

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 7 (ENGLISH) PROJECT –
BRINGING WRITING TO LIFE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LIFE
EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING WRITING**

Mouton 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 - Bringing Writing to Life: Exploring the role of life experience in teaching writing

Mouton College

This project aimed to examine the role of individual lived experience for teaching writing. We trialled a range of methods, including dialogic questioning and tailored learning resources such as alternative peer assessment, in both Functional Skills and GCSE English lessons. We observed that when we used certain methods that encouraged learners to draw on their individual lived experience and existing knowledge, their writing improved.

Summary

Moulton College is a specialist land-based FE college in the East Midlands offering programmes including animal management, equine studies, construction, food and drink, sport, business and agriculture. A team of five English teachers took part in the project, as well as learning support assistants and the Head of English and maths (who also teaches English at the college).

Through the project, we were hoping to achieve a greater understanding of strategies that help FE learners to respond to writing tasks (both descriptive and transactional writing). We were particularly curious about strategies that could support learners to feel more motivated to write, to be able to generate ideas and to expand on their points to improve the quality of their writing. These aspects of writing were of particular concern, as our learners reported finding them challenging.

Rationale

Analysis of learners' GCSE exam transcripts in June and November 2019 indicated that the majority of learners achieve higher marks in the reading section than the writing section. English teachers commonly set targets in response to learners' written work, both in class and in formative assessments, around particular aspects of their writing. Examples include improving the authenticity of their creative writing through the use of more vivid descriptions and improving their transactional writing by adapting more effectively to the required type of text, intended audience and purpose, as indicated in the question. Through attending network meetings, we discovered that many colleagues at other colleges report the same finding. A similar finding is also true for learners studying Functional Skills English. Learners typically require more attempts to pass the writing exam than the reading exam and often voice concerns around not knowing what to write, or how to structure their responses. This issue inspired our project.

Approach

We trialled a range of resources and methods in our English lessons, which all foregrounded the belief that an appreciation of individual lived experiences is

important when teaching writing. English teachers and learning support assistants trialled the following activities:

- Dialogic questioning, particularly around the planning process during transactional writing tasks and when facilitating group analysis of the work of their peers. See Appendix 2 for a more detailed explanation.
- Live modelling, including class questioning to support live modelling.
- Using excerpts from the book 'Orangeboy' by Patrice Lawrence (Lawrence, 2016) to inspire learners to write creatively, while drawing on their own lived experience. (See Appendix 3.)
- Alternative peer assessment. In order to reduce barriers caused by learners' insecurities about showing their own writing, we asked them to examine the work of other learners (not present in the class at the time). We used hand-written exemplars from a range of sources, including the work of learners from a different class at Moulton College this academic year; the work of learners from previous years at the college, and exemplars provided by Eduqas (the exam board we use for GCSE English). (See Appendix 4.)
- Regular conversations with learners with a particular focus on getting to know the learners' interests, past experiences and motivators.

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

The teachers involved in the project have a renewed understanding of the benefit of taking an action research stance to improve the experience for their learners. Teachers report that they have found the regular meetings beneficial, as talking to colleagues about how learners have responded to the new methods and approaches has helped them to understand what they need to do next in the classroom. One of the teachers who took part in the project recently moved to teaching in the FE sector, after years of teaching in secondary schools. She said:

*"I love this form of CPD. It's been brilliant and I feel like my thinking has shifted from talking about what learners **should** do, to thinking about what they **could** do, with the right approach".*

Some of the teachers involved report that, since taking part in the project, they now attend regular English Practitioners Network meetings to ensure that they also benefit from working collaboratively with colleagues in other organisations. They report feeling more receptive to trialling new ideas in the classroom.

Learning support assistants report that they have a better understanding of methods and approaches that they can use to support learners in both English lessons and vocational lessons.

The project findings have useful implications for teaching writing, both in English lessons and vocational lessons. The project lead has already delivered some CPD to the vocational teachers at the college this year and has plans to deliver more, in light

of the project findings, to ensure learners are able to benefit across all areas of their study programme.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project has encouraged better collaboration between the English teachers at the college. It has been a brilliant talking point in our regular meetings, as the learners have been at the forefront of conversations. All teachers involved have enjoyed trialling the strategies with their learners and taking time to carefully reflect on their influence in the classroom. The project has facilitated more open conversations between teachers and learning support assistants about the different ways that we support learners and there are plans being put in place to ensure that these continue. There is a renewed understanding of the vital nature of collaboration and reflection as a team and, as a result, managers are now more conscious of the importance of dedicated time each week where teachers can come together. Going forward, this has implications for timetabling and scheduling of team meetings, to ensure accessibility for all team members.

