EDUCATION & TRAINING FOUNDATION

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

A SUMMARY OF PROJECTS IN THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROGRAMME

ccConsultancy, That Reading Thing, Skills Digital

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Cover photograph: Rhonda Borel-Chaffin (Adult learning tutor, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) speaking at the OTLA Phase 6 (English) final dissemination event (February 2020)

Foreword

Dr Catherine Manning (National Head of Practitioner Research and Development, Education and Training Foundation)
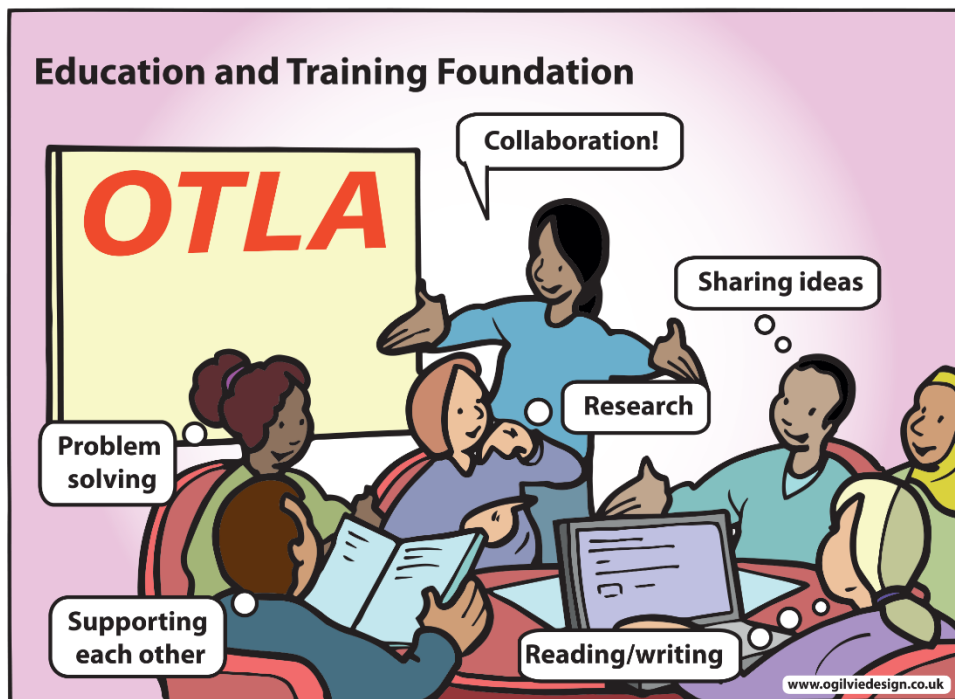
For the past six years, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has funded Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) collaborative projects. These projects involve groups of Further Education (FE) practitioners working together to explore strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning around a particular theme.

This year (2019-2020) ETF commissioned Claire Collins Consultancy to run an OTLA programme on teaching and learning in English. As a former English teacher and practitioner researcher in the FE sector, I am particularly delighted to introduce the exciting and innovative reports from this year's project.

ETF supports teachers and leaders across the Further Education and Training sector to help them achieve their professional development goals for the benefit of learners and employers across England. At ETF we offer a wide range of professional development programmes for this sector including leadership and management, digital technology, maths and English, technical education and more. In particular, we recognise the value of practitioner research as an approach which enables and empowers teachers and trainers to take charge of their own professional development for the benefit of their learners and wider stakeholders. OTLA collaborative projects are designed to bring together practitioners from across FE providers to undertake small-scale research on a specific area of teaching and learning.

ccConsultancy recruited a total of 45 providers and over 400 practitioners took part in the programme. The participants attended a number of face-to-face events and benefited from the immense amount of experience and expertise offered by Claire and the delivery team. The groups of practitioners were also supported by mentors to undertake action research on a particular area of English teaching, learning and assessment such as developing a reading culture or use of phonics.

The individual practitioners who took part in the project were hugely committed, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about developing their practice to meet the needs of their learners. The feedback on this OTLA programme has been extremely positive; some of the participants have described it as "innovative", "inspirational", and "career-changing".

This booklet contains reports of the research into teaching, learning and assessment of English produced by participants on this year's OTLA programme that will interest and inspire teachers and leaders across the FE sector.

Contents

Introduction

David Prinn (Project Manager, ccConsultancy Associate)

We ALL bring the strands together

Outstanding Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Assessment for learning

Reading

Phonics

Resilience

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The OTLA (English) programme was delivered by ccConsultancy in partnership with That Reading Thing and Skills Digital. This was the 6th phase of OTLA projects funded by the Education and Training Foundation and the 3rd one that we were involved in as delivery partners.

Twelve projects researched new approaches for teaching English in the post-16 sector and focused upon driving professional development for staff through encouraging practitioners to use action research to explore and integrate those approaches into teaching, learning and assessment.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a summary and evaluation of the work undertaken by the programme and its associated projects.

In April 2019 we invited applications from providers wishing to take part in the OTLA (English) collaborative projects, hoping to attract 30 applications. We drew upon Professional Exchange Networks, Regional Specialist Leads and the Skills for Life Network to maximise applications from across the country. In fact, we received over 100 applications and eventually selected 45 organisations to take part. Twelve projects were formed, each consisting of 3 or 4 successful organisations who wanted to work on a similar theme.

Each project was allocated a mentor. The mentors were chosen for their subject specialist expertise and in many cases, they arranged and delivered relevant CPD for the project teams (e.g. Post-16 phonics approaches, effective use of a visualiser, Level 5 Functional Skills courses). Mentors also assisted project teams to use practitioner-led action research approaches. On page 15 Andy Convery reflects on the importance of mentors in energising project teams.

We also appointed four 'Strand Leads' who each managed a group of 3 projects and supported the mentors and project teams within their 'strand'. The strands were mainly arranged geographically but there were some exceptions where we placed organisations into projects because of the theme they were working on (The Sheffield College worked on resilience with a group of providers who were based in the South, for example). Three of the Strand Leads were Regional Specialist Leads and had good working relationships with the providers in their region. The fourth Strand Lead is an expert on Post-16 phonics and worked on that theme across all regions.

We have invited the Strand Leads to reflect on their experiences of working on the OTLA programme and you can find their summaries at the start of their projects' reports.

To further support the project teams' understanding of practitioner-led action research, a series of project-related professional development events were held.

We held an inception day for each project where we brought the providers together to prepare them for their projects. These were facilitated by the Strand Lead, mentor and members of the core delivery team. We worked with each of the project teams to refine their proposals and ensure that their project aims were achievable within the short timescales of the programme.

We held CPD sessions on how to conduct collaborative action research, gather evidence and present findings. These sessions were led by Dr. Andy Convery and Professor Jean McNiff, two leading exponents of collaborative action research.

Really enjoyed hearing about a real research project – pitfalls and all.

I loved Jean McNiff – puzzling, questioning and provocative approach.

Other projects I've been part of have not explained everything so clearly about action research, involving learners, scope, evaluation… Thanks.

Feedback from delegates at research CPD event

Research CPD events

The project teams presented the outcomes of their projects and evidence of impact at interim and final dissemination events, which stimulated cross-project (national) collaboration and sharing of effective practices. Feedback from delegates was excellent:

Thank you, everyone! I'm humbled and inspired by everything I've seen and heard. We can change our learners' lives!

I really enjoyed coming today and sharing my experience. As a tutor I KNOW and FEEL that I'm NOT ALONE in my challenges. Thank you!

It's so inspiring to see the enthusiasm attendees have for their learners and improving learners' experience and ability.

Inspiring seeing the work that's happening in our wonderful sector. Loads of transferable, learner-centred ideas underpinned by rigorous, action research methodologies :-)

This session made sense of everything that went before, it brought all the initial ideas back together.

Feedback from delegates at final dissemination event (February 2020)
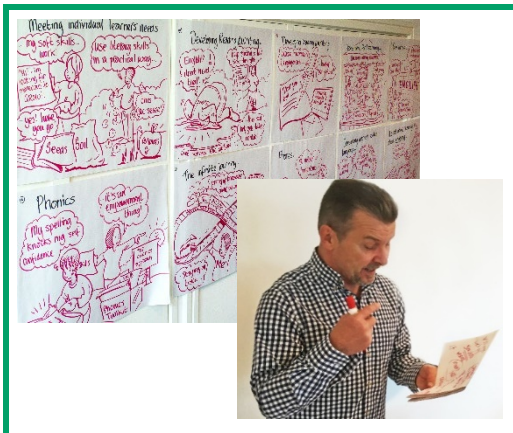
At the dissemination events our 'conference artist' **Graham Ogilvie** produced a number of illustrations to capture the main messages of the events and to represent the project themes. We have used digitised versions of his work throughout this booklet.

Conference artist Graham Ogilvie www.ogilviedesign.co.uk

Project teams have also shared their work at regional network meetings and within their organisations. This booklet will be shared widely to continue the dissemination of their projects' outcomes.

Some of the project team members, mentors and Strand Leads are preparing articles for a special edition of RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacies) journal. In her editorial on page 12, Claire Collins reflects on the influence that this programme has had on the field of teaching English / literacy in Post-16 settings.

We believe that the work done on these projects was of the highest standard and we hope that you enjoy reading about the contribution that these projects have made to knowledge of the field. Participants valued the opportunity to take part in the OTLA programme:

> *Sharing and learning. Everyone I spoke to was so supportive and positive.*
>
> *It gave me the opportunity to try something different and made me critically evaluate my own performance.*
>
> *Great to share and collaborate and see crossovers and synergies between projects.*
>
> *Chance to reflect, collaborate and talk to teachers working in similar contexts.*

> *The steer to stay on task, to be evaluative and to disseminate findings. Without the project it would have been 'action' not 'action research'.*
>
> *I have learnt so much and have so much faith that my fellow practitioners have still some drive and their talent has not been buried under politics and workload.*
>
> *What an opportunity to take time out of the frenetic world of FE and develop new initiatives to support student learning and learn ourselves.*
>
> *I've really enjoyed the chance to work with great professionals. Our mentor has been wonderful and Claire and her team have been inspirational.*

Feedback from programme participants (February 2020)

We at ccConsultancy have treated our delivery of successive OTLA programmes over the last 3 years as our own action research project. We have tried out approaches, found what works (and what doesn't work so well). We have acted on our findings to improve the support we give.

As part of our internal quality improvement procedures we invited Jean McNiff to evaluate our delivery of the programme. She presents a summary of her findings on page 19 and makes some recommendations as to how our delivery of the programme could be improved. A fuller version of this report has been presented to the ETF.

In Table 1 we give a brief description of the 12 projects and from page 23 onwards we present a report from each of the 41 organisations who completed the OTLA (English) programme. Full reports including evidence, case studies and associated resources will be made available to download from the ETF's Practitioner Research and Evidence Hub on the Excellence Gateway **https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/prep**.

However, we believe that the most valuable resources that have been produced by this programme are the 440 participants comprising managers, English specialist teachers, vocational subject trainers, tutors, lecturers, volunteers, librarians, LRC staff and support assistants who are now equipped to continue to use collaborative action research approaches to further improve their practice for the benefit of their learners.

Project	Theme
1	**Working with learners to use assessment for learning to encourage progress and plan for learning**
	Assessment for learning was the overarching theme of this project. It was based on the individual perceived needs of our learners with one main goal; that of building learner self-belief.
	We did this primarily by questioning the way we did things and addressing learner barriers in order to improve the accessibility of learning and learning resources. Our strategies emerged out of discussion and feedback from our learners and allowed us to develop successful scaffolds, engaging texts, effective feedback methods and remove demoralising grading within marking.
	All of these initiatives enabled and empowered learners to progress, resulting in immediate incremental gains and positive attitudes.
2	**Oracy and visualisers – powerful classroom catalysts**
	This project has grown from our values; we believe that young people continuing in education is the key to their empowerment. We want to find ways that practitioners can better develop students' literacy skills. Moreover, we want lessons to be enjoyable - instilling confidence and skills.
	Oracy is the capacity to express oneself in and understand speech; it is powerful. It is the pathway to independence, social mobility and a voice in the political arena. Its power and influence extends beyond the classroom and grades.
3	**Developing a reading culture**
	This collaborative project sought to develop a culture of reading via a series of interventions aimed at making reading more accessible, fun and linked to the vocational curriculum.
	Evidence clearly shows the impact that reading can have on vocabulary, emotional intelligence and exam success. A study completed by the OECD (2002) revealed that reading for pleasure had a demonstrable effect on social mobility and was, in fact, the most important indicator on the future success of the young person.

