existing background knowledge and experience. This has allowed me to adapt my teaching practice to suit such differing needs.
- Using formative assessment to challenge negative beliefs about 'failure'. Encouraging students to recognise the value of making mistakes as part of their learning journey.
- Conscious and regular self-reflection as a practitioner is something I will continue to embed into my practice.
- Allowed me to maintain and update my knowledge of educational research to develop evidence-based practice.
- Increased confidence working with adult students and in my ability to meet their needs.'

In terms of challenges, she reported:

- 'I found it challenging to consistently include mindset starters at the beginning of lessons. With the current situation, Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGS) and COVID-19 related Bubbles, time is very limited. It often felt like I was 'wasting time' if I didn't move straight on to exam preparation. Sometimes, even if I did have time to plan a mindset starter, I would often skip it as felt like I couldn't go into as much depth with the students as I wanted, or that it wasn't as meaningful or impactful as preparing for the exam questions.

- It was a challenge to research and plan high quality mindset activities alongside my other, often more pressing, responsibilities as a teacher. I believe this fed into my own lack of confidence delivering the activities, especially at the beginning.
- Difficulty engaging all students– especially in an online learning environment.
- Engagement - first time doing the mindset activities, lacking in confidence and delivering online is more difficult as you can't read body language or get a sense of how students feel about it. The Hawthorne effect (Perera, 2021) – students seem to say what they think we want to hear.
- Next time, I'd make a conscious effort at the beginning of the year to talk with the students more explicitly about the value of a growth mindset and resilience. It might be taken more seriously if students are aware of the research behind it. I also think it would be interesting to ask the students to reflect on the mindset starters after each session – to see what works for them.
- In some cases, I feel it helped for me to get involved with the reflection and share my own positive reflections with the students. I felt this encouraged them and helped with building rapport.'

Teacher 4 – Observations of the impact of her approaches on students' progress (Case Studies)

'I have observed that some students are more confident to ask questions in the sessions in a group setting, even in an online environment. Many students are also more eager for me to read their work and give to them improvements and feedback. However, at the beginning some were anxious about this and didn't like me to read their work unless it was 'neat' or that they had 'finished it'. It seems they are becoming less-perfectionistic and more at ease when they make mistakes. They are beginning to recognise the value of making mistakes as a collective learning experience for the group. More recently, one student even requested that we look at some examples of their work as a group and consider What Went Well (WWW) and Even Better If (EBI). Everyone was happy to share!'

'Student A has improved her ability to time-manage exam answers and approach to questions. She is now able to attempt to comment on language and structure. She received the same mark in a timed-mock exam to the first assessment which did not have any time constraints.'

In the student survey she stated she was more confident in 'life' because of 'mindset tasks', 'class discussion' and 'practising exam questions'. When asked to elaborate, she noted the impact of a 'very helpful teacher and both the students and teacher are really nice and easy to talk with'. She also noted that 'I feel more confident with having conversations with new people and helping my son with homework'.

She has shown an increased level of resilience from the beginning of the course through her sheer determination to 'get it right'. More recently, this student is putting

a huge amount of effort into her independent Google assignments which indicates a big improvement in her confidence at attempting these by herself. Not only this, her reading and writing skills and approaches to answering exam questions have improved dramatically.'

Student B: When this student started the course, she was very reluctant to share work with me to mark due to her 'mistakes' and 'spelling'. She would often leave comments on Google Classroom assignments regarding how difficult she was finding the tasks, even though the end result and exam response would be a good standard as she has improved by 12 marks in the latest mock exam.

In the Student Voice this student stated she was 'somewhat' confident that her 'writing is getting better and her work in writing up documentation', But she hasn't recognised her increased confidence and resilience. Even so, I have seen a transformation in her attitude towards completing tasks and willingness to receive and engage with feedback. She is usually now the first to contribute to group discussion about the text or volunteer ideas, which I feel demonstrates increased self-esteem and self-worth.'

I have observed that some students are more confident to ask questions in the sessions in a group setting, even in an online environment. Many students are also more eager for me to read their work and give them improvements and feedback. However, at the beginning some were anxious about this and didn't like me to read their work unless it was 'neat' or that they had 'finished it'. It seems they are becoming less perfectionistic and more at ease when they make mistakes. They are beginning to recognise the value of 'failure' as a collective learning experience for the group.

Some responses to mindset reflection/journaling prompts include:

"I remember my first assignment. I stared at the screen over the period of two days. Not knowing what to write, reading words I didn't understand but as much as I know I need plenty more practice, I understand things a lot clearly and my work just flows. I seem more comfortable around talking with new people, before I used to panic, slur my words but now I feel a little bright for a more intellectual conversation, as if I fit in more".

"I am a lot more confident with conversations and important phone calls because I am better with my words. I have a very important job looking after family members and I have to talk to doctors and sort tablets so I feel more confident with that also. So English has helped me in more ways than one. Including being able to be a lot more patient with my kids with home learning, I understand the frustration, I know how to take steps with them".

"Since starting this English course, I feel a huge gain in my confidence in the English language and that it has helped develop my skills in many aspects from my wording, writing, communication and how to

understand language. I have gained knowledge on language and structure, analysing extracts, my punctuation and techniques.

"I feel more confident with new challenges and with the knowledge gained so far it has helped me understand".