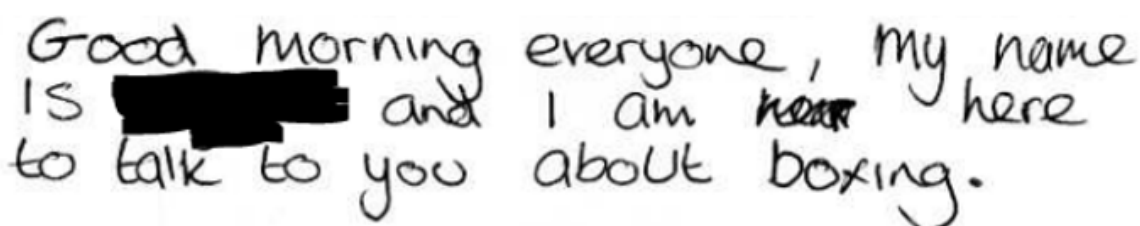
Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners were seen to be more engaged in the lessons when hand-written examples of learner work were shown. When an example piece was handed out, learners who were previously visibly distracted, for example, using their mobile phone, were seen to put their phones down without being asked, and started looking at the examples and taking part in class discussions. The pieces seemed to support better engagement because learners could see that the pieces had been written by somebody who was, at some point, 'just like them'. Learners re-sitting English at college often struggle to believe that they can succeed and, therefore, this exposure to the work of their peers who had improved their skills, helped them to believe they could too. This improvement in their motivation and self-belief was key, as these are often two of the greatest barriers to progress that we see in the re-sit classroom.

Figure 1: One of the hand-written example pieces. The learner was responding to the following task:

'You have been asked to give a talk to your class about your hobby or special interest to try to encourage others to get involved.

Write what you would say in your talk.'



Good morning everyone, my name is [redacted] and I am ~~here~~ here to talk to you about boxing.

Boxing is great in many different ways. People do it for ~~fitness~~ fitness, self defence or stress relief.

I started boxing when I was 14 because I've always had a ~~interest~~ dream to become a ~~professional~~ Professional boxer and fight in the olympics. I have had ~~two~~^{three} fights won two by decision and one by TKO so I'm on the right track.

I go to ~~the~~ boxing club, it's an amazing environment everyone is nice and we have a good laugh but we all work very hard until the last second of the bell.

Boxing is not all about technique, speed and power ~~its~~^{also} about ~~the~~ heart and having a strong mindset. You have to be dedicated and give ~~your~~ (100%) one hundred percent even on your bad days.

Being in the gym helps ~~me~~ me and many others I'm sure to relax and take their mind off things.

Many people believe that boxing is simple and to them people I say your wrong. Its not just beating each other up. ~~Its~~ you got to have good hand-eye coordination, footwork, keeping your hands up and controlled breathing.

You might be thinking breathing? but when someone is leathering you with ten ounce (10oz) gloves in your ~~stomach~~ ~~stomach~~ belly your breath gets ~~its~~ swept away right from your ~~throat~~ throat.

Boxing is well known worldwide and is not a sport that can be taken lightly, it is a dangerous sport. Why do you think they get paid so much?

~~And~~ ~~I~~ want to you guys to do is give it a try. If you don't like it fine but its worth a go and you never know you may be surprised by your ~~talent~~ talent.

Thank you and be safe
everyone

In one lesson, a construction student studying Level 1 Maintenance Operations was overheard quietly saying to a friend “this feels much easier, doesn’t it?” When the teacher asked him if he would mind repeating this out loud and saying a bit more about what he meant, he was happy to and added further explanation saying that he “liked seeing a full example that didn’t seem too hard to do [himself]”. Seeing a hand-written response from one of their peers seemed to help things to feel real and doable.

The vast majority of learners were seen to be writing more over time, as the project progressed, and the quality of their work improved.

In their creative writing, learners’ descriptions improved when they wrote about something that they could relate to and had personally experienced. (See Appendix 5.) We found that learners who previously found it challenging to structure their creative writing, did better when they were encouraged to write about an experience with a very clear, tangible structure in real life, for example, running a race or going for a short walk. Learners were seen to do better when they were given a specific title, set by the teacher, and a hand-written example piece to evaluate first. Teachers reported that it was great to see the different ways that learners took the title and made it their own. One teacher was particularly heartened to see how energised and enthused learners were in a lesson where she asked them to use the title ‘The Chase’ to inspire a piece of creative writing. The teacher chose this title because the class had been listening to the audiobook of ‘Orangeboy’ by Patrice Lawrence (Lawrence, 2016) at the start of every lesson and, in the part they listened to that day, the main character and his best friend were being chased as they tried to escape from their enemies. The teacher was fascinated to see how well the learners naturally built tension and suspense in their own writing, after listening to that part of the story. A general observation from teachers involved in the project was that learners did better when encouraged to write naturally, rather than being directed to consciously include any particular language techniques. When reflecting on Professor Brian Cox’s 1991 report (1991, cited in Bleiman, 2018) on English teaching in schools, Bleiman (2018) says that ‘If English in schools becomes ‘exam English’ or ‘school English’, with no real connection to the ‘real English’ or ‘full English’ that can be found in other contexts, then students will engage in ways of thinking and writing that will neither fulfil any of Cox’s roles for the subject, nor get them the best possible grades in exams.’ Our project findings certainly seem to support this notion. Authenticity was a key theme underpinning the approaches in our project. Learners made better progress when they were supported to make links between English and their lived experiences.