However, there are many challenges including:
- The perception that is it "uncool" to read
- Lack of reading in the home environment
- The misconception that reading is just for English lessons

4	**Developing resilience through teaching and learning**
	This project focused on developing learners' resilience and the findings from all four partners will be of interest to practitioners across the post-16 sector:
	Buckinghamshire College Group concentrated on tackling learners' negative mindsets towards resitting GCSE English Language.
	Sheffield College introduced both learners and teachers to positive 'mindsets for learning', with a view to developing confidence, resilience and achievement.
	USP College focused on building resilience through independent learning for GCSE and A-Level English learners.
	Morley College aimed to raise the retention and achievement of adult learners on Entry Level 3 to Level 2 English courses. By discussing challenges in their lives, learners started to break down barriers to learning and foster a more positive attitude towards studying.
5	**Developing independent learning and meeting individual learners' needs**
	As FE practitioners, we are all in the business of helping learners grow in confidence and become independent, for learning and for life. Such assertions are etched into our identities as teachers, yet how often do we really stop and think about how we promote independent learning in FE? Are there strategies for independent learning that can help one class soar, yet tether and confuse another? Are there particular joys and challenges in our work with FE-based English learners? Can we simply 'lift and apply' existing research within our own settings, or do we need a more nuanced, contextualised approach? These are the questions that we explored.
	Kent: Promoting independent learning, wellbeing, self-confidence and the practical application of English and maths skills through volunteer-led, extra-curricular activities such as lunch club. Our research poses a grassroots challenge to Hattie's (1996) meta-analysis, where he argued

support from non-qualified teachers had little impact upon student learning.

RBKC: Exploring the effectiveness of different active learning techniques to develop resilience, build confidence and promote independence for ESOL and pre-entry English learners.

Petroc: Exploring how VESPA strategies (Oakes and Griffin, 2012) can be embedded within English teaching and learning to promote and develop independent learning skills.

6	Developing reading and writing

The focus of this project was 'developing reading and writing' with post-16 learners.

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College designed a reading booklet based on *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill, interleaved with thematically connected non-fiction texts that incorporated learning resources and activities.

City Lit College worked with a neuroscientist from pre-course assessment onwards to integrate new insights into teaching, learning and assessment practices.

London South East Colleges ran the DEAR project (Drop Everything and Read) which embraced a two-pronged approach to improving reading comprehension and engagement with texts for GCSE resit students of all ages.

New City College ran a letter writing exchange between 16 year old Level 1 Functional Skills students focusing on real, purposeful and meaningful communication.

The highly practical findings from all four organisations will be of great interest to other teachers, support workers and managers.

7	Developing a reading culture

This project has focused on ways to encourage learners in post-16 settings to develop their reading. The teams identified workable approaches that help engage learners as well as give them some agency in deciding what to read and why.

Bishop Burton's Read Anything Project aimed to let learners experience the impact of reading on their written communication.

Bolton College's Accelerated Reading project saw the English team working closely with the Motor Vehicle Tutors in dedicated reading half hours each week to read texts online during the vocational session. These learners were chosen for the project because they struggled with reading.

Burton and South Derbyshire had Level 1 ESOL learners working with library staff once a week to read anything with the aim of developing reading skills and attainment. Learners shared what they had been reading on a Padlet.

8	Working with learners to use assessment for learning to encourage progress and plan for learning

This project focused on the difference that can be made when assessment for learning (AfL) strategies are developed and used with learners to support their English development. The approaches trialled included engaging learners in providing feedback on one another's work in a work-based learning setting and a resource booklet to support teachers and learners across a college to use effective AfL strategies.

Lakes College, for example, in partnership with Level 3 IT learners, developed a series of vocationally-relevant assessment tools and teaching approaches to continue to improve learners' English on their course, and subsequently in the workplace. Most of these learners had already achieved GCSE level 4 but the college felt it was important for these learners to see how the skills developed relate to further learning and the workplace.

9	Developing new teaching strategies for improving English

This project focused on the development of specialist English teaching strategies, not only for use in English classrooms but also so that vocational teachers can support learners' English development. The team will share their findings which show, on the whole, that learners improved their confidence, their retention of the skills and their knowledge and learners saw a marked improvement in the quality of the work they produced as a result.

University College Birmingham worked with the Sports department to use DARTs activities to engage learners in reading vocationally relevant texts.

	This project had the unexpected outcome of being viewed very positively during a mock deep dive.	
	Sandwell and Dudley College worked to develop a range of bespoke approaches to improve spellings specifically for ESOL learners.	
	Moulton College looked to investigate the usefulness of using scaffolding techniques such as PEE to help learners to develop their writing.	
10	**Post-16 Phonics Approaches**	
	The organisations in this project explored using Post-16 phonics approaches to support literacy in four distinct contexts. They worked with Functional Skills English and maths learners in an F.E. college group, with learners in vocational workshops across several prisons, with SEND/LDD learners in a land-based college and with a variety of native English speakers and ESOL learners across a community adult learning service including an extra-curricular phonics-based spelling club.

Across the project they have documented the experience of training and supporting not only English teachers but also support staff, vocational tutors, volunteers and front-line staff in Post-16 Phonics approaches. From small steps to big changes, they looked at fostering meaningful collaboration within their organisations and developing autonomy and confidence in both staff and learners. | |
| 11 | **Developing strategies to build self-belief in learners in the North East** | |
| | This project incorporated two colleges and an independent training provider working on strategies to inspire learners facing different challenges as they embarked on Functional Skills, GCSE and ESOL qualifications.

Newcastle College had identified a lack of communicative purpose in ESOL entry level 1 exam writing tasks and attempted to address this by organising an email exchange between classes. Feedback from instructors working in support roles was instrumental in modifying and developing the method and resources and improving links between classroom and computer lab sessions. This led to liaison with a separate project which had successfully used Padlet for improving learners' engagement with reading texts. | |

	Springboard Sunderland Trust worked with GCSE resit students, including learners referred from probation services. This project aimed to improve learners' choice and commitment to engaging in Functional Skills. Learners were encouraged to select targets and were asked to identify the resulting outcomes. In some cases, this proved noticeably effective.

Sunderland College focused on raising learners' awareness of their existing skills. Staff used an outcome star as a vehicle for initiating meaningful conversations about learning. This resulted in both learners and staff recognising learners' hidden potential. This encouraged the staff to evolve responsive strategies to address individual learners' needs. | |
| 12 | **Transitions, Technology and Teaching** | |
| | This project relates to and expands on the three 'Ts' of teaching, learning and assessment: Transitions, Technology and Teaching, seen as crucial to learner progression. The 4 organisations explored different transitions learners experience: School to FE, FE to employment and FE to HE, using a range of different approaches to encourage learner confidence and autonomy enabling learners to see the value of English in their journey through education.

These transitions are frequently problematic because of learners' previous educational experiences and can prevent them from achieving their full potential. Technology was used to engage learners, provide innovative approaches to learning and give them a useful platform for further development.

Two organisations gave a realistic assessment of the use of commercially produced podcasts and compared the outcomes with learner and teacher produced resources, whilst the other institutions evaluated how their use of technology promoted more autonomous learning for both Functional Skills and Level 3 learners. Teachers used scaffolded approaches to build learners' skills and confidence and hope to share these strategies and consider their applicability to a wider range of contexts. | |

Table 1: List of projects in OTLA phase 6 (English)

Editorial

Claire Collins (Project Director, ccConsultancy)

'Action research' is just a couple of words

It's you, and us, in collaboration that will make the world a better place

Action research

Me!

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Reading articles and reports about English in the post-16 sector, it would be easy to imagine that English teaching today consists entirely of preparing learners to resit GCSE exams or achieve a pass in Functional Skills English, and then picking up the pieces for all those learners who don't make the grade. There is truth in this; many learners don't achieve what they need for progression, and must again go through the resit cycle. However, post-16 English is about more than this.

More than a resit factory

If we are to look beyond the English results tables, and recognise the rich variety of English development that takes place in post-16 settings, first we might ask; *'what does it mean to be good at English'?* According to Marshall

and Wiliam (2006, p.4-5) in order to be good at English, learners *"need to learn to develop judgement about the quality of the work they and others produce."* Marshall and Wiliam share the idea proposed by Sadler (1989) that this use of judgement is the development of "guild knowledge" whereby those of us who are 'insiders' in this guild believe we have the right, for example, to express ourselves in our own style and to comment on other authors' texts.

Put simply, we feel we have the authority to say about a text 'that's good' or 'that's bad' and this is why I think it to be so. Herein lies an important synergy between English teaching, learning and assessment and action research: we are all concerned with the development of judgement, with describing the quality of what we do and why we do it.

In the OTLA English programme this year we have seen multiple examples of teachers expressing their understanding of effective approaches alongside learners, who had previously thought they were terrible at English, recognising that they can progress and sharing their views on what works and what doesn't. We are more than a resit factory and the OTLA programme has provided ample evidence of this.

English knowledge claims from across post-16 curricula

Quite aside from every-day literacy and language acts (the communication we take part in throughout our lives), the practices of learning and teaching English in the post-16 sector take place in spaces as diverse as prison gyms, woodwork shops, web rooms, libraries, greenhouses, warehouses and, of course, English and ESOL classrooms. It is in and across these varied learning spaces this year that knowledge claims about English teaching, learning and assessing have been tested, and contested, and new claims to knowledge have been made.

In this wonderful collection of reports, OTLA English participants share their project findings and seek to help you build on them for your own knowledge and practice, by describing the contexts in which their work took place and

explaining what they wished to improve, how they undertook their action research, what they learned and why this matters. We hope that, by including such a diversity of voices and ideas, we can inspire you to ask of your own practice; *"How can we improve what is happening here?"*.

What we mean by 'outstanding' in Post-16 English contexts

OTLA stands for 'outstanding teaching, learning and assessment' but, outside the context of inspection and quality improvement grades, outstanding can be understood in many different ways. Is it outstanding to ensure that learners achieve high grades in English exams? Is it outstanding to promote respect for linguistic and cultural diversity? Is it outstanding to develop learners' critical communication awareness in a world of increasing online manipulation and questionable sources of 'truth'? There is a place for all these things if we shape a broad understanding of the term 'outstanding' and take a community approach to achieving this.

How we think of ourselves is revealed in our social discourses, those "themes, attitudes, and values - expressed through written and oral statements, images and behaviour - which at a given time and place … are deemed meaningful" (Papen, 2005, p.12). Are we still a 'Cinderella sector', forever destined to be the neglected middle child between schools and HE? I think this perception is starting to change and it is the result of a plethora of voices rising up from the sector saying that they have researched their practices, and have learned how to reach out to disengaged and disaffected learners, as well as learners who have written themselves off as 'too thick' for English achievements or who are no longer willing to try. I see the same values persist that shaped my practice as a new teacher of literacy and ESOL in the late 1990s, despite the many changes we have seen in the past 20 years. All those in our sector who work to provide English learning opportunities unequivocally care about learners' present and future lives and seek to find ways to open up opportunities for all, in many cases, with the bare minimum of funding in which to do so. This has been brought into sharp focus today as I write during the 'great lockdown' and reflect on the past few weeks of my practice. I have had countless conversations with teachers who want to ensure that all their learners, with and without digital connections, both continue to learn English and also feel part of active and supportive learning communities.

Reflections on what we have learned this year

The reports in this collection offer many diverse and hopeful stories of learning English in our sector. Together this year, teachers, learners, managers, mentors, and everyone who has made this programme such a joy to be part of, have created a space where everyone has a chance to shape our collective understanding of what works and doesn't work. There is not enough room here to mention all the action research reports and reflective accounts you can read in this booklet, so I will share just a few examples to whet your appetite before you dive in and immerse yourself in the pages that follow:

- **South Devon College** explored how progressive marking strategies, including directed improvement and reflection time (DIRT), used widely in school settings, helped learners raise their grades.
- **Suffolk New College** explored and adapted approaches using visualisers, for example, to annotate texts live in class.
- **Sheffield College** explored the potential of developing a "mindset" approach across an English team and provide great insight into teachers' decision-making. They demonstrate how theory needs to be adapted to practice for every teacher.
- **Kent Adult Education Services** designed development plans for volunteers to assess and develop learner independence, which, they explain, had a particularly positive influence on Entry Level and ESOL learners.
- **City Lit** worked with a neuroscientist to stimulate fresh insights into learners' needs, which prompted fascinating reflections from established teachers.
- The librarian at **Burton & South Derbyshire College** worked with ESOL Level 1 learners to develop their reading and writing using an online noticeboard called Padlet as a space to share books and reflections. This led to learners who had never before used the library services becoming regular and active members of the college's library community. Her work was shared with Newcastle College and enabled their ESOL team to

overcome technology barriers that were stifling ESOL learners' writing for purpose.

- **Moulton College** investigated learners' choices of scaffolding strategies in a project titled 'to PEE or not to PEE' and found that learners often needed personalised scaffolding to suit their individual approaches. This is an excellent example of English staff learning from observing vocational tutors' practices.
- **Springboard** showed how a small independent training provider used the project opportunity to make incremental changes to their teaching through linking with their organisation's newly-established "learning champions".
- **Kirklees College**'s Learning Resource Coordinator investigated how to help learners improve the quality of their academic writing and drew on insights from learners and staff to design usable web materials.

Emerging Themes

Common themes have emerged across the programme, such as the fundamental problems caused by low motivation and disengagement in learners who have experienced repeated cycles of failure in English, and the positive outcomes when these learners experience success in their efforts.

For example, in the post-16 phonics projects there are frequent references to turning failure into progress - e.g., the motor vehicle apprentice who spells

"diaphragm" as "diafram" has 5 of the 7 graphemes correct. For demotivated learners, teachers recognised that some impact could be detected when learners began actively engaging (rather than passively complying) with activities, showing curiosity and often pride in their newfound potential, no matter how limited.