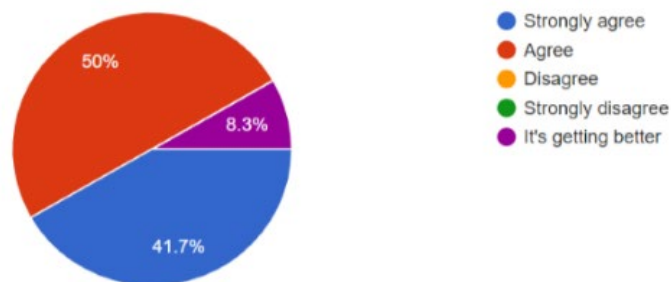
Teacher 4 – Student feedback

Teacher 4 conducted a Student Voice activity. Having interrogated the responses she was pleased to report that, 'Interestingly, 7/10 students said they felt more confident as a result of their English lessons. 3/7 of these more confident students said the mindset starters at the beginning of lessons were either the contributing factor, or one of the contributing factors, to their increased confidence. It might also be worth noting here that students who said they were more confident were confident in: life, employment and/or English work.'

Here is the data from her Student Voice activity

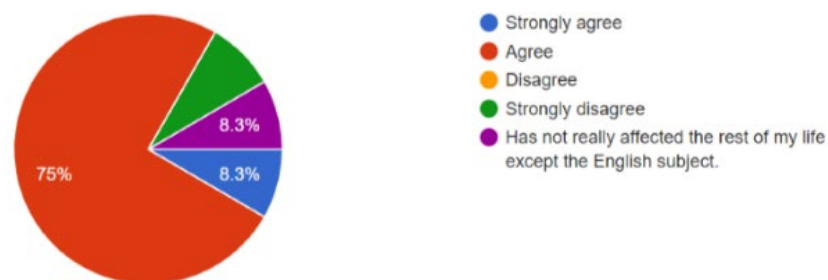
I have more confidence in myself as a learner.

12 responses



I am now more confident in other areas of my life.

12 responses



Do you think positive self-reflection through 'mindset' activities has had an impact on your confidence in other areas of your life? Can you give an example of an activity that you enjoyed and how it helped you?

12 responses

all of them

Bit of both, yes and no.

most of all.

Group discussions with other students in class

NA

It has neither positive or negative.

Yes

yes

yes. i feel my english skills have improved both on paper and also vocally.

Because it is more of a class activity, I have found i have come out of my shell a lot more, not only in class but outside of class too. I'm a lot more confident talking to new people and i believe will help me as well towards an interview.

Group work

I'm enjoying my weekly class

Teacher 5 – Approach

Like Teacher 4, Teacher 5 was new to the project in 2020-21. Here she outlines her approach:

- 'Mindset activities used within each session – completed as a starter or exit ticket and sometimes embedded within low stakes assessments for reflection purposes.
- Key area of focus was flipping negative thoughts to positive and changing our mindsets to what we can do and how we can change the elements of the course that we aren't so confident with.
- Emphasis placed on moving past the fear of failure, remembering how close the students are to a Grade 4 already and thinking about what they can learn from mistakes and what they can do to move forward and make progress.
- Discussion of positive mindsets allowed for activities to become more relatable and to understand that everyone is 'in the same boat'. They also allowed students to understand that, even as their teacher, I often feel the way they do and didn't achieve my goals on the first try.
- Students are aware that I am their 'GCSE English Cheerleader' and felt comfortable to try, fail, and then make improvements, as well as knowing they have a vast support network to help them with this.
- Mindset allowed me to see who needed a 'boost' and who couldn't see their own potential, as well as identifying students' struggles and helping them figure out a way around them.

Linking her learning to the Professional Values and Attributes, (ETF, Teaching Standards, 2014) 1, 3, 6 she reflects that:

'Mindset activities have allowed me to think outside the box and look at the different methods of motivating students. Appealing to students' positive sides and getting them to understand their potential is a lot like incorporating differentiation into the lesson plans: one size does not fit all.

Thinking about how to involve Mindset activities into lessons has allowed me to explore and think about my own mindset. Positivity, enthusiasm and passion from the teacher will surely encourage students to think more positively about their capabilities when they can see their teacher is so invested in their potential and achievement too.

Collaboration with colleagues has allowed for sharing good practice as well as sharing success stories and alternative ways of approaching those barriers that are typical within the GCSE resit specification in FE.'

In terms of Professional Knowledge and Understanding: 10, 11 she observes,

- 'Mindset allows for an additional form of monitoring the impact of the lesson on the students and checking where activities are making a difference in terms of progress and achievement, as well as retention in some cases.

- Student behaviour has, in some cases, improved where confidence and negative expectations have been an issue. Students know that, as a result of mindset activities and embedding these throughout, even where they're not too obvious, they are coming into my class with a clean slate; it doesn't matter who they are or what limits they have put on themselves, a new year means a new chance to learn, grow, adapt and develop.'

And Professional Skills: 13, 17, 20:

- 'The power of positive thinking, flipping negative statements, etc... have all been effective methods in encouraging students to develop their own skills and push themselves. Maintaining a positive attitude can often motivate and inspire students to reflect on what they need to do to develop their skills further.
- Reflecting and feedback within mindset activities interlinks with the need to reflect on work within lessons as well as on formative assessments – once students begin to feel more confident and have a higher sense of self belief, they feel more open and ready to reflect on their work, make improvements and have a clear understanding of their current working level as well as the targets they need to set/have been set to move forward.'