The same finding was true for transactional writing, in GCSE and Functional Skills lessons (see Appendix 6). Teachers also noticed that learners seemed more generally inquisitive as a result of some of the dialogic questioning. For example, in one lesson on transactional writing, the teacher spent some time asking the learners questions about a piece written by a learner from a previous year, where they shared their views on pets. The questions were designed to encourage critical evaluation of the piece, so that the learners would be able to learn from it and use the insights they’d gained when they wrote their own piece in the second half of the lesson. The

learners all took an active part in the task and were seen to make excellent observations about the piece. Afterwards, the teacher asked if anybody had any other points they wanted to make or discuss. One learner asked what the teacher thought about pets. The task seemed to facilitate an open dialogue where the learners felt comfortable to express their opinions and ask questions. The learners all then went on to write their own piece, where they confidently expressed their own views on pets. Similarly, in a Functional Skills lesson, the teacher reported that, when the learner was prompted to use his own experience of eating in a canteen, it really helped him to get started and he could think of what to write.

Learning from this project

Through the project, we have learned that:

Learners' writing improves when they can draw on their own lived experience and, therefore, teachers should embrace methods that facilitate this process.

Learners benefit from seeing hand-written example pieces, written by their peers. Learners seem to be even more interested in reading and learning from the piece if they perceive the author as similar to them, for example, pieces written by learners who had moved from a grade 3 to a grade 4 or above; learners who studied the same vocational course as them and learners who studied at the same college as them. We noticed that learners were far more interested in looking at examples that were hand-written, rather than typed, perhaps because of the added 'believability factor'. Our learners often feel insecure about their writing ability, especially if they are not confident in the accuracy of their spelling or use of grammar. Seeing the hand-written examples was powerful because learners could appreciate for themselves that there are many others who struggle with similar things, and that writing doesn't have to be perfect to still be brilliant in lots of ways. We would stress how important it was for our learners to be given the right time and space to notice the areas for improvement, as well as the positives in the example pieces. Example pieces should be chosen carefully, to ensure maximum benefit for the learners.

Learners benefit from planning their writing, particularly transactional writing tasks, and they do better when they have taken time to ensure they fully understand and appreciate the purpose, audience and type of task required. However, we noticed that the majority of learners found it unhelpful for teachers to use the words 'purpose, audience and type', as they were confused by what these terms meant in the context of planning writing tasks. Bleiman (2018) talks about negative symptoms of the widespread shift to a very narrow focus on exams in the English classroom and states that '[o]ne answer to this, for us, has been to try to encourage the teachers we meet to step back from the assessment and to encourage their students, at the start of the course, to do the same. Just as a Year 7 doesn't need to see a GCSE question, so a GCSE or A Level student doesn't need to know that 30% of a component goes on context, right from day one. Rather, they need to start applying contextual knowledge in well-judged ways and learn what it means to do that.' Our learners were able to show excellent understanding and appreciation of the 'purpose,

audience and type' required, but this was best achieved when teachers asked learners to "highlight the important parts of the question", for example. Teachers then asked the learners specific questions, to ensure that they had a thorough understanding of the implications of the task in their writing. For example, if learners had highlighted the words 'write a talk' and 'to deliver to your class', the teacher might say "I see that you have highlighted the words 'talk' and 'to deliver to your class'. How might you start your piece of writing to show you have really thought about these things?" Learners' writing improved when they made highlighting and annotating the question a regular part of their planning process and were seen to be taking time to draw on their 'real world' experiences.

As teachers, we feel that this project has reminded us how important it is to come together regularly to reflect on what we are seeing in the classroom and to share effective teaching strategies. We look forward to continuing our journey, working collaboratively as we discover more strategies that help our learners.

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Appendix 1 – The project team

Project Role	Name	Job Role
Project Lead	Kirsty Powell	Teacher of English
Deputy Lead	Tom Redshaw	Head of School- Maths and English
Project team	Louise Sparrow	Teacher of English
Project team	Sarah Shelford	Teacher of English
Project team	Nikki Middleton	Teacher of English
Project team	Clare Hulme	Teacher of English
Project team	Cherry Letts	Learning Support Assistant
Project team	Ana Peixoto	Learning Support Assistant
Project team	John O'Shea	Vice Principal of Curriculum
Project Mentor	Catriona Mowat (ccConsultancy)	
Research Group Lead	Bob Read (ccConsultancy)	

Appendix 2 – Using dialogic questioning to facilitate planning

When helping learners to plan and respond to transactional writing tasks, teachers asked a range of questions designed to ensure that learners had a good appreciation of what the task required of them. The example shown below illustrates the process.

Learners were given the following writing task:

'You have been asked to give a talk to your class about your hobby or special interest to try to encourage others to get involved.

Write what you would say in your talk.'

- After giving every learner a copy of this task, the teacher first asked them to consider and highlight the words that they considered to be the most important in the question.
- Based on the words the learners highlighted, the teacher then asked further questions. For example:

"Based on what the question is asking you to do, what do you think you will first need to decide?"