Another theme was the importance of learning with colleagues from different subject backgrounds, for example, vocational tutors introduced to English activities were delighted to discover manageable approaches that had an immediate usefulness in workshops, and this was evident across colleges, adult learning providers and prisons (see Novus' project, where Construction, Catering and Horticulture staff adopted Phonics approaches as a key to improving spelling and confidence of craft terminology). This practical cross-subject approach enhanced the value of English to other staff and was most evident in approaches to assessment for learning, reading, scaffolding and resilience activities.

I am sure there is much that you will enjoy reading and I now invite you to delve deeper into this important publication. Perhaps the reports here will inspire you to investigate and improve your own practices and certainly you will see that there is much to build on from this action research undertaken by the sector for the sector. Enjoy!

How project mentors energise practitioner research

Dr Andy Convery (Research and Professional Development Lead, ccConsultancy Associate)
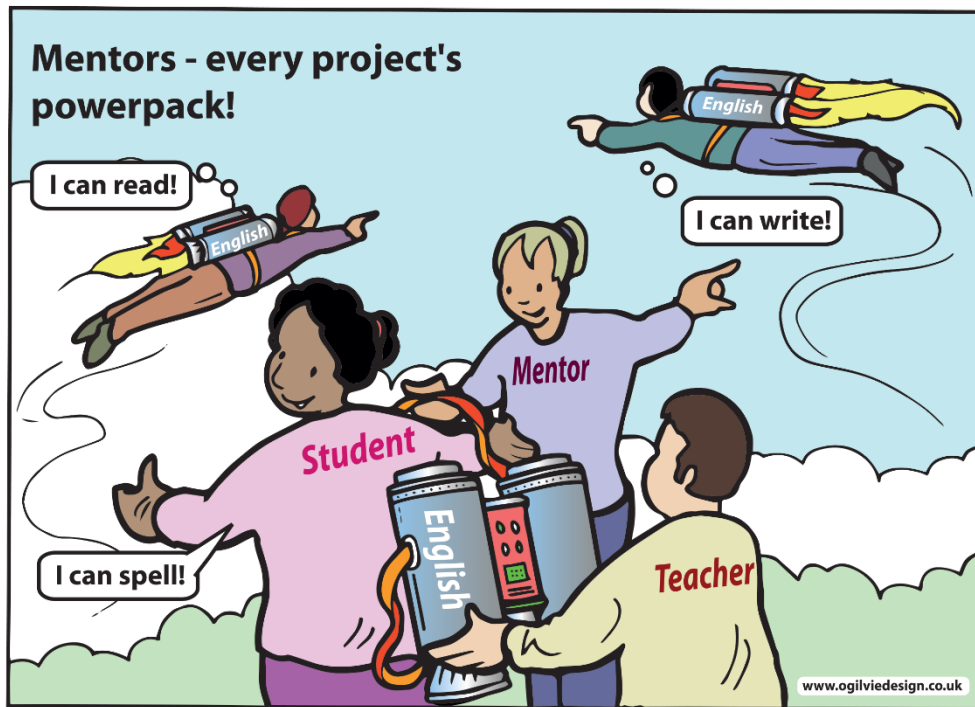
This is the third OTLA programme managed by our team, and we can reflect on some very successful projects which have inspired learners' self-belief, boosted their self-esteem, and spurred learners to enjoy challenge and success in reading and writing activities.

Tired teachers have been revitalised and have raised their expectations about what they – and their learners – might achieve. Vocational tutors, learning support assistants, library staff and volunteers have discovered they can be crucial in nurturing learners' confidence and skills as readers, writers – and even as spellers. As a programme team with considerable previous experience of practitioner research and development programmes, we have become aware that this OTLA English programme has been very successful, as evidenced by the project reports and importantly, by the underpinning

teachers' accounts, the learners' feedback and the evidence of progression in case studies of learners' journeys. From my role as Research and Professional Development Lead, it is apparent that appointing a team of mentors was the central factor in facilitating teachers' professional growth and their learners' increased skills and confidence with English. It is worth asking:

- Why did this team have such impact?
- How did our programme structure help them to hit the ground running?
- What lessons have we learned for the design of practitioner support in similar programmes?

The mentors' roles in the project

In this programme we had designed a support structure in which the 45 successful organisations were grouped into 12 thematic projects of three or four partners who were coordinated and supported by a mentor.

Mentors were chosen both for their relevant subject expertise and their contributions to practitioner professional development activities. Mentors worked most closely with the "project leads", who usually led the project in each of their 3 or 4 partner organisations. Mentors had four main roles to perform with their 3 or 4 partner organisations in their respective projects:

- Quality Assurance – complementing the Strand Leads by providing first-line encouragement to meet the project reporting commitments;
- Facilitating English Teaching – helping projects adopt and implement more effective teaching strategies;
- Encouraging Practitioner Research – encouraging all practitioners to engage with, and report on, their English experiments in classrooms.
- Reminding projects to collect "evidence" – participating teachers tended to focus upon planning and resourcing new teaching activities. Mentors encouraged project teams to focus on gathering credible evidence of the effects of these activities on learners.

There were also four Strand Leads who operated as "Lead Mentors" for a group of three projects. The four leads met monthly with the programme management team. These leads were selected because they were themselves nationally recognised English specialists with expertise in complementary areas of English (i.e. post-16 GCSE English; post-16 Phonics: GCSE/Functional Skills qualification design; and Adult Literacy.)

Being able to appoint well-qualified and respected staff to act as mentors was a major benefit for the project.

Why did we invest heavily in a mentoring team?

Our previous OTLA management experience had identified that the most productive projects were led by exceptional project leads who had experience of teacher development and some experience of practitioner research approaches. We attempted to ensure that all projects benefited from having access to such informed leadership, and well-qualified mentors could develop project leadership across the board. We were also conscious that other collaborative projects that had been informed by JPD (joint practice development) sometimes led to activity that could be limited to partners simply recycling limited strategies.

Because English teaching was so important in the post-16 sector, we needed experienced specialists to provide direction and to help teachers to leave their comfort zones and feel confident in accessing, testing and revising the most successful English approaches from all sectors. Engaging subject specialists to advise over the life of a project could improve the quality and focus of the research.

Our experience showed that all participants needed support, but the really productive "flagship" projects had benefited from being driven as well as supported. They needed support in overcoming barriers arising in their practitioner research processes, and also, they needed access to the latest English thinking and practices. We invested in experienced mentors with some research background and also expert pedagogical subject knowledge as we wanted every project to be a flagship.

This strategy is a development of the ETF-funded Technical Skills programme approach which appointed two central "Excellence Advisors" to support the individual project "Peer Advisors" who were available to projects; however, our design wanted mentors to be not just available, but to be proactive in ensuring the momentum of the practitioner research could be sustained. Mentors needed to provide a crucial dimension in the rhythm of professional development events designed into the overall programme. Mentors could be uniquely situated to provide timely and responsive interventions and encouragement to teams.

How well did the mentors fulfil their potential?

Across ESOL, GCSE resit and Functional Skills projects, there was evidence that learners could be roused from demotivation and passivity and gain self-belief in their achievements and potential. Teachers used the project opportunities to begin to know their learners in much greater depth, and to better understand the barriers that learners were experiencing. In terms of quantitative progress, twelve projects generated 41 reports, and each is underpinned by case records of learner journeys, including examples of learners' work, teacher strategies and resources, and teacher accounts of their personal experience. These well-written reports are each animated by appendices where other practitioners can find materials to help their own decision-making.

One can also see the added value that Strand Leads and mentors have provided in the improved quality of the evidence that projects produced:

1. **Projects drew upon a wider range of evidence from beyond the sector.**

   The influence of the mentors can be seen where projects drew on emerging good practice from beyond our own sector. The mentors encouraged projects to engage with practices from schools and outside agencies (such as oracy approaches and use of visualisers). Mentors also introduced variations on established approaches (e.g. scaffolding and mnemonics) from other settings, and advised how they might be tested in our sector settings to develop partners' practitioner research. Experienced mentors guided projects to draw upon practice and ideas from

Professional Exchange Networks, and they also drew on learning from earlier OTLA projects to offer new avenues and facilitate progress.

2. Mentors encouraged projects to test received opinions

Mentors also gave projects the confidence to test ideas from the research community rather than accept them uncritically and obediently. Mentors invited projects to test approaches (such as strategies recommended in the post-16 Phonics toolkit) and to adapt them to a range of vocational contexts, from prison education to Community SEND. They also encouraged projects to critically challenge over-simplistic mantras about mindset or resilience so that teachers could integrate principles into their practical planning in challenging contexts. Some projects also questioned the authority of established literature (e.g. Hattie 2015) by providing evidence of the impact of volunteers supporting teachers.

3. Practitioners sustained their inquiries in action research cycles.

Staff in our sector always seem under pressure and some projects bend to pressure, curtail research activities and submit a minimal report with token evidence. In this programme, the majority of organisations have engaged wholeheartedly in sustaining risk-taking and exploration, and there are valuable examples of teachers acknowledging "What didn't go as planned", and outlining the limitations of their research activities.

There are also engaging examples of practitioners' personal accounts of teaching dilemmas, illustrating what they have learned through their new relationships with learners and with colleagues in different roles and different subject areas. The quality of these measured reports, illuminated by insightful personal accounts from individual teachers, indicates their significant professional development. Many have offered reflective accounts which evidence how they have risen above their need to defend their former practices as they have become more responsive to learners.

I would argue that the examples of sustained inquiry and self-reflection in project reports result from the continuing support by mentors which has stimulated practitioners' capacity to do research, and this has validated practitioners' emerging identities as practitioner-researchers.

Which strategies improved mentors' capacity to act as practitioner-research facilitators?

In retrospect, it is possible to identify a number of factors that were instrumental in maximising the effectiveness of our well-equipped mentors. These included:

1. Sharing guided feedback on project proposals

Most organisations had been over-ambitious in writing their project proposals (both in terms of project scope and research "doability") but they provided an excellent foundation for negotiation. Consequently, we sent each project (and their mentor) detailed feedback and a suggested revised research schedule. Mentors found this useful, both for highlighting our programme research approach and also for offering a timetable of focused research activities. These proposal revisions acted as the basis of action planning discussions between the mentors and their research teams.

2. The dynamics and content of project inception meetings.

We made a conscious decision to invest time and personnel in the individual project "inception meetings" which were staffed by mentors and members of the Programme Team. We designed these days as educational planning days to prepare those teachers and managers from partner organisations for leading their project teams. We had planned a variety of case studies and interactive exemplar materials to engage project leads in the practical application of issues crucial to ensuring the project success:
- What teaching activities will our project focus upon?
- How can we ensure the participation and commitment of all the English team? What CPD might they need for this project?
- Who are the learners, and how will we judge their progress?
- How will we support and encourage teachers to conduct action research and to gather evidence of their teaching?

We included mentors in the delivery of these practitioner-led research activities and the experience proved educative for all. These inception

events initiated a collaborative ethos, with mentors and project teams working and learning together. The case-studies sparked good working relationships between mentors and project teams, and planning tasks provided project leads and mentors with a purposeful plan for which they could assume elements of joint responsibility and ownership.

During these meetings, organisational project leads found it reassuring to meet the other partners who were following their particular theme. Typically, discussions encouraged partners to deliberate how they might best experiment with approaches (e.g. "Should we use commercially produced podcasts to promote knowledge of language features?"; "Could teachers produce their own podcasts?"; "Could students make them?"; "How?"; "In pairs?" "Which levels of learners would podcasts help most?" etc). Such discussion inevitably introduced practitioner research into teachers' everyday practice – helping teachers ground their inquiries into pragmatic judgements about activities that involved the learners whenever possible. These meetings were educative for all participants; mentors became central in adopting practitioner research approaches to investigate the value of English strategies. These meetings seemed instrumental in stimulating a research facilitator dimension to complement mentors' identities as English experts.

3. Building in a rhythm of CPD events

Whilst a powerful inception experience was necessary to kick-start the Programme, we knew that projects needed the continuing support of a "rhythm" of CPD. Too often, practitioner research begins with detailed planning, only for projects to become side-lined when competing pressures intervened. To counter this fall-off, we had organised a series of subsequent one-day events, including "Investigating Teaching & Learning" regional events, Interim and Final Dissemination Events, and "Writing Days" to energise project participants.

The national events foregrounding research and writing approaches were ostensibly directed at projects, but they also served as a professional development opportunity for mentors as these meetings emphasised the

Programme team's expectations and ethos. Mentors attending these events described them as an invaluable and productive learning experience; not just for the content of the presentations, but also by learning about other mentors' and projects' priorities, practices and concerns, they developed unique understandings about how to manage their extended roles as "English specialist" and "research facilitator". Their experiences of these events were powerful in establishing their membership of the project mentors' community of practice.

Conclusion: mentors make projects work (harder)

Mentors have ensured that the teachers and learners on this project have fully achieved their potential. Their supportive and constructive presence has driven a wide range of projects far beyond what would have been achieved without their steadfast interest and responsiveness. If these reflections end on a sobering note, it is because mentors exerted most effort into those few projects who did not commit as wholeheartedly to mentors' efforts.