In terms of her professional practice she states:

- I have re-evaluated my approach in the classroom in terms of the language choices I make, e.g., 'flipping' my own statements to continuously encourage the importance and benefits of English rather than accepting that students 'just don't like it'
- This allowed me to focus on the language the students use throughout the lessons as well. This, in turn, has allowed me to encourage students to use Standard English and work on their spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG), whether in the classroom or online, in both their written and spoken work.
- I have been able to reflect on and monitor the attitudes of my students linked to the progress they make in formative, summative and low stakes assessments.
- Colleague collaboration has enabled a wider discussion of the impact of mindset on our students and talk about what works and what doesn't, as well as sharing ideas and good practice.
- I have been able to reflect on what works and what doesn't, allowing me to make changes to lesson plans in advance as well in real time where necessary or appropriate.

"Overall, I believe that, in general, many of my students have become more invested in their own progress and potential because there have been several opportunities in class to allow them to think about their strengths, areas for improvement and their own capabilities, including what they can do if they push themselves.

As this year has been like no other, due to the global pandemic and moving to online learning for most of the year, a focus on positive mindset has been an imperative element of the GCSE curriculum this year. Our students have needed a lot of encouragement and I think this has aided with attendance, progress and retention in some cases”.

Teacher 5 – Observations of the impact of her approaches on students' progress

Case Study – Student AB:

AB is a Protective Services student at Peaks Campus and, at the beginning of the year, stated that she “couldn’t do English”, adding she’d been “doing it for years so another year won’t help”, and admitted that she rarely attended any of her English classes last year. Over the course of the year, I have been able to develop a strong working relationship with AB and this has allowed me (along with the rest of the class) to implement the mindset activities throughout the work that she has done. AB was working at a Grade 3 or possibly a 2 around September/October time but, as the months have gone on, I have witnessed a dramatic improvement in AB’s work, attitude and progress.

AB’s attendance for GCSE English currently stands at above 90% and she has shown a great attitude and commitment to GCSE English this year. She has attended revision sessions, 1-1s and cooperates extremely well in class, showing a great improvement through low stakes assessment. AB has also been one of the few students that has engaged in discussion using her microphone and occasionally switching on her camera in the Google Meet lessons.

I feel that the Mindset activities have allowed for all of the above to have a positive impact on AB and I’m so proud of how far she’s come. She has matured so much and now has the attitude of “do you know what? I can do this!” or “I can’t do this bit yet but can you help me?”

AB has just accepted a conditional offer at Manchester Metropolitan University to study BSc Criminology this coming September. At the beginning of the year, she didn’t know what she wanted to do, and didn’t believe she could achieve so “there was no point”. Now, at the end of the academic year, AB is up to date with all assessments and is on track to achieve a Grade 5 or 6.

Case Study CT:

CT is a young adult student who joined my Wednesday evening class from the start of the academic year. She also attended the ‘Meet Your Tutor’ session that I held over the summer where she spoke to me afterwards about her issues. She had never studied GCSEs due to being taken out of school in Year 9. She suffers from anxiety and sometimes this can be debilitating and seriously affected her confidence and self-belief. She came in with the expectation that she “wouldn’t be very good” at it and didn’t have much faith in herself.

As the months have gone on, with the addition of the mindset activities within the sessions, CT's confidence has gone from strength to strength, starting small with occasionally contributing in class, to asking questions, to confidently stating her opinion and writing responses within low stakes assessments. CT now asks for help and even asks questions based on her feedback and works on reflecting and improving on this.

Based on our mindset activities, I have worked really hard with my adults to encourage a positive mindset and remind them of why they joined the course in the first place. I have a great working relationship with my adults students and remind them every week of how fantastic they are; CT is one of these students.

Of course, grading for this year is not finalised and the marks will need to be moderated and verified, but generally speaking, CT should be leaving this year with a Grade 6 under her belt. For a young woman who suffers with her mental health, had to leave school in Y9 and has never studied GCSEs, she has achieved a phenomenal goal and has pushed herself to be positive and believe in herself.

Another proud moment for CT is developing the confidence to deliver a presentation on Mental Health in Young people, achieving a 'Distinction' in her Spoken Language Assessment!

In summary Teacher 5 considers:

What Went Well:

- Working with others and learning from and utilising others' creativity and creating mindset tasks and being able to reflect on how effective these were for different cohorts of students.
- Self-reflection on my own mindset and thinking about the language that I use when talking to my students within a lesson. I have found the importance of using positive language and always 'flipping' negative statements, whether they be my own or my students, allows for students to develop their own language skills as well as think about why they may have a certain outlook.

Even Better If:

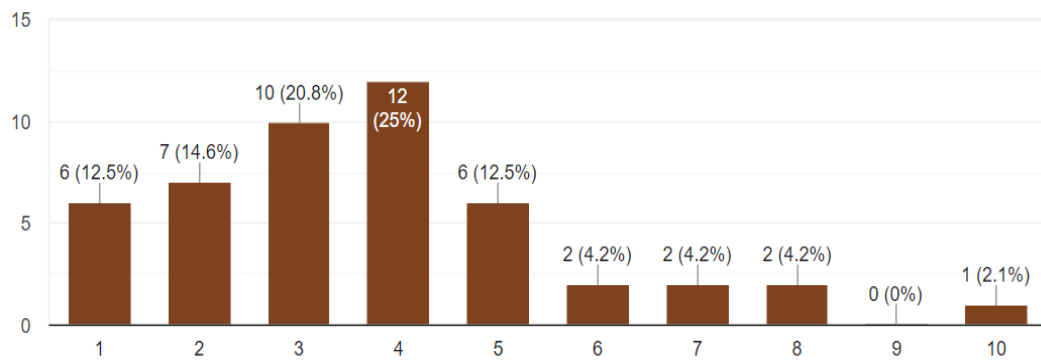
- I could create a broader range of activities and think about how I can incorporate mindset in a more subtle way as well as just having explicit mindset starters or exit tickets.
- Possibly having a set of mindset resources that students can access outside of class time.