"I see you have highlighted the word 'talk'. How will that affect your piece of writing? Where do you think it will be most obvious that it's a talk and not, say, a letter?"

"Well done for highlighting the phrase: 'to your class'. How might this affect the language you are going to use, and the things you might say?"

"You've highlighted 'to encourage others to get involved'. How do you think you will achieve that? What kind of things might you say? Or not say?"

Teachers tried to ensure that all learners felt confident to respond to these questions by using a range of strategies, including online questioning tools that allowed learners to respond anonymously using their mobile phones.

Dialogic questioning was also used to encourage learners to evaluate example pieces, written by their peers from other groups at the college. For example, to support learners to respond to the task detailed above, we gave every learner a copy of the example piece shown below and asked questions such as:

- Which parts of this make you think it's a talk?
- How well has this learner shown that they understand that it's a talk for their class? Why do you think that? (What else could they have done?)
- Do you think this talk would encourage others to give boxing a try? Why/ why not? Would it encourage you to? (Which words, sentences or phrases would support what you're saying?) What else could they have said?
- What is good about this piece?
- What would you change about it? (if anything)
- Do you think this learner is always clear? Why/ why not?

Good morning everyone, my name is [redacted] and I am ~~here~~ here to talk to you about boxing.

Boxing is great in many different ways. People do it for ~~fitness~~ fitness, self defence or stress relief.

I started boxing when I was 14 because I've always had a ~~interest~~ dream to become a ~~professional~~ professional boxer and fight in the olympics. I have had ~~three~~ ^{three} fights won two by decision and one by TKO so I'm on the right track.

I go to [redacted] boxing club, it's an amazing environment everyone is nice and we have a good laugh but we all work very hard until the last second of the bell.

Boxing is not all about technique, speed and power. It's ^{also} about ~~the~~ heart and having a strong mindset. You have to be dedicated and give ~~your~~ (100%) one hundred percent even on your bad days.

Being in the gym helps ~~me~~ me and many others I'm sure to relax and take their mind of things.

Many people believe that boxing is simple and to them people I say your wrong. Its not just beating each other up. ~~its~~ you got to have good hand-eye coordination, footwork, keeping your hands up and controlled breathing.

You might be thinking breathing? but when someone is leathering you with ten ounce (10oz) gloves in your ~~stomach~~ belly your breath gets ~~its~~ swept away right from your ~~throat~~ throat.

Boxing is well known worldwide and is not a sport that can be taken lightly, it is a dangerous sport. why do you think they get paid so much?

~~Back~~
All I want to you guys to do is give it a try. if you don't like it fine but its worth a go and you never know you may be suprised by your ~~talent~~ talent.

Thank you and be safe
everyone

Appendix 3 – Creative writing inspired by ‘Orangeboy’ by Patrice Lawrence (Lawrence, 2016)

After listening to a part of the story where the main character and his best friend were being chased, one teacher tasked her learners with writing a piece of creative writing with the title ‘The Chase’. Learners responded with enthusiasm and enjoyed drawing on their own experiences in their piece. The teacher was impressed by the different ways in which the learners used the title and the teacher highlighted, in particular, how effectively the learners built tension and suspense in their pieces. An example written by one of the learners is shown below. Some parts have been blanked out to protect the learner’s anonymity. The teacher highlighted (in yellow) the parts that she was particularly impressed by, as the learner demonstrated excellent understanding of how to use language and structure to engage the reader. We use positive marking strategies such as this because they help to motivate our learners to write and to be more receptive to feedback. The learner’s planning is also shown:

Getting chased - in [redacted] town. 4 boys chasing 2 of us. Meo and my brother feeling? how? why? Feeling scared, at same time full with energy. How?

We ~~was~~ are in Mcdonalds. I have just sat down for my food but I don't feel like I'll be sat for long. [redacted] was next to me scoffing his chips and chomping away at his burger. I just didn't have the appetite right now. Especially after the day we've had.

I started to eat but It wasn't setting right. Something was just not right. I nudged [redacted] and asked him how he was feeling so fine after the day we had. As soon as I said that I see the boys from earlier.

Me and [redacted] locked eyes for a split second. I don't know how they knew we was here. Especially all 4 of them. I binned my burger and sat there patiently hoping they wouldn't see me, but we was hard to miss.

"I knew we shouldn't of [redacted] [redacted] said. And to be honest I was thinking the same thing. They must of followed us here or [redacted] [redacted]. We was stupid to [redacted] and look what we got ourselves into now.

The closer they got the more I got ready to run. I don't even care about [redacted] now I just want to get out of here safe.

Me and [redacted] knew we had to run. If not [redacted] I told [redacted] on the count of 3 we run. He agreed but it wasn't going to be easy. 4 of them and 2 of us. We wasn't ready for what's about to happen.

I look at [redacted] and I slowly started counting. 1... I done up my shoe laces tight and put my phone in a secure pocket. 2... They was right at the door now and we was hard to miss. We had to go now. 3!!!

We both shot up arms swinging. ~~and then~~ All four of them looked up and set there eyes on us. But before they properly could me and [redacted] barged straight through them. I peeked back and seen one of them slide across the floor. But the other 3 was pouncing on us.