Successful mentoring requires two-way commitment, and whilst mentors can provide support, projects have to engage with the mentoring process. Those projects who were limited in their progress tended to be those projects who absented themselves from meetings and distanced themselves from offers of mentor support. Some projects who suffered staffing attrition or organisational upheaval but responded to mentor encouragement still made significant professional progress, albeit for a reduced number of staff and students, and they have still contributed to our understanding of English teaching in challenging contexts.

There has not been space in this booklet to publish the reports of all mentors, so we have invited reports from the four lead mentors. On reflection, I appreciate that we would benefit from listening to the voices of all twelve. Fortunately, several have joined the "Writing for Publication" mentoring project which continues beyond this programme, so I anticipate they may shortly be using their creative resourcefulness to complete this phase of our education…

Evaluation

Professor Jean McNiff (Research Consultant, ccConsultancy Associate)
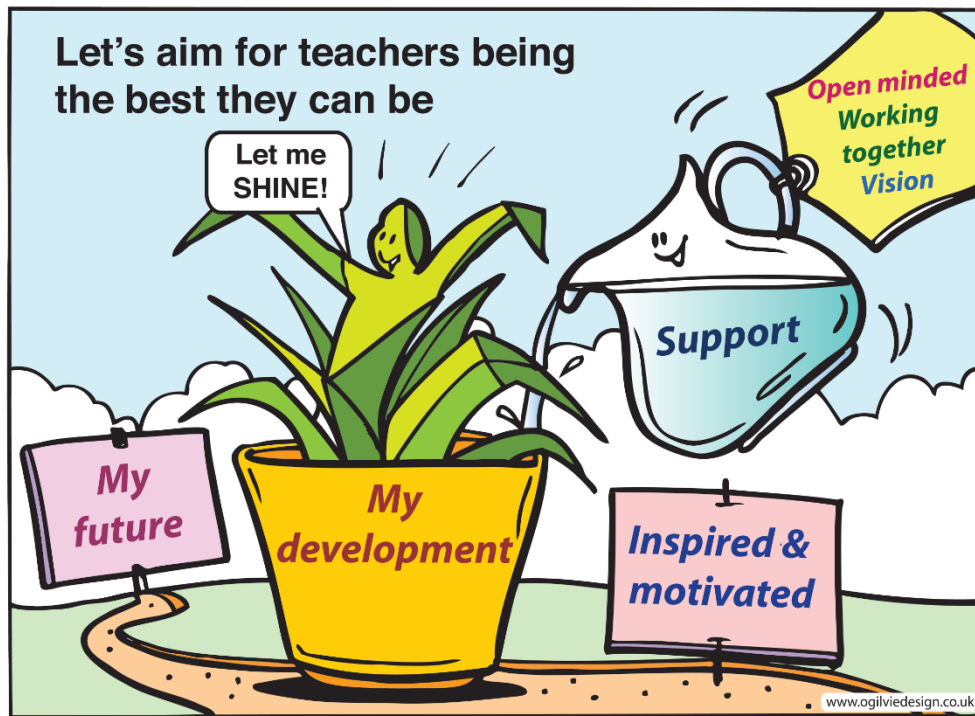
The experience of working on the OTLA (English) programme has been exhilarating, as has the subsequent process of writing the evaluation report.

The evaluation process itself has meant being caught up in working and talking with as many people as possible involved in the OTLA programme, including members of the ETF, teachers, managers, support workers, librarians and others, and the ccConsultancy team, all working collaboratively, with enthusiasm and enjoyment and with a compassionate understanding of the other's needs.

It has been uplifting to work with, talk with and listen to people developing ideas together about the programme, negotiating meanings and coming to

conclusions: this has included members of the ETF as well as practising teachers and the ccConsultancy team itself.

A striking feature of the programme is the way in which all have developed innovative ways of working together to improve the quality of teaching to help learners learn more effectively and enjoyably.

It has been especially enjoyable to listen to teachers' shared presentations of good pedagogical practices, grounded in their commitment to developing a strong research base for their enquiries, and reading their reports in this and other publications. The reports themselves are inspiring: they contain accounts of energetic, highly committed people developing collaborative practices, with close support from the ccConsultancy team, mentors, team leaders and other colleagues, all with the intention of improving the quality of their own and their learners' education.

A key value-added feature has been the opportunity of working with the ccConsultancy team, to explore ideas together regarding the development of a strong research base in which to share and test the validity of ideas, and in turn to pass these on to teachers, who will, it is hoped, pass them on to learners. This 'passing it on' process forms the basis of the OTLA programme; it could, indeed, be seen as the process of all current and future educational development, with implications for the improved wellbeing of the planet and its rich multitude of participants.

Purpose of the evaluation

The specific purpose of the evaluation of the OTLA programme was to give an objective assessment of its value for all involved in its planning, funding, delivery and experience. This process may also be understood as judging the extent to which the aims of those involved have been achieved in practice: that is, whether people's involvement in the programme met their expectations of what they wished to get out of it, and the extent to which the provision and experience of the OTLA programme met their wider needs of

practice and professional learning. The programme has been overwhelmingly successful in this regard: no negative experiences have been reported and all participants appear to be fully satisfied with the overall experience.

The evaluation process

The evaluation process has throughout been collaborative. It has involved accessing relevant documents, including government reports and scholarly literatures; gathering amounts of data, including data from conversations with colleagues, surveys and focus groups; checking which of those data may stand as evidence, and as evidence of what; coming to considered conclusions; and testing the truthfulness and relevance of those conclusions against the feedback of appropriately-informed others.

This process has reinforced the understanding that evaluation should be seen as a rigorous form of research, where aims are considered and practices judged in terms of the extent to which those aims have been achieved. It has also been conducted in a rigorously ethical way, meeting the high standards of agencies such as the British Educational Research Association and the National Evaluation Society.

The evaluation report may stand as a bone fide account of rigorously-conducted practice-based research. It has followed a standard action research methodology of:

- Identify an area of interest or concern;
- Explain why the issue is important and relevant to the field;
- Produce data to show what is happening in the field;
- Imagine ways of improving the situation;
- Try those ways in action;
- Monitor practices to see whether the action is having any effect;
- Take stock and consider whether the situation is better in light of the action;
- If yes, continue with the action and new practices; if no, then re-think and start again;
- Continue this process until the situation is satisfactory (while remembering that new ideas evolve through working with other people, so it is unlikely that an entirely satisfactory situation would ever be reached).

The evaluation process has involved two sets of enquiry: an inner set and an outer set, each taking the form of an action enquiry. The inner set constitutes an account of the teachers' own enquiries, while the outer set constitutes an account of the evaluation process.

In terms of a standard action research approach these two enquiries appear as follows:

Inner set: Teachers' enquiries

Teachers' questions about practice	Teachers' stories of practice as research
What is the concern? What issue do we wish to investigate?	Teachers identified a particular issue of concern that they wished to investigate further
Why is this a concern?	Teachers explained why this issue was important for them
What is happening in the field?	Teachers described what is happening in the field and said why this represented an area for investigation
Gather data to show the situation as it is	Teachers gathered data to show the reality of their concerns
What might we do to improve the situation?	Teachers imagined how the issue might be improved
What can we do about it?	Teachers and supporters talked together to decide on possible actions to improve the situation
How do we evaluate progress?	Teachers reviewed progress collaboratively and requested feedback from others about the value of what they were doing
How do we check whether our conclusions are reasonably fair and accurate?	Teachers shared their stories with others and listened to their critical feedback
How do we modify our actions in light of our evaluations?	Teachers talked together about possible new practices in light of their evaluations

Outer framework: The evaluation process

Questions about the form and content of the evaluation	Process of conducting the evaluation as an action enquiry
What is the concern? What issue is to be investigated?	The area to be investigated was the value of the OTLA programme for all participants
Why is this a concern?	Establishing the value of a programme as feedback to funders and participants
What is happening in the field?	Accessing key literatures provides an initial overview of what is happening in the field and for potentially justifying any recommendations
Gather data to show the situation as it is	Conversations and feedback from all involved in the OTLA programme showed the reality of the situation from multiple perspectives
What might we do to improve the situation?	Report how teachers imagined how the issue might be improved
What can we do about it?	In the evaluation report, explain how and why teachers' reports of developing practices should be seen as a form of research
How do we evaluate progress?	Get feedback from all concerned about the authenticity and usefulness of the evaluation process
How do we check whether our conclusions are reasonably fair and accurate?	Subject draft evaluation report to knowledgeable others for their critical review; submit evaluation report to the commissioning agency
How do we modify our actions in light of our evaluation?	Make recommendations regarding developments in practices and for ongoing cycles of research and evaluation

Findings

The main findings of the evaluation were as follows:

Finding 1   Teachers can produce high quality research reports when appropriate support is provided, especially in terms of expert knowledge of:

- the nature of professional education practices
- research approaches relevant to enhancing collaborative and person-centred forms of professional education
- the production of high-quality practice-embedded research reports;
- appropriate attitudes on the part of participants in terms of readiness to learn and openness to innovative forms; of providers, in arranging the most beneficial conditions for learning and in delivering appropriate forms of support; of managers, in providing opportunities for the delivery of research-based professional development programmes; of policy makers in openness to the development of new participative forms of supporting professional learning.

Finding 2   Practitioners can learn best and benefit from professional development provision most when the provision is presented in terms of their lifeworld experience. This includes an appropriate form of relevant personal and professional content presented in a practitioner-friendly and practitioner-relevant form of language.

Finding 3   Practitioners' learning is best supported from an understanding that research may be carried out and its findings may be put into immediate effect.

Finding 4   Sufficient amounts of time should be allocated to professional education programmes that involve ongoing learning and reflection: a concern was voiced consistently by teachers that more time would have been helpful in developing learning and skills acquired from participation on the OTLA programme.

Finding 5   The best ideas and suggestions for research programmes usually come from practitioners themselves, when they see the relevance of the research topic for their own practices, with possible application for colleagues and for the profession.

Finding 6   Learning from previous life episodes may be seen as informing new practices, as shown in the incremental learning by both the team and participants across the years 2018–2020, and as communicated through teachers' reports and through the nature of the technology-rich content of professional development days; this incremental form of learning often takes the form of and is embedded in a rolling-out of ideas and insights.

Finding 7   Professional development should include the provision of new ideas and new technologies.

Finding 8   Sustainable professional development often best takes the form of the development of a practitioner's own knowledge, not simply the acquisition and application of others' knowledge.

Finding 9   Professional education programmes should be grounded in a commitment to dialogue, participation and negotiation. In the OTLA programme it was a case of the team negotiating content and form with teachers, and of teachers negotiating content and form with learners. This was altogether a demonstration of the values of participation, inclusion and democratic discourses as communicated in the aims and values of both the ETF and ccConsultancy.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the evaluation were:
- For the provision of similar programmes, more extended time is needed for engagement with and the application of learnings acquired from participation;
- The current OTLA programme for teachers should be continued, with built in progression, to show the potential uses and benefits of the professional

learning acquired from the programme; the issue now is to see whether the abundant evidence that shows the benefits of participation in terms of participants' professional learning may realistically be brought to real-life situations; this implies –

- An extension of the evaluation process in terms of investigating the development of learners' learning in relation to teachers' professional learning: specifically, to see whether the quality of learners' learning has been improved through teachers' participation on the current OTLA programme;
- Production of further evaluation reports to show the ongoing effects of teachers' professional learning in relation to the quality of learners' learning; and in relation to issues of its sustainability and ongoing application to everyday life. This would involve accessing learners, together with their teachers, possibly in their work and study places;
- Production of appropriate texts that show these processes in action, produced in both practice-friendly forms of language for appeal to a practitioner audience, to be made available to the wider public, appropriately dated for ease of reference in the literatures, and also in scholarly forms for publication as in refereed journals. The production of such texts would show that practitioners can work with and communicate in multiple forms of discourse, and as full participants in what Geras (1995) calls 'the conversation of humankind'.

End word

In summary, may I say that it has been a joy and a privilege to work with outstanding teachers and colleagues in this most worthwhile endeavour; I consider myself fortunate indeed to have had the opportunity to enjoy such excellent companionship.

Reasons to be Cheerful...