Teacher 5 – Student feedback

Teacher 5 conducted a comprehensive Student Voice activity. The impact on students' perceptions of their ability to achieve are very interesting.

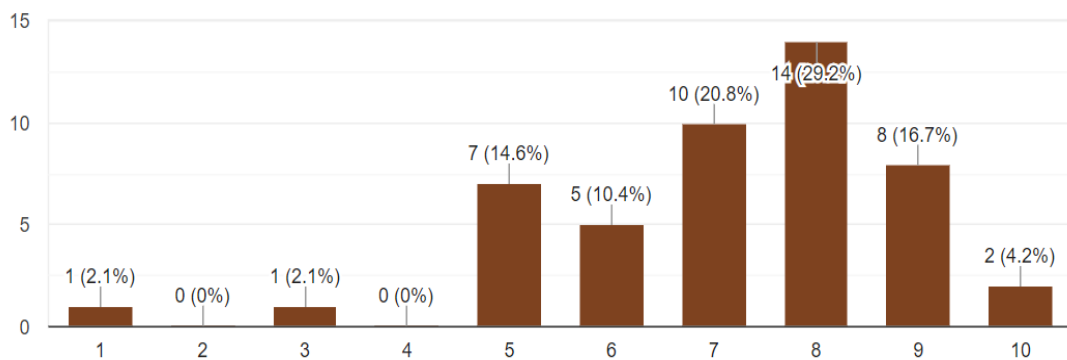
On a scale of 1-10, how would you have rated your confidence in GCSE English at the START of the year?

48 responses



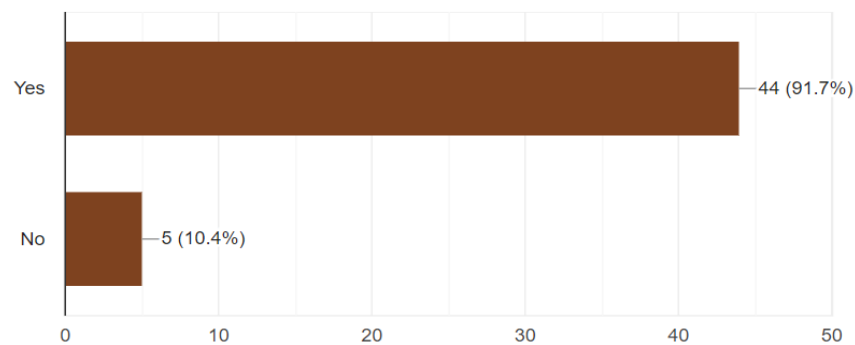
On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your confidence in GCSE English NOW?

48 responses



Do you think the mindset activities have encouraged you to be more positive during your studies?

48 responses



Teachers 6, 7, 8 and 9 – Reflections on approaches, impact on students and their professional practice

Teacher 6

'The activities we have completed have been based on looking for the inner positives with the aim of building resilience and self-esteem. Students have been engaged in tasks where negative statements are replaced with positives. For example, we used a task which involved students reflecting on times where they had overcome obstacles or what they perceived as difficulties. Focusing on these helped students realise they have the potential. Another one is where we simply used a positive adjective to describe their day so far. Simple tasks were often effective such as:

Think about something that you weren't very good at when you started. It could be something like a sport or a hobby.

- What did you do to improve?
- How does it feel to look back on it?
- Is there anything you would change?

We also looked at positive interpretation, discussing what and who could put us in a bad mood and how a negative outlook can make us make assumptions about others and ourselves.

Students have appeared to gain in confidence. This could be a natural process but as most students engaged in the tasks, I believe that it has made a difference. Evidence of this can be found in their own self-assessment, improvement in work. Even if improvement was not massively marked in some, sustainability and effort in work was significant. Throughout the year, students have developed more confidence in asking and answering questions. Not all students were confident to do this verbally, but those who shared through the chat and the Jamboard began engaging with interesting and challenging ideas. To begin with students were

reluctant to answer questions in front of their peers but this has definitely improved as time as moved on.

Some students have delivered presentations in front of their peers which I couldn't have imagined at the start of the year.

This project has made quite a significant difference to my teaching practice. I was mildly sceptical at first because I was worried that the tasks would make students feel self-conscious or at worse, patronised. However, I have made a point of engaging with the tasks myself and opened up about my own doubts that I have experienced at school or life. I made a point of not presenting myself as the all-knowing adult and this helped the students to engage more about themselves. This openness had the effect of students feeling a part of something rather than different and I am sure it helped them to know that they are not alone. It is easy to feel that everyone else has it sussed but yourself.

I have started to become very interested in the use of positive language and I am conscious of the language I use in class. I no longer feel the need to apologise for the challenging tasks I set them or feel the need to tell them it will be all over soon. I have recorded these positive language changes.

In terms of the impact on students:

Student 1: Marked improvement in both confidence in himself and his work. He occasionally has doubts but feels comfortable emailing me. His attendance was sketchy, but he now attends every lesson and has completed all his assessments on time.

Student 2: Had severe self-esteem problems. Sadly, his self-doubt and feel of failure has led to him leaving his vocational area but he felt happy with the way his English is going and is continuing. I regret that I didn't realise he was having problems with his course. However, he has been fully engaged with English, completed all work and assessments and his attendance was excellent.