We ran through the [redacted] slipping and sliding. I have never ran so fast in my life. I barged a buggy that I didn't even see. I wanted to stop and say sorry but I had no time. [redacted] was what seemed like a mile in front of me so I had no time to waste. I had to keep up.

Appendix 4 – Using hand-written examples for alternative peer assessment

A key finding from the project was how useful and valuable learners found it to see the work of others, especially if they could relate to the authors. Please see below, an example of a piece of creative writing and a piece of transactional writing that we used with our learners. Both of the pieces were written by learners who also attended Moulton College. Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 include examples of the pieces that learners produced as a result of interacting with this work. Teachers were particularly impressed by the ways in which learners took the prompts and made them their own. For example; 'The Race' became a race between brothers while walking the dog or something less obvious, like a race around the Monopoly board (see Appendix 5).

Creative writing

The Race

~~Leading up to the race~~
I had started my training 3 months before the actual race. It was the most gruelling ~~3~~ ~~month~~ 3 months of my life and I wouldn't wish it on my worst of enemies. The ~~tense~~ intense workouts for the race meant I had basically no social life with ~~the~~ training before and after school everyday of the week. ~~and~~ Even on weekends I had ~~to~~ to train. ~~It~~ It felt like I was

The ~~be~~ week before the race was the worst week of my life. I had to wake up at 4am every day before school and ~~train~~ ~~for~~ ~~two~~ and a half hours. That week I also had all of my exams for ~~the~~ school which only ~~add~~ made the week worse for me.

But finally race day was here I came ready to win and ready to push myself to the limit to do it. The race was no normal

The race though as it had been rain falling heavy the night before, ~~the track~~ which made the ~~effect~~ already ~~rather~~ muddy track basically impossible to run on but I was more ready than ever to race.

The race was about to begin and I was very nervous and started to doubt myself even though I knew that I could do it. In the distance I could hear my family and friends cheering me which cleared my head. A whistle a split second ~~the~~ ^{the} whistle had blown and I was off running.

At mid way thru the race my legs ~~had~~ already turned to jelly and I felt I couldn't go any more. I felt like my legs ~~were~~ ~~at~~ I would never be able to walk again if I carried on but I had trained to hold for me just to give up now. I pushed myself ~~the~~ ~~to~~ more than I ever thought I could push. I ~~am~~

I had nothing left in me but as I looked up I could see the final mile checkpoint in front and there were only two people in my way. ~~I pushed like myself to the~~ I had pushed myself to the limit before but never like this. The two people in front had started to slow down so I took my ~~opportunity~~ opportunity and overtook them. I burst ~~thru~~ thru the checkpoint and ~~got collapse~~ collapsed but I had done it, it may of ~~it~~ taken

every thing I had but I had done it.

Transactional writing

The learner in the example shown below was responding to the following task:

'Write a lively guide to surviving the teenage years for a school/ college magazine.'

An observation made by teachers throughout the project was that learners were more able to sustain concentration and wrote longer pieces, of a better quality, when they could relate to the stimulus. The example below demonstrates this finding.

Surviving education

This is your personal guide ~~to~~ on how to survive school or college. If you every need help look back on these tips and tricks.

Anxiety - now have you ever had a moment when you were too scared to speak in class, make a new friend, eat lunch alone, walk alone to class or even go toilets alone? Well so have I. Most people do. ~~which is why~~ This is why friendships are so important they help build your confidence so you can do all these things. Making friends is scary but the key is to find someone else who is alone because they most likely are just as scared as you. So breath, say this will be okay and walk over and start talking. Everything from then on will get easier, you'll both make more friends together and you'll have someone to sit next to in class or lunch.

Bullying - Have you ever been made fun of from getting called names, getting your lunch stolen to getting physically hurt?

Well first thing first go tell a parent, teacher, sibling, nurse anyone who is an adult and ~~as~~ you feel safe talking to. ~~you can~~ If you're ~~so~~ worried about getting called a snitch then don't worry you can tell who you're speaking to if they can keep it anonymous. Another tip is to ignore them. Most of the time they will be looking for a reaction and if you don't give one they will get bored and stop.

Have fun! do not take it so seriously you're allowed to have a laugh with friends and teachers it's what makes the days go ~~by~~ by quicker. enjoy your lessons, listen and do the work and you will have no problem with getting told off as long as you listen when you need to and follow rules. ~~Be~~

Be yourself - if you're allowed to change your hair colour do it, if you're allowed to wear your own clothes do. Express yourself in ways people will want to come and be your friend. Be nice to everyone ~~and~~ and treat people how you want to be treated.

Save money - Always try bring in a snack to eat for breakfasts as lunch can be expensive. Specially if you're a snacker and like to eat throughout the day. Like me. It'll save you money if you eat before you leave the house and pack a lunch with you.

Sleep, Sleep is the most important for us moody teenagers. If you're falling asleep in lesson and getting told off then you need to set a earlier bed time and allow yourself to relax rather than being on your phone. Teenagers need up to 8-10 hours sleep.