Bob Read (Strand Lead for projects 1, 2 and 3, ccConsultancy Associate)
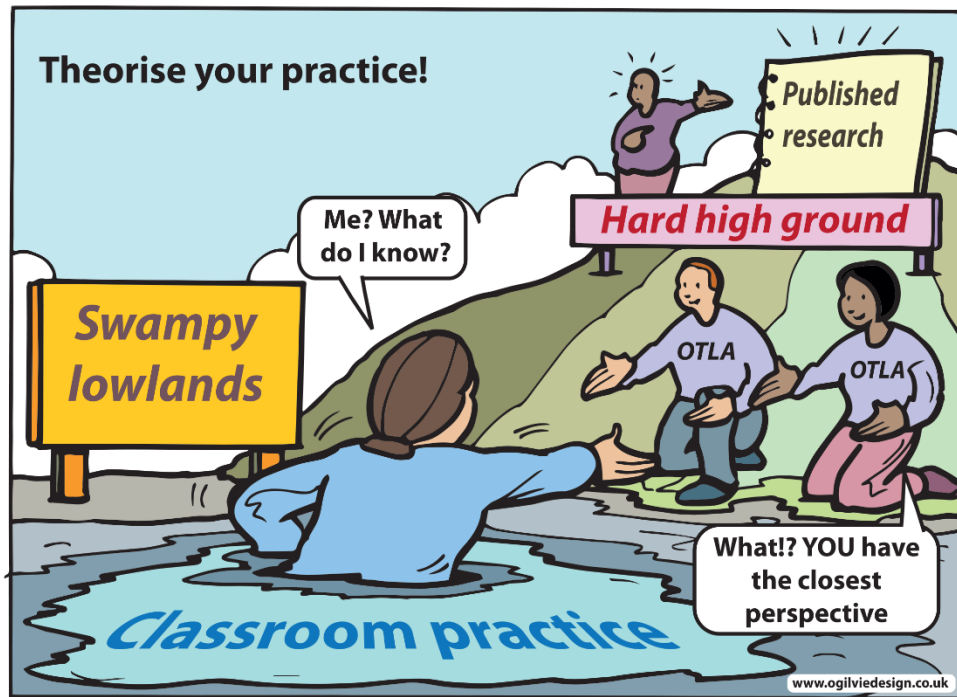
For those of us working in the post-16 sector to improve our learners' English skills there are daily reminders that we work in a very challenging curriculum area. Low learner motivation levels, behaviour management issues, staff shortages, more rigorous qualifications, demands for higher retention and achievement, shifting mark boundaries – such factors can dampen the enthusiasm of even the most committed teachers.

However, this year's OTLA programme has provided for many of us some important reminders of how the sector is responding bravely and creatively to those many challenges, and in writing this article I would like to share some reflections on those 'reasons to be cheerful'.

Building on research from other sectors

First, I have been greatly encouraged to note how many teachers working in the post-16 sector regularly take time to read and evaluate research findings, Twitter chats and blog posts by English teachers in the school sector and are keen to use the OTLA programme to investigate how to adapt those ideas for use in college settings. Here are some examples:

- Rebecca Walker and her team at South Devon College have explored an approach to the marking of learner work based on the use of 'Directed Improvement and Reflection Time – DIRT' in the primary and secondary sector (**https://ukedchat.com/2019/04/29/dirt/**)
- As a member of the Teamenglish Twitter community (**https://teamenglish1.wordpress.com/**) Louisa Baddiley, project lead at Suffolk New College, had been greatly impressed by the reports about the benefits of using visualisers in secondary schools and was keen to pilot their use on GCSE English resit programmes in her college.
- The project at PETROC has explored ways in which the VESPA approach (Oakes and Griffin, 2017) to teaching study skills had been developed within a 6th Form College.
- Georgina Choat at Harlow College was originally inspired to explore the importance of oracy skills in her OTLA project by attending events organised through the Voice 21 project (**https://voice21.org/**) in schools.

Synergy with other ETF-funded projects

I have also been delighted to see how many practitioners on this year's OTLA programme have accessed resources and training offered by other ETF-funded projects, suggesting a valuable synergy that can be of considerable benefit to those concerned and shows an efficient use of government funding.

For example, as part of an earlier OTLA project in 2017, Dom Thompson and colleagues at Havant and South Downs College produced an online resource, Teachers Takeaway (**https://www.teacherstakeaway.co.uk/**), a bank of short informal video interviews with teachers who are keen to report on their success in introducing innovative teaching strategies into their practice. This excellent online resource continues to be updated with new material and features, and has been an inspiring example for those working on this year's OTLA programme; it shows how digital technology can enable teachers to share their ideas and enthusiasm in ways that can often be more persuasive and convincing than a written report.

Similarly, in the very early stages of his project, Tom Vines at Brooklands College appreciated the opportunity to access and adapt resources shared on a Padlet board (**https://padlet.com/bobacer2/resit**) by members of an ETF Professional Exchange Network (PEN). The PEN was set up in the Eastern region to share examples of reading material that were effective in engaging and motivating reluctant readers on GCSE English resit programmes. The resultant collection provided a useful source of ideas for Tom and his colleagues as they began their own action research project.

Finally, in the early months of the OTLA project some organisations were able to request training on topics relevant to their chosen research interests such as phonics, use of a visualiser and embedded approaches.

Action research – theory and practice

A key source of interest and pleasure for me has also been the opportunity to meet and work with Professor Jean McNiff at three of the national events featured in this year's OTLA programme. I was already familiar with her distinctive approach to action research from reading some of her articles and books but it has been fascinating to hear her talk through her ideas within the context of our post-16 sector and the particular challenges we face in English teaching.

In her presentation at the launch event in York, Jean explored different types of knowledge and prompted us to consider how the prestige attached to the abstract knowledge generated by traditional academic research in universities often contrasts with the lower status of knowledge gained by

practitioners through reflection on their own experiences in workplaces and in everyday life. The low status of *'experiential, practice-based forms of knowledge'* (McNiff, 2017, p 50), she says, is an example of *'epistemic injustice'* (McNiff, 2020) that we should resist.

> *"The form of knowledge and its acceptability still tends to be linked to how much the knower is publicly valued: people on the high ground are seen as legitimate knowers and theorists while those in the swampy lowlands are seen as trainees and hopefuls. Schön does not accept this situation: practitioners, he says, should create their own knowledge through investigating their practices and thereby promote themselves as powerful and competent practitioner-researchers who are able to produce their personal theories of practice to account for what they do."*
>
> **(McNiff, 2017, pp 73-74)**

From this theoretical basis Jean has encouraged our practitioner researchers to value the 'knowledge claims' that can result from using a rigorous and well-planned action research process to structure their OTLA projects. This empowering message is particularly welcome at a time when teachers are trying to find their own creative solutions to new challenges of delivering GCSE and Functional Skills English qualifications.

Jean is the first to say that academic research clearly has its place (McNiff, 2017, pp37), most often perhaps in clarifying starting points for an action research project. She also encourages teachers to value the opportunities they have on the OTLA programme to generate valuable knowledge and theories from within their own practice. I was delighted to see how positive and responsive our practitioners have been in engaging in such discussions and to note how Jean's ideas have served to develop their confidence in the role they have as practitioner researchers.

A willingness to value "experiential, practice-based forms of knowledge" is a key feature of all types of action research and underpins the OTLA programme and other ETF joint practice development initiatives. It has also been rewarding to revisit with Jean the important debate about different modes of knowledge and to consider the kind of rigour needed to build into

action research projects if they are to generate knowledge claims that will be seen by others as valid and reliable. Central to that rigour is the need for practitioners to 'theorise their practice'; and in the latter stages of the OTLA programme I have been able to support project workers in this important stage of the research process.

For example, Laura Holland at The College of West Anglia managed a project rejecting the use of acronyms such as PEE and PETAL, on GCSE English resit programmes in favour of alternative writing support strategies. However, she and her team have realised that as well as exploring the technical aspects of teaching writing skills they have also recognised the importance of gathering information about the attitudes and experiences of resit learners at the start of the course.

For example, in asking learners to discuss their views on the use of acronyms, teachers found ways of building stronger working relationships more quickly with learners and gained valuable insights into the relevance of study skills not only to the use of acronyms but to other aspects of their English programme. Laura and colleagues are keen to undertake another action research cycle next year to explore this area further.

Similarly, Tom Vines at Brooklands College notes that the experience of involving learners as key members of his research team has encouraged him and other managers to consider using this collaborative approach to curriculum design more extensively as it yielded unexpected benefits.

In discussions with Laura and Tom about their research projects I suggested that their insights reflect some of the findings in the study carried out by the DfE (Hume et al, 2018) to identify ways of improving retention on GCSE resit programmes. One of the report recommendations emphasised the effectiveness of interventions to actively explore and validate learners' backgrounds and experiences, and enable learners to feel 'a sense of belonging' both on their programmes and within the college generally.

However, given the original timescale and funding constraints of the OTLA project, time for such discussions looked to be limited and threatened to restrict the important opportunities for practitioners to theorise their practice.

Fortunately, additional funding was offered to providers in the last month of the programme so they could continue to bring practitioners together to reflect collaboratively on their research findings. These discussions turned out to be highly productive.

Dissemination of early research findings

In a December meeting of an English Practitioners Network in the Eastern region I arranged for two managers from the OTLA programme to update network members on their progress and early research findings. The feedback from members was extremely positive and indicated that teachers value the opportunity to hear from colleagues who are piloting new teaching approaches in authentic teaching contexts and are willing to share their resources and tentative conclusions about their new practices.

Such presentations can be challenging for those delivering them, as teachers will quite rightly probe any explanation of a causal link between an intervention and its impact. But overwhelmingly and quite understandably, practitioners attach a premium to authentic accounts from those 'working at the chalkface' who face challenges similar to their own and who value 'experiential, practice-based forms of knowledge'.

After the meeting several members noted on their evaluation forms that they would be very keen to be involved in the OTLA programme next year and one of the managers at the meeting emailed me the next morning to say:

> *"I just wanted to thank you for convening yesterday's meeting. I found it really inspiring and have taken away with me a host of ideas. I spent most of my journey home thinking and planning and it has helped to invigorate some enthusiasm at the end of a long term!"*

Within a curriculum area that continues to face daunting challenges I feel the OTLA programme this year has been an uplifting and valuable experience for all of us who have been directly involved and, I hope too, for those who may read these reports and access the resources we have created.

1a. Level Up
South Devon College
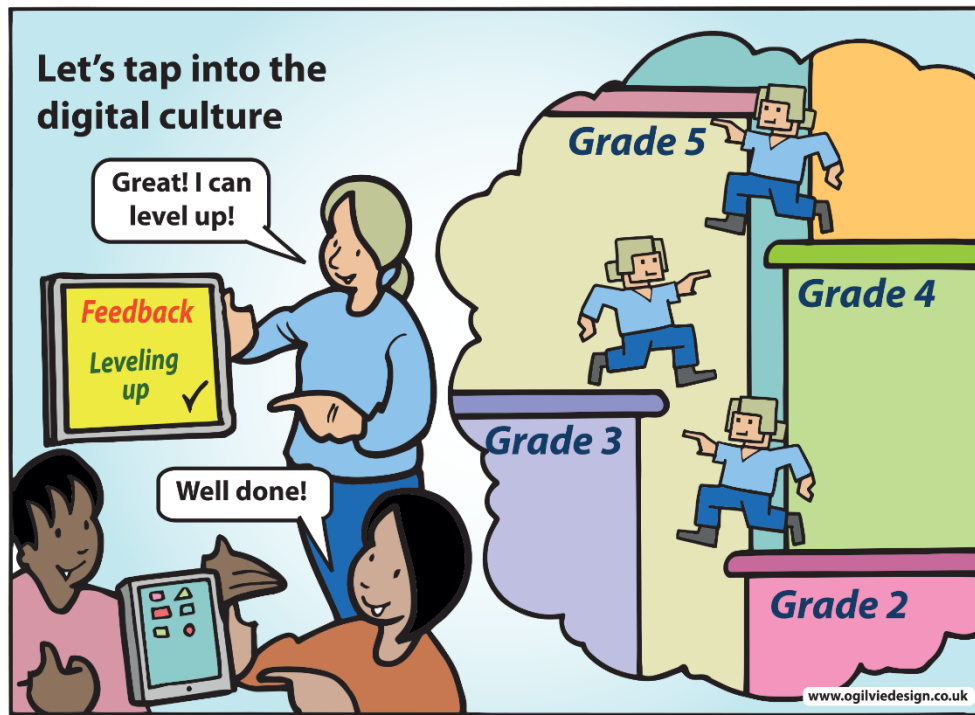
The aim of this project was to raise learner achievement and aspiration by developing a new progressive marking strategy across the English department and by implementing a marking cycle across the English department delivering Functional Skills, GCSE and A Level English.

Summary

South Devon College is a General Further Education college, based in Paignton, with 'out centres' throughout South Devon.

The aim was to make marking more meaningful for teachers and provide learners with the opportunity to upgrade.

The stages of the cycle were as follows:

1. Learner completes their summative assessment work
2. Teacher marks and grades learner work
3. Suggestions for improvement are provided by the teacher
4. The redraft and upgrade work is completed by the learner
5. Upgraded work is marked and marks are added to 'LEVEL UP' the learner grade
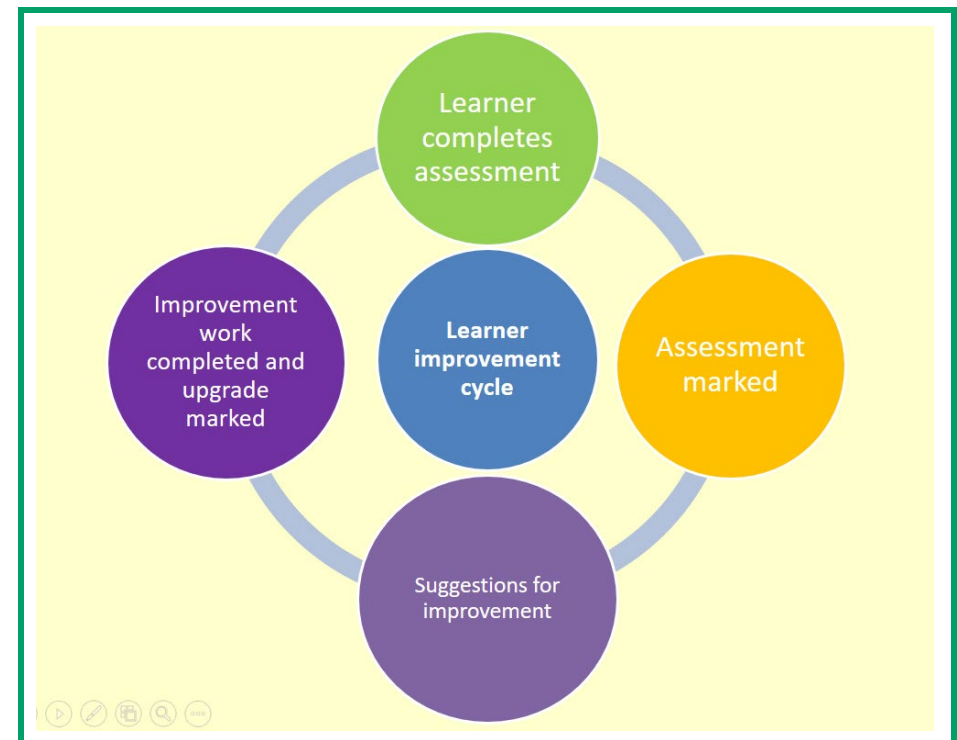
Figure 1a-1: Learner Improvement Cycle

This cycle would also support the development of learners' lifelong metacognitive skills, transferable to vocational courses and industry.