As a result, I feel that the project has helped me to think about my own teaching approaches and how to adjust this to benefit my students and keep attendance and engagement up and consistent. Of course, this does not work with every student and that's where further interventions are needed, but overall, I feel that the mindset of myself and my students has improved and helped us all to think and approach GCSE English more clearly.

It has also given me the chance to get to know my students even better and figure out what their worries are. By doing so, I can change approaches to my teaching to try to reassure students and find ways of learning that make them feel more comfortable and gain a better understanding.

Teacher 7

Teacher 7 had not been involved in the project before. She delivered discrete mindset activities at the start of her sessions and found that:

- 'Lessons seem to feel more inspiring for students
- I have managed to build a better relationship and understanding of my students
- The atmosphere is much more positive
- Students seem to feel more determined and hard working'

She observed changes in the attitudes of some of her students e.g.:

One student, 'is continuing to show motivation in lessons. She is working very hard and goes the extra mile to ask as many questions as possible. Her confidence has increased significantly and she seems very engaged and determined to pass. The student appears to be more self-aware with her own progress. She had previously failed her GCSE English and was feeling very overwhelmed this year. She has sent an email to say she is now understanding her work and is trying her best to achieve a pass grade.

'This student seems to carry a more enthusiastic attitude to learning. It is still uncertain as to whether this is due to the mindset activities, or the general severity of the need to do their work to pass. She tries very hard to attend weekly and contributes a lot in class and appreciates positive praise, as it seems to boost her confidence. Overall, the attitude to the mindset activities is positive. She seems to show awareness of the need to gain the GCSE English Language Qualification.'

However, she also discovered one hairdressing student did not seem to show any change in attitude to the lesson, the mindset tasks seem not to have had an impact as seen in her slow attempt with work. She seems to do the mindset activities, but does not follow through with what has been said. This may have a better result later. It may be too early to see as of now.'

Teacher 8

It has definitely been a difficult year so far. I have completed a different task most weeks in an effort to track and observe students' resilience. Keeping language positive, especially considering the current situation with the pandemic has been hard and not simply because students' mental health has been challenged, but mine also. However, I feel some interesting observations have led me to conclude certain factors.

One interesting task that I prepared for all my classes was 'Why do we fail'. This task was introduced to each group by asking them what they felt about failing their English exam, some of them for the second and even third time. Some said that they had simply had enough of doing the course, some said that they saw the value of having a GCSE in English and wanted to continue. Interestingly some students who were attending college for the first time believed that their predicted grades from school were unfair or incorrect. I then showed them a video from Christopher Nolan's version of Batman (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ig3nsEgqNE>). This

extract shows a young boy who falls down a well. His father then retrieves him and asks him, “why do we fall”? The answer is “so that we can learn to pick ourselves up”. I felt that this is significant for many of our students and we then discussed the results of not reaching the 4 grade rather than saying, failed the exam. The negative connotations of saying the word fail has a deep impact upon the confidence of many students. Basically, students learn from their exam attempt; they learn how to deal with the pressure; they learn how to adjust their timing and they also learn, in actual real time, what is expected in the examination experience. What I found interesting here was that many new students have never even sat the examination and failed because their teachers have failed them because they didn’t feel they were good enough. The negative impact of being told by a teacher that you are not good enough, when that teacher must have, surely, spent an academic year or more encouraging them must have been so demoralising it was bound to affect any student. Therefore, the impact of being told that the reason we fall (a metaphor for not reaching the desired result) was so that we can learn to pick ourselves up (a metaphor for trying again) was recognised by some students with anger, simply because they felt they hadn’t failed the exam, they had been failed by their teacher.

Another interesting task that I tried was, what are you good at and why? By this time I had almost learned to successfully use Jamboard and I asked students to follow the link and write on the board, what they believed they were good at. Some students assumed it had to be related to English, so I had to adjust the task. When students gained the confidence to admit the things they believed they were good at, such things as football, gaming and computing were popular choices. When I asked them why they were good at these choices, the answer was always the same. They believed they were good at their choices. This is significant, because when asked if they liked English the answer was generally no. However, when asked if they disliked the lessons, answers were varied, but generally they didn’t hate the lessons, but they all believed they were not good at English.

The significance of this is important. Lots of research has been done into professional sports people, footballers, cricketers, tennis players and athletes about resilience and having a positive mindset. It is worth considering here that professional sports people do their sport because they are good at a particular sport and are not being forced to do that sport as part of an education. Therefore, the similarity is worth further investigation. I will continue with this thought during the remaining academic year.

Case Studies

Jack has made progress and the improvement continues, but sometimes I can tell he either ‘can’t be bothered’ or he is tired. When I asked him about this he seemed reticent to answer. Then I received an email from his mother who explained her own situation. She was unwell with a debilitating condition and she finds it difficult to actually get out of bed. In her email she expressed concern for Ifti and suggested that his normal way of working, in his own words, was to ‘wing it’. Ifti will never be an academic, but he is intelligent and this got me thinking about the dominant