Home work. DO NOT fall back on homework or assignments this is when it gets stressfull and you worry. the day you get set work try do a little that night then do some the next day. if you have a week to complete it, do a little everyday so it doesnt stress you out.

Appendix 5 – Creative writing using lived experience

GCSE English learners are required to produce a piece of creative prose writing as part of the course. In the exam, our learners are given a choice of four written prompts to inspire their writing (examples of these written prompts are shown throughout this appendix). Teachers noticed that, for the vast majority of learners, their writing improved when they based their piece on something they had experienced themselves. The lessons typically involved giving the learners a writing prompt (for example: write a piece with the title 'The Race') followed by alternative peer assessment with dialogic questioning (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 4). The learners would then be tasked with thinking of lots of different ways that the title could be used. For example: a race at school, a race with a sibling or a less obvious interpretation (see examples below). We were struck by how much more effectively learners were able to use language and structure to engage their readers when they were writing from their own experiences. However, we appreciated that this would not necessarily be true for every learner, and we ensured that learners could easily let us know if they would rather not base their piece on a lived experience. A minority of learners chose to write about something entirely fictional, as this was a better option for them. The examples below show excerpts from pieces that our learners produced when drawing on their own experiences. The headings show the writing prompt they were responding to.

Write a story which begins 'I was really looking forward to this...'

This learner used language and structure consistently well, as she told a funny story about one particularly memorable Christmas day. As can be seen here, the learner's descriptions are original and authentic. The full piece was three pages long, but only the first two paragraphs are included here.

I was really looking forward to this day, so much so I'd been counting down the days like some exasperated convict in prison. December 25th - Christmas Day, the one day of the year when you can eat as much as you want and get hammered, and nobody would judge you for it!

Nothing interesting happens at my home during Christmas, and our boring white walls don't have even an inch of tinsel adorned on them. We haven't even set up a Christmas tree in years, it's discreetly sleeping in the back of our airing cupboard, gathering dust. If that Christmas tree were human, I think it would be happily living out its retirement about now.

The Worst Job

This title inspired one learner to creatively describe the cafe where he worked part-time. Excerpt shown below. The similes and scathing tone were highlighted as particularly impressive for this learner.

Working in a greasy bus station cafe ~~where~~ was not the ideal job. I felt like an animal trapped in a cage just waiting to leave before I even get to work. I could smell the grease and oily ~~smell~~ ~~smell~~ ~~smell~~ ~~smell~~ from a mile off. The place was described as unhygienic ~~from~~ ~~many~~ many critics. This was by far the worst job. The food was safe about ~~edible~~ edible with fat dripping from every meat ~~delicious~~ ~~delicious~~ ~~delicious~~ ~~delicious~~ dish.

The Race

This title was particularly popular with our learners. The examples below demonstrate how learners took the title and made it their own. We noticed, in particular, how much more effectively learners were able to structure their writing when working on this task.

Example 1

"Ah... I remember that day as if it was yesterday." -
a somewhat nostalgic me muttered calmly to myself.
For this was the first time I struck gold.
Well, I'll admit it wasn't actually gold,
but in the mind of an ^{eight} 8 year old boy, it ^{is} as
mighty as well have been.
It was the day... I won my first medal, the day...
I was "Separated from the Weak".
Like most typical challenges, it was a sports day.
Yep... Penalty Shots... 3 legged race, and egg & spoon
sawre! Not to mention relay races, and also a
sprint. Also it was the first day I was actually
motivated to go into school (because my year four
group was a living hell!) but I digress.

Example 2

The Race

My family was very competitive but this race was down to complete pot luck.

My mum, my dad, my brother and me. This was it and I really hope I don't see this starting line again this race.

Me and my dad got a really good start at 5 big strides which put us neck and neck. All of a sudden my mum ~~strides~~ ^{shot} past me but she was only one stride ahead. My brother got so lucky because he only went three paces and found a secret tunnel to ^{the} half way point. That was the first set of ~~rolls~~ ^{rolls} in our game. Good.

Snakes and ladders was such a big deal in our family when ~~we~~ ^I was young. The second set of ~~rolls~~ ^{rolls} came around and I was nervous because if I got a two or a six I was on a snake but I was praying for a one so I could be just ahead of my brother. I jiggled the die around in my hand and after a couple of seconds, I let go. I saw the one then the four then the six and then it landed. I looked down to see a two and I was devastated because

Example 3

The race.

My brother had challenged me. I was not really worried though. He was a lot smaller, slower and younger. I accepted the challenge. We were on a field with the end line being the tree line. ✓✓ Good.

He walked me over to the start line. He was very excited to prove he was faster. I could feel his enthusiasm. I went down to one knee. The smell of the wet grass was overpowering.

"We go on!" I said. However I knew my brother he was one of the biggest cheaters ever. "Yeah, yeah" He ~~said~~ sighed. This meant he was going to start early. In the distance, I heard our mom shout "hurry up". I could tell she was bored as she walked away at a consistent, slow pace. ✓✓

So I counted down "3... 2... 1... go".