Rationale

Although summative assessment work was marked by teachers in the English department, further moderation and work scrutiny identified inconsistencies in terms of –

- The focus of marking activities
- The impact of marking on learner progress
- Time taken to mark work after completion
- Methods used to provide feedback
- The language used to communicate the feedback
- Time allocated for learners to respond to feedback
- Teachers' response to improved learner work

Learners' attainment in English was identified in our last Ofsted inspection as an area for development: "Learners do not improve their English and mathematical skills in all curriculum areas and at all levels well enough."

We also found that there was a disproportionate balance between the time teachers spent marking and the time spent by students responding to their feedback.

Figure 1a-2 shows the average amount of hours spent on marking an assessment by the teacher (1 hour per student) compared with the time students spent responding to their feedback (average 15 minutes).
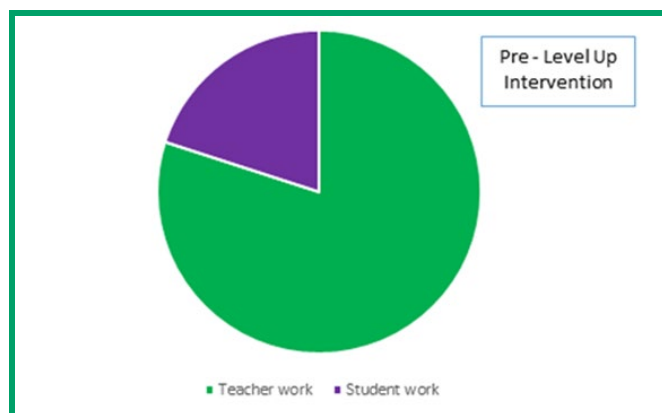
Figure 1a-2: Marking time compared with student upgrade time pre-project

There were also missed opportunities for teachers to use the marking of summative assessment to identify students who would benefit from an exam access arrangement referral, for example: extra time, use of a laptop, reader or prompt.

We were unable to track any measurable impact that teacher marking, feedback and upgrade may have had on student progress.

The value of re-drafting or improving work was under-rated. Opportunities were missed to develop student resilience, motivation and aspiration to produce work to the best of their ability and achieve a higher grade.

Following an initial CPD session, teachers commented:

> *"They were committed to marking books, and spent excessive time completing marking, but would welcome the opportunity to be supported to make their marking more efficient and to have a greater impact on their students."*

Approach

A 'continuous learner assessment cycle' was created to show each stage of the process clearly and was used as a tool for staff members in the initial CPD launch in July 2019. The cycle was a model built on the principles of the existing 'DIRT' model widely used in the schools sector (see **https://ukedchat.com/2019/04/29/dirt/**) which inspired the additional stage of the re-marking of the upgraded work and provide recognition for the progress made.

At the initial CPD session the cycle was modelled using an example of a learner journey and the positive impact on learner progress. It was important for us to raise awareness of the risks, should any of the stages not be completed, such as work not marked, feedback not actioned, feedback actioned but not marked and upgraded, and how the learner impact would be compromised if all stages of the cycle were not completed by the teacher or the learner.

We also placed a strong emphasis on how the cycle helps the development of employability skills and metacognitive skills. For example, following teacher feedback, students need to reflect and take an active part in their improvement by planning, monitoring, and evaluating their upgraded responses.

To support teachers, we purchased 25 sets of stamps which they are able to use to indicate that feedback has been actioned.

Other methods included typed feedback slips which could then be copied directly onto the electronic learner record system.

Figure 1a-3: Stamps

Figure 1a-4: Feedback slip

There is now a proportionate balance between time marking and learners acting on feedback (Figure 1a-5).
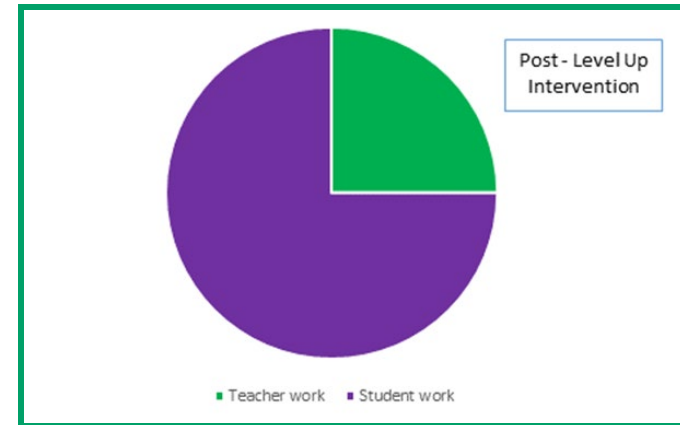
Figure 1a-5: Marking time compared to student upgrade time post-project intervention

A learner focus group was formed which served to highlight the similarities between the upgrade cycle and other quick feedback processes that underpin digital platforms such as video games, Instagram and Facebook. This idea was developed by our Learning Technology Team who designed the branding for the LEVEL UP promotional poster, complemented by branded purple LEVEL UP pens for learner use.

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

The use of the Level Up model is now consistent across Functional Skills, GCSE and A Level English courses and features on the scheme of learning and assessment following summative assessment points. There is an active action learning set of 14 teachers, based across college areas, who use the Level Up process. This includes teachers from maths, science, history, catering and geography.

Vocational staff members have been instrumental in adapting the feedback stage of the LEVEL UP model for their vocational subject. However, rather than written feedback, feedback is recorded by audio or video.

The Level Up process used by the teacher in Case Study 1 will form part of her QTLS professional development plan.

The LEVEL UP model has helped to build positive and collaborative relationships between learning support assistants in the classroom who support learners completing their upgrade work. The project has been fully supported by the senior leadership team and features as part of the South Devon College teaching and learning framework, contributing to the development of the organisation.

As part of the learner improvement process, exam access requirements have been identified and the improvement work has been used as evidence to provide referrals for use of laptops in class and in summative assessment. There was also a focus on learners who had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), identified to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) or pupil premium students to use the upgrading of work as a motivational tool and raise aspiration.

As an English team we have had regular meetings to moderate marking and linked this specifically to the examining board criteria. The use of marked examples from the examining board has enabled us to maintain and update our awareness of the exam criteria. The project has encouraged staff members to evaluate and adapt their practice to use other evidence-based approaches, which can be seen in the learning walk record:

> "Strengths – Evidence informed approaches are prominent in this lesson – recap quiz encourages retrieval practice, slides are uncluttered with accessible text in line with principles of dual coding, providing learner-generated model answers. This lesson was structured extremely clearly to introduce learners to the importance and process of upgrading their work."

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Following the CPD sessions held in June 2019 and January 2020 a number of staff members across the college community expressed an interest in incorporating the LEVEL UP model within their own practice. Members from the Teaching and Learning Coach team actively supported these practitioners with marking learner work, creating achievable targets and facilitating learner upgrade sessions, thereby strengthening the collaboration within sections throughout the college.

The personalised feedback has enabled all learners, including those with SEN, EHCPs and exam access arrangements, equal opportunities to upgrade their work.

The LEVEL UP project team were invited to present at the Senior Leadership meeting. The success of this presentation raised awareness amongst Curriculum Managers who fully decided to include the upgrading process as a key feature on schemes of learning and assessment across college.

Because of the success of the upgrade project, it has now been implemented in the South Devon High School which is a 14-16 provision and although situated on the college campus, is recognised as a separate external establishment. Further CPD sessions were provided and 1-1 coaching to help them adopt this new progressive approach to marking.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

All A Level learners made progress in their marks which was reflected in many cases in the grade boundaries.
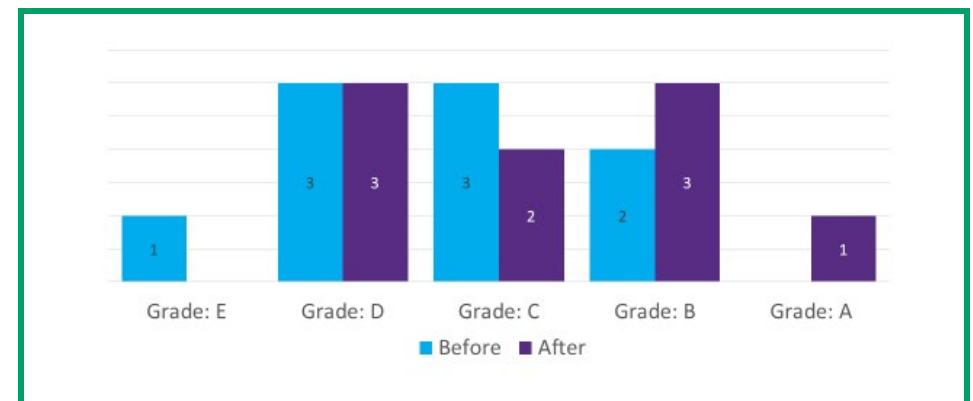
Figure 1a-6: A Level Improvements

Pre-upgrade the highest achievement was a B grade but post upgrade 3 B grades had been achieved as well as an A grade. Following the introduction of the upgrade process, the learners who remained at a D grade did achieve higher marks and were motivated to attend supported one-to-one study to gain additional marks to move them into a C grade.

All GCSE learners made progress which can be illustrated on the bar charts at Figures 1a-7 and 1a-8.
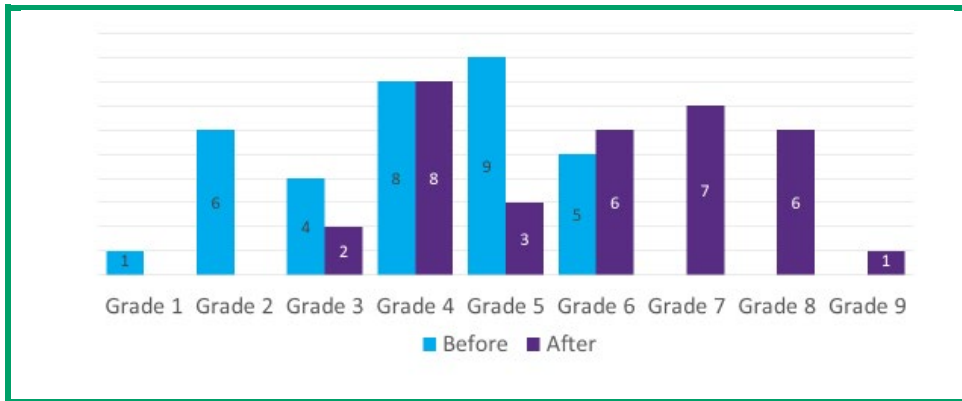
Figure 1a-7: Group A – GCSE Grade Improvements
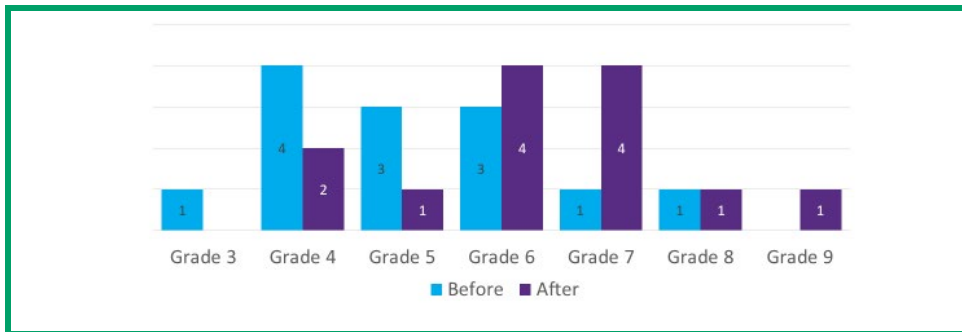
Figure 1a-8: Group B – GCSE Grade Improvements

Learner comments included:

"It teaches you how to improve. I think that's very important as we all want to get the best grades we can…The feedback…helps us get a better grade… The process makes it all seem achievable."