consideration in his life; clearly looking after his mother. Therefore the external factors, looking after his mother as a carer, as well as the internal factors, his initial lack of confidence in English, suggests he has significant barriers in his academic life. But I asked, is he resilient? Yes he is; the external factors in his life are dominant and to perform these tasks and actually want to pass his GCSE in English displays clear resilience. However, the GCSE in English is secondary to his life as a carer. This shows that social aspects of some students' lives, the external, create significant barriers to their academic lives. Furthermore, it displays the disparity in life chances for our students. Financial and social conditions should be equal in our society, but they are clearly not and Ifti's opportunities in life are clearly limited by his situation. But this does not mean he is not resilient. His resilience is displayed in his looking after his mother and his attendance in college, either online or in person. He attendance has been excellent in English and his mother's influence is obvious. In his online lessons I can hear her encouraging him in the background. We have shared emails on various occasions and it is clear that she is concerned about his future and sees the value of her son having GCSE in English. Ifti struggled last year and clearly suggested that he didn't want to do this again. He failed to observe the particular nuances concerned with English and really struggled with understanding writer's use of language. This year he has settled down and followed the patterns I have given him. He still struggles, but he fully recognises that he doesn't want to do this again. His mindset has changed and I wonder if the resilience training has been effective or simply that he recognises that if he doesn't get this right this time, next year beckons again. In his PA1 assessment, the development from last year was enormous and it did make me consider whether it was his own work, but the reading part of his PA2 displayed equal progress and he did that in class on paper. I am convinced he will pass this year. But once again I wonder whether the resilience training has had any affect or whether it is simply down to Ifti's belief that he doesn't want to come back next year and do it all again. Of course, there could be another angle to consider. How much influence has his mother had on his mindset?

Dylan is a student who I found very complex at the start of his course and I taught his father Functional Skills a few years ago. I know, from conversations with his mother, that Dylan is concerned about his English. He is autistic and academically very competent in his other subjects. I feel that his autism is a barrier to understanding language in a text. The hidden meanings are very difficult for him to pick out. For example, to say that 'John was feeling blue' was taken literally. Unlike Ifti, Dylan's external factors don't hold him back, but the internal factors, such as his autism create a huge barrier to his learning. Furthermore, when I said in the first part of this document that some students were angry about their teachers failing them, Dylan told me he hated the fact that his teachers at school were predicting a high grade in English and then failed him. Significantly, Dylan continues to attempt and engage in the online classes and I have conversations with his mother, but he really lacks confidence and I continue to encourage him. The other student who I have been tracking is Dylan. Dylan continues to blame his teachers in school about his failure in English and his autism continues to be another barrier. His results show promise, but he has a scribe and I am unsure of his real ability. Dylan has become a happier student than when I first met him and he clearly enjoys attending lessons.

He is now, more vocal and his understanding has improved and I continue to encourage him. It will be interesting to see how he copes, next year, should he not receive the grade 4 this year.

At the very start of the two years that we have undertaken the OTLA project I showed all my classes the same video and asked them to create their own development plan. It is the denouement from Ridley Scott's film *The Martian* (2015). Mark Watney, the protagonist, has been marooned on the planet Mars for four years and has just been rescued. He is in a lecture theatre explaining his experience to his class. His words are significant:

"At some point, everything's gonna go south and you're going to say, this is it. This is how I end. Now you can either accept that, or you can get to work. That's all it is. You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem and you solve the next one, and then the next. And if you solve enough problems, you get to go home".

Although Watney's experience is not reflective of our students' direct experiences, the fact that he states there is a starting point that needs to be addressed, I feel that it is a good place for our students to start. Most of them come into our context with the hope of gaining enough qualifications to further themselves towards their chosen career. Certainly, if a student wishes to become a mechanic or a plumber the most effective way is to achieve an apprenticeship. In most cases this is improbable if they haven't achieved a GCSE in maths and English. That is one reason why they attend our college and a key reason why their course is funded through maths and English by the Government. Therefore, maths and English is the most important feature of their course, a feature many of them fail to grasp. The main reason for this is their sheer hatred for the two subjects they failed in comprehensive school. I explain to them that their position is similar to Watney's in the fact that they need to *'get to work...do the math...solve one problem, the next.... And the next and if you solve enough...then you'* achieve your goal. This is a clear reflection of our students' learning experience. Get to work and pass English and maths and the apprenticeship becomes a viable opportunity.

However, with all this in mind, their hatred of maths and English becomes dominant and in many cases leads to an obstinate mindset. So, our task was to change that obstinacy and transform their mindset to be tenacious. For some students, they fully recognise the situation, but remain stubborn, they are still young and inexperienced, they fail to observe the importance of education, but some fully recognise the situation and actually *make the start*. This may take a few years of doing maths and English, but their mindset changes, they mature and become ready.

One such student that I have taught this year is Luis. Luis wants to be a pilot and is doing a vocational course in 'Aviation'. He has attempted English on previous occasions and admits he has failed through apathy and disinterest. He now has a place in university dependent on his result in English. He has worked all year and should achieve his goal this year. Luis, has at last fully recognised the value of possessing a GCSE in English, and as Watney indicates, it allows him to move to the

next step in his development. The significance concerning Luis and the resilience training is that Luis already has his motivation, he does not need to be shown how to be resilient; he just needs to do the work and learn. It is my belief that Luis has matured enough, has his motivation and can see the value; therefore he has developed the correct mindset.

This year I made the project explicit to the students and many of my younger students were suspicious of the project, believing teachers were trying to manipulate them into work harder in English. In the previous year, when I didn't make my approach explicit, students were more accepting of the discussions. In contrast, adult students love it. It really works with them. However, the younger students have been all the way through school and have experienced a system driven by success, which leaves lower achieving students behind. Although, we may see the value of having the English GCSE, many students don't feel the same way. The resilience task, 'why do we fail?' is there to impress upon them that they are making progress and we should not look upon their attempt as a failure. But we can 'decorate' it as much as we want, if they haven't achieved the 4 they still have to do it again, which means to them that they have failed. For Luis, he needed the correct mindset, and this was observed through his chance of going to university; he didn't need my constant encouragement and little class starters to give him that mindset; it was already there.