However my prediction was wrong. He didn't start early. That little cheater pushed me off balance and sprinted to the tree line.

Date.....

I stood up and caught up. ~~Both~~ Both ^{sprinting} ~~Both~~ I took the lead. Another 40 metres or so to go. Both of us very unfit. However we fought like gladiators. Great

I saw the tree line. Our 60 metre sprint nearly concluded. My brother 5 metres behind. I couldn't let myself win. He wanted this so much I leaped on the floor. &


^{was} Acting as if I struggled to get up. My brother, with no consideration may I add, ran past me with his tongue out. I got up with little effort. My ~~Brother~~ ^{He} ran into the tree line winning.

This would be a good moment. If he didn't start dancing and rubbing it in. However, I didn't express my true feelings. I congratulated his ~~perseverance~~ ~~perseverance~~ perseverance by carrying him to our mother to continue our main task of walking the dog.

Write about a time when you felt annoyed (or another emotion of your choice)

Many learners could relate to this title. We also encouraged learners to change the final word to an emotion of their choice. Example 1 (below) was an excerpt taken from a piece written by a learner who described an uncomfortable train journey with excellent authenticity. Example 2 (below) was written by a learner who decided to write about a time he felt proud.

Example 1

 Then we entered a tunnel. The train car went really dark and I could hear the boy start to talk to his mum. "~~my~~ ~~my~~ mum did you bring the changes for my ds?" I could hear the mum rumaging in her bag and then she words left her mouth that would ruin the rest of the ride home for me "no I didn't bring it, it was your job to." Then the unbearable sound of a ds nintendo ds shutting down.

Example 2

write about a time you felt proud.

I have been a Leicester fan my entire life, ever since I grew up and understood following a football team side through trials and this it has always been Leicester.

I have felt pride and excitement *
all the way through being *
a Leicester supporter but none
will match the season we
won the league. The one
moment ~~moment~~ for me was
when Jamie Vardy broke the
consecutive goal scoring record
in the premier league.

I remember the day, it was
a Saturday. After the long week
of school there was nothing
better than going to watch
the football. The noise of fans
the feeling of being there
the smell of burgers.

It was almost as if you
knew Jamie was going to
break the record, you know
when you have the feeling
that ~~something~~ something is going
to happen. I remember the goal
like a picture even the corner
the ball went into.

the feeling of pride and excitement
was immense, I have never felt
it that way before. The entire
stadium erupted people were
diving everywhere and shouting.
It was almost too loud.

It was as if the floor was
being stamped down into earth.
It was a rush that is difficult
to describe, it seemed to distort
the sense of time and
it was just an ongoing
party. And the best part was
it was Jamie Vardy from
a small little club that no
one cared about and everybody
wrote off. It is still to this
day the most pride and excitement
I've ever felt.

The day that changed everything

Learners interpreted this title in lots of different ways. The excerpt from a learner's piece (shown below) demonstrates how drawing on a particularly emotive and memorable event helped her to use language to effectively capture how she was feeling.

All day I sat and waited for a call or even a text from him but nothing, the next few days felt like they dragged on, I spent them binge watching Netflix Series after ~~after~~ Netflix Series trying to keep my mind off what happened. my phone stayed off the majority of the time, I slept and ate, then watched TV repeatedly like it was a ritual.

Caught!

We noticed that lots of our learners enjoyed writing about memories of school. Their descriptions were vivid and authentic as they drew on their lived experiences of their school days. See example below.

I was in a precarious position. Trapped in the back science room. The leader began to march down the hall. I hid under the teachers desk. Saying my prayers. It was inevitable, I was going to be caught.

I heard the door creak open and the leader with two soldiers walk in. They check everywhere. If I reveal myself the punishment wouldn't be as harsh. I couldn't lose to [REDACTED]

Anyhow they found me two minutes later and I was arrested. Well, it was called isolation. 120

Appendix 6 – Transactional writing using lived experience

Teachers noticed that, in both GCSE and Functional Skills lessons, learners' writing improved when they were able to draw on their own life experiences. In particular, teachers noticed that learners suffered less 'writer's block' and expanded on their points in a more convincing way, shaping their writing to suit the needs of the task.

The examples below show whole pieces, or excerpts from pieces, that our learners produced when drawing on their own experiences. We avoided directing learners to use any specific language features, as we found that learners did better when they just spent longer thinking about the task and considering what they would really say, if they were responding verbally and, as a result, they adapted their language more effectively. The headings in pink show the task they were responding to.

Write a lively guide to surviving the teenage years for a school/ college magazine.

Example 1

Everyone has to get through their teenage years with college being a huge part of this. People have different ways of dealing ~~to~~ with all the hurdles that ~~are~~ arise, ~~to~~ but here is my guide, to ~~dealt~~ dealing with it. ✓

The first thing many people do is fall behind on work and ~~assign~~ assignments. This can only cause trouble and stress. The best thing to do is create ~~and~~ an effective yet realistic routine and time plan when you are going to complete the ~~tasks~~ you have been set. ✓ Because we all know that for most students it is not realistic to spend hours

doing work at home. If you manage to complete all your work and hand it in at the correct time it will make life easier for all parties involved.