"It gave me confidence for other exams throughout the whole school, so I know I can actually do this and improve on everything I do."

Learning from this project

One of the biggest challenges faced was the new November retake, introduced across college. Teachers delivered an intense GCSE English scheme of learning and assessment from September to November. Because of time restriction, this scheme did not provide regular opportunities for learners to upgrade their marked work and gain recognition.

Within the initial CPD sessions staff confidentially expressed their concerns about how they felt their time spent marking was not always able to demonstrate measurable learner progress. As a result, coaching was offered for staff members to bring learner work up to standard and receive support with the process to ensure it had impact and could be completed more efficiently.

The LEVEL UP upgrading process was most successful when used consistently and as part of a scheme of learning. Learner feedback showed that they felt that completing an assessment was now the first part of the future opportunity to improve and gain a higher grade. The process removed the fear of 'making mistakes' from previous summative assessment where their grade would be final.

The teachers' capacity to meet all learners' needs has been greatly enhanced by the LEVEL UP project, by providing constructive, actionable and personalised feedback, modelling high grade examples and empowering the learners to learn more effectively.

The process has developed a new aspirational culture for all learners to access and strive to produce the best work possible, rather than settling for mediocrity which they had perhaps done previously. Students were engaged in the process and were keen to share their upgrade success with other teachers and managers in celebration events.

The postcards home to share success with parents and carers were extremely motivational and received excellent feedback.

1b. Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning

DevelopEBP
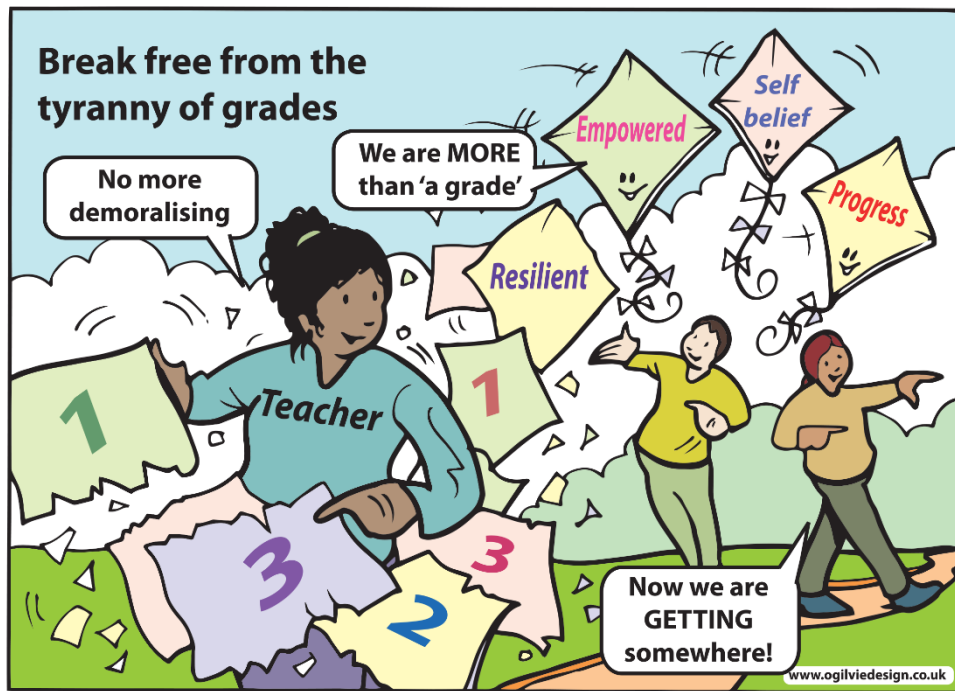
This project aimed to empower students by rewriting the familiar system of failure. Students were encouraged to take a more active role in their learning, specifically through developing an understanding of what is being assessed and how.

Summary

To achieve this, teachers removed the traditional grading system and focused on explicit and targeted feedback that students were encouraged to reflect and focus on, shifting the focus from attainment to skills development.

Through such refocusing, students were expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning and develop an improved relationship between students and teachers, as well as improved attendance.

Rationale

As the name suggests, DevelopEBP focuses on helping students grow, with a particular focus on high needs students aged 14-19 who have struggled in mainstream schooling.

As a result of students having had a negative experience in mainstream schooling, many students come to resit GCSE English with a preconceived idea that their skills and ability should be seen simply as a number with little value beyond whether or not they passed or failed.

Students are repeatedly told they need to achieve a 'grade 4', with little understanding of the skills and knowledge involved. Having failed previously, they come to DevelopEBP convinced they are unable to achieve success in their GCSE English.

When students are assessed, they look to the teacher to tell them how well they have achieved, fixating only on the number, with no sense of how evaluation happens or the relationship between skills and assessment. With a grade-based system, they often struggle to see any significant improvement in their work and become increasingly despondent. This can create a strained relationship between teachers and students, as well as poor attendance.

To counter this, the project set out to explore the benefits of supporting learners to take a more active role in the process of assessment through removing the grading system and replacing it with specific, targeted feedback for the students to use later to reflect on and set targets.

Approach

The project leader used her role as the college-wide English leader to select tutors teaching one GCSE resit group in each of the three centres participating in the project. An initial presentation outlining the project was received positively by staff, and subsequently also by the learners.

Each of the three centres focused on a different aspect of the project outcomes: Bedford looked at changing attitudes towards English learning and attendance, Dunstable looked at student/teacher rapport and progress made in skill objectives, and Norwich looked at student engagement and teaching and learning approaches.

Across the course of the project the students completed 2 assessments focusing on AQA Paper 1 and the skills required to succeed on questions (AO1, AO2 and AO4). After the initial assessment, each student was encouraged to select a specific skill to focus on and develop. This was tracked on an assessment feedback form and also through their ongoing reflective blogs.

Each week the tutor focused on a specific skill and the related question, after which the students sat another paper. The results from this assessment were used to illustrate to students the change in their responses, which enabled them to identify where they had improved and which skills they had developed.

The tutor participants communicated regularly through email, sharing data, student feedback and different approaches used. Tutors also met face-to-face towards the end of the project to discuss how things had gone, reflect on the process and select students for the case studies, to show who had fully engaged and experienced success as well as those who had not.

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

The focus of this action research was on assessment in terms of measurement and development, using one to inform the other. Moving away from a fixation on grading allowed students to break the cycle of failure and the subsequent associated despondency. This was the starting point for all three Develop centres: Bedford, Dunstable and Norwich; although all three looked at a specific knock-on effect from this system of failure.

The tutor leading this programme in Bedford, in line with the focus on changing attitudes towards English learning and attendance, observed the following changes in her students as well as in her own practice:

> *"I gave them 100% certificates for termly attendance and most of them really appreciated these to take home and show them off. I do show the register on the board for them all to see. I do think that spending some time to focus and reward good attendance has had a positive impact. Also, along the way, I have reflected on my lessons including: starting with a game, a riddle and discussing the news and other topics e.g. anxiety etc. I have sat myself amongst them for some of these activities and discussions, so there are no barriers. This has brought them together as a team and perhaps heightened their enjoyment of the lesson. We have had a trip to London, role plays, samosas and songs!!*
>
> *Because of this they have a very focused attitude to work and rarely waste time …"*

The tutor leading the research programme in Dunstable, in line with a focus on student/teacher rapport and progress made in skill objectives, noticed that students were struggling with how hard they found English. She adapted her practice to allow students time to reflect on how they felt, often starting with activities around unstructured writing, after which she noticed an increased engagement from the students, as well as their becoming more open about their struggles.

The tutor leading the programme in Norwich, in line with the focus on student engagement and teaching and learning approaches, observed that reflecting on student assessment was particularly useful in informing teaching and subsequently student learning.

Through developing self-reflection within the students, as well as reflecting on the lessons, it was felt that students responded well to repeating areas of success and continued to break down the areas of struggle they had

identified. This enabled the students to receive tangible positive reinforcement and support.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Across all three centres, it was initially noted that there seemed to be a disconnect in communication and the tutors often felt unsure about what was expected. This was largely because of a significant upheaval in staffing. Once staffing was stabilised and the three tutors involved were able to start sharing information, the situation improved significantly. Although every effort was made to meet face-to-face, this was not always possible because of geographical location. However, email trails and Google chats have enabled participants to remain in contact and share their thoughts.

Since the beginning of the project, the project lead in Dunstable has taken over the co-ordination of English across all of Develop. She has already scheduled standardisation meetings for all English tutors to attend and has planned an end-of-year debrief for all involved, to reflect on what is working in each centre and what is not. Moving forward, English across all centres will be addressed more collaboratively.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Most students across all three centres saw an increase in attainment from their first assessment to their second approximately 6 weeks later. This is largely shown in the overall results (Figure 1b-1).

Some students struggled to engage. Four students across all three centres missed the initial assessment: three were late starters and one has a history of poor attendance because of health issues. Two students saw a decrease in attainment. One had patchy attendance; the other, as illustrated in the case study, lacked engagement. The remaining 13 students saw a significant improvement in results, improving by between 3 marks and 26 marks, which is simply astounding.

Name	Test 1 (40 marks)	Level test 1	Test 2 (40 marks)	Level test 2	Change
Develop Bedford					
KJ	11	2	28	7	+17
MR	26	6	32	9	+6
MC	12	2	21	4	+9
PK	17	3	20	4	+6
CW	16	3	13	2	-3
FA	N/A	N/A	25	4	N/A
DA	17	3	20	4	+3
HS	18	3	21	4	+3
MK	8	1	34	9	+26
Develop Dunstable					
HF	16	3	20	4	+4
LR	12	2	15	3	+3
JPR	15	3	11	2	- 4
Develop Norwich					
OK	N/A	N/A	14	3	N/A
AB	15	3	13	2	-2
AN	N/A	N/A	21	4	N/A
EH	14	3	23	5	+9
CS	16	3	22	5	+6
EP	9	2	25	6	+16
HR	N/A	N/A	11	2	N/A

Figure 1b-1: Assessment results

Bedford centre reported significant improvement in attendance and in the relationships between peers, as well as with the tutor. It was noted that students were developing a sense of pride and taking their certificates of attendance home to 'show them off': this showed a significant investment from the students. To address the focus on 'getting along with each other' the tutor incorporated games, activities and team building, including herself, noting that her class is 'more of a team now'. Attendance at this centre, specific to English, has been excellent with 5 students achieving 100% attendance across all terms to date; 1 learner receiving 100% attendance to date for the 2nd term, and 2 learners with significantly increased attendance since September.

The Norwich centre, with a focus on student engagement and approaches to teaching and learning, observed that students initially seemed to be of the mindset of 'just get it done' rather than 'take the time to do it right'. The greatest obstacle seems to be the fact that students feel they are 'bad' at English, label themselves as 'stupid', and frequently express how 'impossible' everything feels. Withholding grades and focusing on skills has mitigated this to some extent but the habit is deeply ingrained.

Another pertinent observation is that although students are now able to complete tasks and have improved their skills, timing remains a concern.

> *"Students struggle to complete tasks to time, and the longer they have to concentrate the more they struggle. This poses a problem for written exams as they need to focus for at least 2 hours. Focusing on exam strategy and how to use time will be invaluable for them."*

Learning from this project

Withholding grades was effective across all three centres as students had no choice but to begin to develop an understanding of the skills they are learning and how to achieve them; this is the only way they have of measuring progress. Students were receptive to this approach and there was a degree of relief at not receiving the same 'not good enough' grade over and over again. It allowed them to shift focus and begin to see improvements.

However, it was also established that the system of failure has left a deep scar on most students' sense of themselves and their own abilities. Most students still respond with surprise at evidence of improvement, and remain fearful of more failure. It was established that although focusing on skills instead of grades is a step in the right direction, in and of itself it is not enough.

Attendance was another key area of this research project. The Bedford centre in particular reported increased attendance across the course of the programme. It was established, however, that this would have been easier to monitor and assess with centralised access to records of attendance instead of relying on feedback from different people. While specific people at different centres have access to the individual breakdown, this is not generally known by staff. The centralised attendance looks at the students' attendance across all courses – not just English. It was noted also that it is difficult to ascertain reasons for poor attendance, or to draw direct links between their improved relationships with regards to English with taking ownership of their own learning. Norwich in particular recorded that most absences were connected to sickness or external factors influencing students.

As most students have failed English GCSE in the mainstream school system, most students have reflected a more positive experience in the English classroom across the course of the project. This is primarily seen in terms of their daily engagement in class and activities in spite of their feeling 'tired' or of things being 'harder than they expect'.

One student reported:

> *"I didn't want to come to college today but I decided to because it is important".*

Such comments may be seen as evidence that DevelopEBP really does achieve its aim of empowering students by rewriting the familiar system of failure, now as a system of success.