This year has been interesting for students and teachers alike. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a whole new world of problems that have challenged peoples' resilience. Technology has certainly challenged my own resilience, but I have persevered and I am sure that I am much more competent than when I started. My manager constantly tells me I am hard on myself and I wonder whether I am part of her resilience project. If I am, my own mindset is naturally resilient, but her encouragement is welcomed. I have spoken in depth with other members of the team and one member suggested that our students need to learn that failure is not negative; to which my response is simple. For teachers who work in an educational setting, most, not all, but most, have not experienced educational failure and so they simply cannot empathise with many of our students who fail English year after year and are forced to do it again. Another colleague once said that if he attended college to study bricklaying and was forced to learn the cello as part of the course, his lack of interest in playing the cello would not encourage him to want to learn to play it. If we regard this statement with any weight, we must consider that if we were forced to learn English as part of a course, but we had no interest in it, would any resilience training at all encourage us to want to study English. Also, many students suggest that they may not have the grade 4, but they can read, write and speak. Therefore to many students, the 4 becomes irrelevant. They have a significant point here. For me, I love writing, reading and analysing language. I listen to people speak and love to observe structure in stories in both books and films. This is, not just my job, but my hobby and I like to think I am fairly good at it. Just like the sportsmen, I mentioned earlier, I am at the top of my game, which is why I teach it. For many of our students, learning English does not interest them. They don't like writing stories, they feel that writing a descriptive piece is a waste of time and do not see any value in having an

opinion on whether *Alice has found something that is life changing, or, what a writer's opinion about a certain elephant is*. I see the value of having a GCSE in English because I have a deep interest in the mechanics of the subject. And, also, I understand that it has a value in the wider world.

Therefore, my conclusion is quite simple. For most of our younger students the resilience training possibly has little impact. I encourage all my students to a high degree, but unless a student observes the value of possessing a GCSE in English, nothing will change their mindset. They need to either, see the value to achieve their goal, or see that if they don't pass with the 4, they will have to do it again and that creates a negative mindset in itself. If a student attends class, like most adults, they see the value, they fully understand that doors will open if they have the 4 or above and they also have the maturity to work hard. Now for these students, their teacher's constant encouragement in changing their belief that they can achieve, the resilience training is essential, but that requires further development.

I know that this final report will appear cynical, but it is based on what I feel is sound judgement based upon research over two academic years. If we remove the adult provision from my research and concentrate fully on 16 to 19 year old provision there are other factors to consider:

Firstly, my research has been based around 16 to 19 year olds within the areas of bricklaying, plumbing and motor vehicle. Historically, attendance and engagement within these areas is, somewhat, limited and students have an extremely reticent view of studying English. Over the past two years I have had two alternative classes from contrasting areas. One is social sciences, and the other is catering. The social science class could be described as more academic and engagement was very high, although actual results were relatively low. The catering class was also mixed with engineers and aviation. Engagement is very high and results will be high. The academic difference between bricklaying, plumbing and motor vehicle and catering I believe is not that different, so we must ask why is the catering class more engaged? I feel the reason is departmental. In catering, the tutors and chefs demand a higher level of engagement and discipline. We, as English teachers, are not even allowed in the kitchens. There is much to consider here and further research into this is required.

Secondly, my research has been undertaken at the time of a global pandemic. My research does not take into account the psychological impact upon students' mindset. Perhaps further research is required post pandemic.

Finally, many of our students are very young and lack experience in life. In many cases, although they feel they are knowledgeable and are mature enough to make their own decisions in life, in reality the world outside is often harsh and cruel. Our students attend our college because, generally, they have not been accepted into the sixth form of their own comprehensive schools due to achieving low grades. In other words, they have been abandoned by the institutions that have guided them over the first 15/16 years of their lives. They may not admit this, but most of them know it is true and so begins their reticence to the academic world. Therefore we must ask

why should they trust a new set of teachers who encourage them and tell them that they can achieve good grades in a new educational environment? Straight away, they become obstinate. However, maybe it is the case that after a few years more of doing maths and English, their hatred of these subjects softens and their ability simply clicks. Again, further research is required.

Teacher 9

Teacher 9 delivered discrete mindset activities and 'found that students are more confident.' She discovered that her adult students:

- 'When asked, are wanting more tasks/ work/ tests/ assignments etc
- Students are more willing to make mistakes and learn from them
- Students are asking for more work, assignments and are actively taking part in intervention sessions'

However, following an observation of her teaching and learning, she:

"Changed direction... and have since decided to alter my questioning technique. I wanted to incorporate stretch and challenge questions whilst working on mindset. I have therefore started to change how I asked students questions and delved deeper into why students are thinking a certain way. I am in the early stages of this and want to fully explore this half term".

She subsequently found this to be very powerful. Strong Level 1 and Level 2 Functional Skills first time pass results suggested to her that such a focus was proving to be highly effective. Additionally, she observed that one of students who she was tracking for the project has really engaged with the mindset tasks and questions. He has started to ask himself questions and see how putting himself down won't help.'

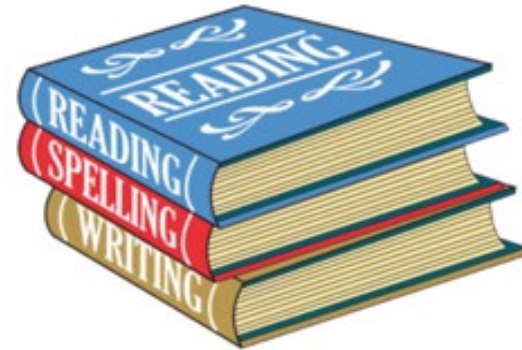
Appendix 3 – Examples of Resources

Mindset starter

Is English as a subject disconnected from the real world?