A second thing is Sleep. So many people underestimate how important getting enough good quality sleep is. It allows you to function more effectively and produce a better standard of work. You will also feel more motivated due to the extra energy you will gain from resting your body correctly. Good sleep increases your memory capacity and this in return will ~~also~~ give you a better grade.

The last thing I have to give advice is probably the most important one. You need to take a break from college work and occupy yourself with something else. Because if you're constantly doing college work with no breaks

you're going to end up
burnt out and unmotivated. ✓
The best thing to do
while taking a break
would be playing a sport
~~or~~ or ~~exercising~~ exercising
as this has been scientifically
proved to release ~~stress~~
stress ~~and~~ and make you
happy.

I hope this guide can
make your teenage years
a little easier. ✓

Example 2

How to survive being a teenager

Being a teenager is not easy
it comes with many ~~steps~~
struggles as you are at
that ~~front~~ crucial age
where you ~~don't do not have~~
you have to ~~learn to~~
~~study~~ get a job,
~~to~~ pass exams and learn
how to become more adult
like.

There are many ways in getting through this difficult, stressful and tiring stage in your life and I have written this to help you try to find your perfect way of getting through it.

One way is to become more healthy maybe changed your diet or learn to take a break after tasks. It will help you out a tonne and improve your state of mind. ~~Another~~ Another way method is to ~~just~~ just take things slow think longer about what you are doing and remember to

Stay positive in situations of self doubt.

~~As a teen~~ As a teenager technology is a big part of our lives. An example of this is our phones, too many teenagers are becoming depressed with ~~themselves~~ themselves.

as they have been on social
media and seen models
or photoshopped women or
~~men~~ men with their
~~dream~~ bodies, this is
a big factor in teenagers
being ~~depp~~ depressed as
W.I. of teenagers are not
happy with ~~there~~ their physique.
What I say is ~~take~~
take a break of your
phone been to love
yourself once more ~~your~~
you are beautiful in
your own unique way.

Another thing is to stay
active you dont want
to be in your room
all day. ~~if~~ you want to
be out there enjoying
the ~~real~~ world.

You have been asked to give a talk to your class about your hobby or special interest to try to encourage others to get involved.

Write what you would say in your talk.

Example 1

Hey guys, you already know who I am so I'm going to skip that but I was going to talk about the wonders of gaming.

I've been playing games ever since I can remember much like most of you I'm sure however there are a few people who ~~either~~ either don't like it or don't have the time. I encourage you to at least try it and/or make the time to relax and play.

Everyone has their own personal preferences, for example, I ~~try~~ my personal favorite types of games are FPS (first person shooters) such as the ~~Call of Duty~~ Call of Duty franchise, and action RPGs (action role playing games) such as fable ~~and other games~~.

There are games out there for creative people like minecraft or more already games for nostalgia and there are even games that can give a little boost to your intelligence.

One of the reasons why I play games is to help
relieve my ~~bad~~ boredom by ~~the~~ playing Call
of Duty for a couple hours. However if
I ever needed to escape from the ~~problems~~
of the real ~~world~~ world I would play an ~~RPG~~
game ~~but~~ where the story is what you make it.

I bet some of you are thinking that why don't
I just read a good book if I need to escape into
my own world, well a good RPG game is very
much like a book come to life, however
you control the pace of the story, as well as
the outcome and ~~how~~ why you go about doing
~~the~~ things. ~~One~~ one of the best RPGs of
all time and my personal favorite is ~~the~~
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Skyrim has ~~thousands~~
different endings and paths, depending on
the choices that you make along the ~~way~~ way, every
playthrough of Skyrim is different.

before I end my talk I just want to reiterate
that there is a game out there for everyone and
to not be afraid ~~to~~ to try them.

Thanks for listening, I will now answer any questions.

Example 2

Good morning everyone, everyone has a secret hobby, and mine, Skiing. I'm going to tell you why it's worth a go.

Skiing is having freedom of, Skiing down a huge mountain in France, or doing the slalom on the slopes of Austria, freedom to go down see amazing things. You feel like you're flying through the air. Not to mention all the views you will get of snowy mountains and a lovely village at the bottom for a coffee or a beer!

Going to these places, ~~it's~~ ^{in itself is} amazing and the skiing is just a bonus. I like going to Austria, ~~the~~ a small town called [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we have befriended a lovely apartment owner over ~~the~~ ^{their} from the years of going. So we stay in an amazing, modern, extravagant apartment. You meet people skiing, also, it's a talking point, and you can meet some interesting people whilst on holiday.

Another thing about skiing is that it is actually an exercise. If you are looking for a fun possibly expensive but incredible source of exercise then skiing is your sport!

All of this without even mentioning life after
the slopes... plenty of alcohol and we'll
leave it there!

Seriously though, give it a go! ~~for~~ What's the
worst that could happen, you get attached
to skiing and have to come on holiday
with us! Joking you'll be much better
than me... thanks for listening! ✓

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