Do you **agree** or **disagree**?

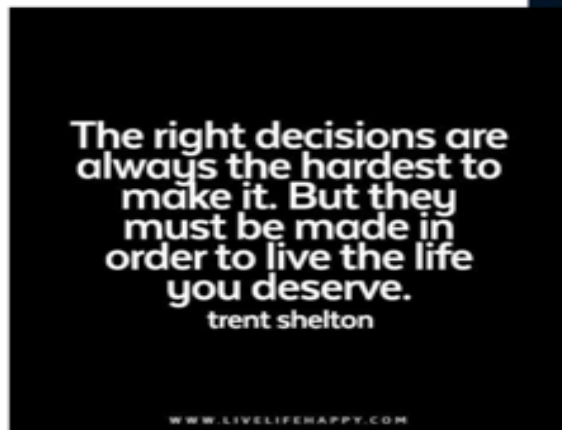
Explain **WHY**.



Mindset - making positive decisions

Choose an image and explain how far you agree.

I agree that... because...



“Don’t ever make decisions based on fear. Make decisions based on hope and possibility. Make decisions based on what should happen, not what shouldn’t.”

Michelle Obama

Mindset starter

The Language Question

This question tests your ability to understand certain words and the context that they are used.

Language is central to all our lives and is arguably the cultural tool that sets humans apart from any other species. We use it to buy groceries in the supermarket, to get a job, to hire or fire an employee, to buy train tickets, and to compose an email. We use it to make a telephone call, to invite someone out on a date, to propose marriage, to get married, to quarrel, and to make up afterward. Language allows us to make friends and enemies, to pass the time of day, and so on. In our everyday lives, we produce and comprehend language with such apparent ease that we take it for granted.

Write down an account of when the language you or someone else has used, has been important to you.

Mindset - making positive decisions

Look back at your target from the beginning of the lesson and answer the following questions:

1. Did you achieve your target?
2. If you didn't achieve your target, why do you think this is? What might help you to achieve your target next time?
3. If you did achieve your target, what helped you achieve it?
4. What impact has achieving your target had on your learning and on how you feel at the end of today's session?

Self-assessment

Give yourself a WWW (what went well) and EBI (even better if) based on the following questions:

1. Have I identified the writers' perspectives from both sources?
2. Have I used concise, focused quotations from both sources?
3. Have I used multiple quotes to support my ideas from each source?
4. Have I labelled the method each writer uses?
5. Have I fully developed my explanations and used the word 'because'?
6. Is my response clear and does it answer the question?

WWW:

EBI:

Now, in a different colour. Make the changes you need to to improve your work.



'Grittiness'

Adapted from 'The Grit Scale' by Angela Duckworth 2016

1

If we say a person is 'gritty'
or has a lot of 'grit'...

What do we mean by 'grit'?

2

For the following slides,
pick your answer and keep
a tally of your score.

3

1.
New ideas and
projects excite
me, especially
if they build on
previous ones!

- Not at all like me = 1
- Not much like me = 2
- Somewhat like me = 3
- Mostly like me = 4
- Very much like me = 5

4

4.
I am a hard
worker.

- Not at all like me = 1
- Not much like me = 2
- Somewhat like me = 3
- Mostly like me = 4
- Very much like me = 5

5

8.
I am diligent. I
never give up.


- Not at all like me = 1
- Not much like me = 2
- Somewhat like me = 3
- Mostly like me = 4
- Very much like me = 5

6

What's your score?


Take your answer of your score for each item & add them up to get your total score.

See: Angela Duckworth's Grit Scale, available on: <https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale> for full questionnaire





Why don't we ask for help?

Think about all the situations where someone needs help but doesn't ask for it (it doesn't have to be college related). What reasons are there for people not asking for help do you think? Also can you think of how we can encourage people to ask for help?


[Share](#) 


Faye 


Embarrassed that you asked for help and feel like you should be able to do in on your own. But you should ask for it and it will make it an easier task or more straight forward 

Rhia-Maria Johnston 


feel dumb n embarrassed 

tammy 


feel ashamed 


Emily 

people may feel nervous to ask and they may like they need to do the task alone 

Faye 

Not judge people when others ask for help and make it a safe place to do so 


Emily 

ask if they need help first 

Rhia-Maria Johnston 

maybe ask them if they get it and then maybe explain it more 

Faye 

Work in small groups so it's not as scary 

Starter: what is your viewpoint (opinion) on studying from home? Write your ideas into the chat. **In my opinion/I believe/I think/I feel...**



You could consider:

1. The benefits of studying at home.
2. The negatives of studying at home.
3. What your ideal way of studying would be.

Challenge: write two sentences to persuade someone to take on your viewpoint. Use two **persuasive techniques**.

Useful words

Independent, technology, new, internet, routine, challenging, motivation, resilience, research, teachers, interaction, environment, distractions



Challenge

Write a sentence to describe the image using the words you came up with e.g. Feeling *hopeless*, Tia stared longingly out of the window.

Starter

1. Write down 5 words to describe how the person in the image might be feeling e.g. **hopeless**
2. **Can you explain why you have chosen these words using evidence?**

*I think she is feeling...
because...*

-
1. What attitude to change is being presented in this image?
 2. Do you agree with this attitude? Why or why not?



Below is an extract from a lesson working on GCSE English Language Paper 2

What is your opinion of *Dear Basketball*?

Summarise the film in one word.

What type of mindset would you say Kobe Bryant demonstrated?



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