1c. Assessment for Learning
Brooklands College
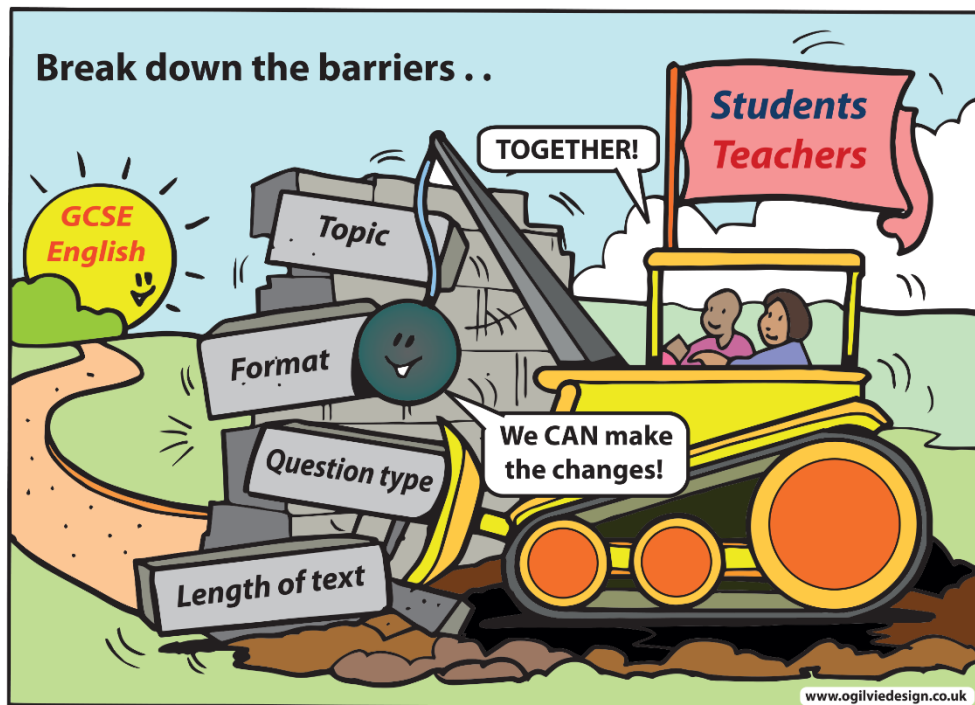
In this project we set out to try to understand the barriers our students face when trying to engage with a non-fiction text within a classroom or examination situation. We then hoped to identify strategies to help them overcome such barriers.

Summary

Brooklands College is a Further Education college based on two campuses, one in Weybridge, Surrey and the other in Ashford, Middlesex. We are proud to be one of Surrey's largest providers of vocational training and Further and Higher Education.

Our course offering is diverse and our teaching excels. The support we provide for our students is also excellent and is recognised as one of our key drivers for success.

The college has been awarded 'Good' by Ofsted following the college's December 2019 inspection, stating that the College fosters "a close community between learners and teachers."

Rationale

We had four main objectives. We hoped to:
- develop the learners' ability to identify the barriers in engaging with reading
- work with a learner cohort in finding pathways around these barriers
- support the learner cohort in creating a bank of reading resources which map across GCSE exam requirements but are more student-centric
- support the learner cohort in developing questions on the reading resources which are related to the assessment objectives of 9-1 GCSE English.

As a result, we hoped that learners would have a greater awareness of themselves as learners, their study skills and their potential. We hoped too that learners would feel more confident when approaching reading texts and we planned to build a bank of student-centric GCSE texts and exam papers to support classroom delivery and promote student engagement.

Approach

We recruited a team of lecturers and student researchers to develop approaches for Phase 1. These approaches were tested with the GCSE student cohort using exemplar reading materials, discussion and questionnaires. In Phase 2 we planned to put our approach into practice and assess its impact.

Phase 1:

- Locate exemplar GCSE texts.

  The project team decided to focus on the non-fiction texts for Paper 2 in the AQA exam, as the fiction texts of Paper 1 could be seen as more subjective in their appeal.

- Work with these resources to identify where engagement is lost and why.

  We started with a generic visual approach to understanding where engagement began to falter.

- Note the factors which engage and disengage students

  We developed a more thorough approach in identifying the factors that disengage learners by creating a questionnaire for the GCSE cohort. The GCSE cohort fed back on this and we developed another questionnaire to catch more information.

- Create a bank of reading resources to meet the required elements of GCSE, but which would also be likely to engage learners in their content and format.

  We researched and located a series of linked resources (contemporary and 19th Century non-fiction texts) that met with initial factors for engagement and then formatted them to ensure they met the further requirements.

Phase 2:

- Develop questions which are more student-centric and meet the requirements of the GCSE English AOs

  The project team realised that only three questions of the five were barriers to engagement and developed alternative examples.

- Apply these questions to texts selected from the reading resource bank

  We were able to put together a series of papers ready for testing. One was completed with questions.

- Trial papers with the GCSE English cohort and collect the feedback using the developed questionnaire.

  Given the timescale of the project we were unable to trial the resources as fully as we had planned.

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

The lecturers within the project team were asked to evaluate their participation and identify any changes to their teaching, learning and assessment practices.

They reported that they had gained:
- a greater understanding of the barriers to engagement which will inform lesson planning and delivery in the future;
- an increased confidence in finding new resources in a move away from the tried (tired) and tested;
- a greater awareness of the AO requirement of the GCSE which will impact on lesson planning and delivery;
- an increased respect for the ability of students to work collaboratively with tutors.

We plan to build on these insights in the planning, development and implementation of next year's curriculum.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The creation of a lecturer/student collaborative project team is an innovative approach within the college and is something we would like to pursue in different contexts going forward. It promoted equality and diversity in seeking to involve a cross section of the college's members, students and lecturers alike.

The scheduling of classes for the project team was new and necessitated redeployment of staff and resources.

Project findings were used in some departmental CPD in December, exploring 'the aesthetics of a study text'. This involved a workshop where

English and maths lecturers on GCSE and Functional Skills programmes discussed the project findings regarding resources and questions.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Quantifying learner achievement and progression at this early stage is difficult, as the student volunteers and GCSE cohort are yet to sit their final exams. However, we can say that student confidence in their ability to overcome barriers to reading seems to have improved, with clear potential for increased achievement.

> *"I feel as if I know more about me and why I don't read so much. I reckon I could do better in the exam now"*
>
> *"Now I know what they want me to write, I'm sure I can do better."*

Student comments

> *"It's good having students to discuss the project with, I'm really impressed with some of the ideas they've come up with."*
>
> *"Retrospectively, I can see why the formatting of the texts including a photograph could make such a big difference."*

Lecturer comments

It is also evident that identifying barriers to engagement in reading activities involving the students has helped them self-assess their own learning. This capacity should promote a better achievement rate, as shown in the generic visual approach and in the questionnaire feedback.

Learning from this project

Phase 1

- **Commonality in AQA paper texts.** Whilst it is clear that initial texts were selected as examples of persuasive writing, this seems to have tailed off and has been replaced by what may appear to be more accessible topics for students e.g. surfing and sailing.
- **Barriers to engagement.** We found that while the topic of a text is a key factor in the engagement/disengagement of a student, another important factor seems to be the formatting of the text on a page. This is not always linked to the length of the text but also to the use of paragraphing and pictures.
- **Preferred themes.** Students seemed to move away from the "heavy" texts relating to world affairs and significant historical events. They preferred more "popcorn" topics such as social activities and popular media. These themes include: crime, fame, recreational activities, horror, sport, the supernatural, prison and disasters.
- **Bank of resources.** This research and selected process has been challenging but effective. It would have been better if we had identified this process within our learning aims, as the adaptive nature of this individual research provided some great results.
- **Formatting of text including pictures.** Our understanding of what worked on the page based on the research was key in formatting the texts. In future it would be good to look at the presentation of this in a multi-media format.

Phase 2

- **Adaptation of questions.** This was a particularly valuable task and is something we will roll out as part of lesson content going forward. We developed alternative versions for exam questions 2, 3 and 4.
- **Assessment of final papers.** The project was divided into two phases but we were unsure how long these activities would take. We were able to get further into phase 2 than we perhaps expected but a full trial of the created papers was not possible in the timeframe of the project. The papers will be rolled out within the college as lesson resources later in the spring term and as revision materials at the start of the summer term, and feedback sought thereafter.

1d. Avoiding the Acronym
The College of West Anglia
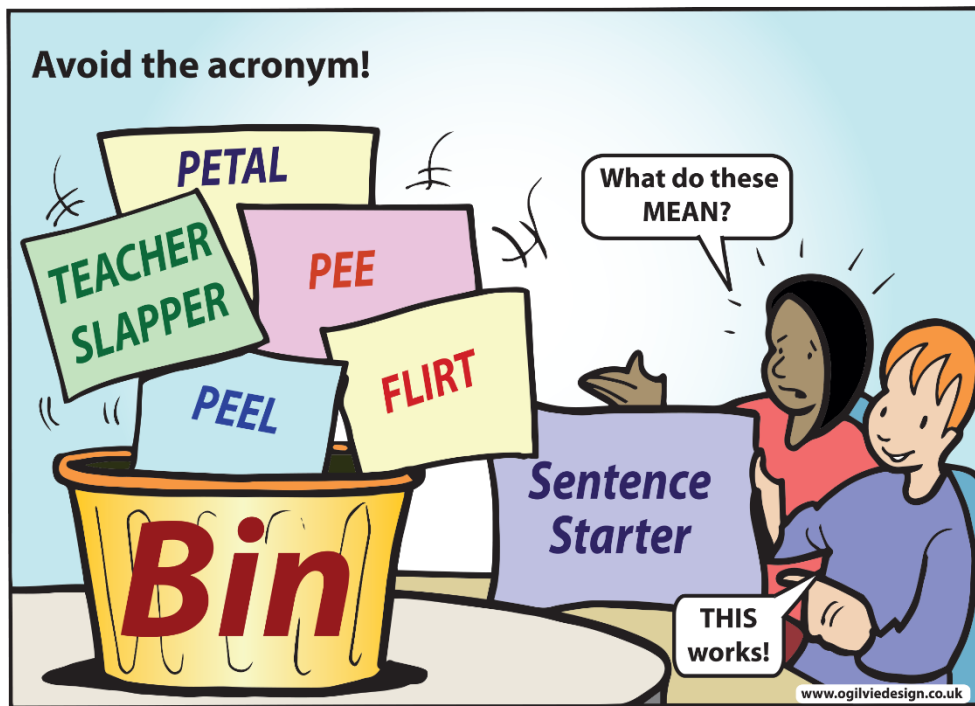
This project aimed to pilot the use of small, simple sentence starters to frame a response which we would also repeat for reading and use for all questions.

Summary

Anyone who has been an English examiner will know that students love to write an acronym at the top of their question paper. Unfortunately, anyone who has ever been an examiner will also know that this very rarely helps a candidate.

When marking, you almost become amused by the variety and absurdity of the range of acronyms used - my personal favourite was 'TEACHER SLAPPER' for use in poetry analysis. We all face challenges in teaching a

'resit' subject: one of the biggest is understanding what and how a student has been taught before.

At the College of West Anglia, we deliver AQA English language to over 600 students, each with a range of previous conceptions or often misconceptions. For many years, we wanted students to build on previous knowledge and allowed them freely to use whichever acronym had worked for them. However, we have increasingly discovered that the very tools designed to help students were often in fact confusing them.

As a large English department of 10 staff, we decided to avoid the use of such acronyms and use simple sentence starters to aid students instead. We wanted to use these to help students to think more clearly about how to approach and start a question.

Rationale

One of the first English lessons we deliver attempts to explore the previous experiences that students have had with English language in their secondary schools. As part of this lesson we actively encourage students to be honest about what worked for them and what they struggle with.

These first few lessons present teachers with a mass of information and highlight common issues that all colleges face: the muddle between English Language and Literature; the feeling that "I didn't need to revise as it was English"; a lack of belief in reading and the plethora of approaches to structuring a coherent exam response.

Every year, there is a distinct connection between these issues: confidence. As such, teachers often feel lost and unsure of where to begin in re-teaching a large and complex qualification. The information from students is discussed in the staffroom with collegiate exasperation and then battled with throughout the year. We wanted to focus on one of the specific issues faced by our students and re-direct their knowledge.

As part of these sessions, we noticed that we had collected approximately 8 different common acronyms used by students, with 'PEE, PEEL, PEEZL' used most often. We also noticed that common letters were used in acronyms but often meant different things. For example, an 'R' in 'PEARL' could mean 'relate to context' whereas it could also often mean 'repetition/rhetorical question' in another.

We had used acronyms ourselves when teaching writing and allowed students to use the one they felt most comfortable with. But we still faced the problem of 'How do I start this?' and students would often write very little in exam responses. As a result, our intervention aimed to pilot the use of small, simple sentence starters to frame a response which we would also repeat for reading and use for all questions.

Approach

Although we operate across several campuses, we are lucky to be able to meet as a whole team every Friday afternoon to complete training. We used some of the Friday sessions to plan our project in four stages.

Creation of resources

- Met as a team to discuss one key area to focus on
- Discussed some common acronyms and how they were being used
- Collected data from students about which acronyms they used, and asked them to 'translate' them
- Created some sentence starters:
  - 'The Writer uses language to' or 'I agree with'
  - 'For example, they have used the word/phrases.'
  - 'This makes me think/feel/imagine'
- Issued scaffolds for each question as we taught each question, including them in our pre-planned lessons
- Explicitly taught the scaffold by introducing, modelling and getting students to identify them in their own work

Adaptation of resources

- Examined a cross sample of student exam responses
- Discussed how we had taught these to ensure consistency

- Agreed how to teach a scaffold and how to communicate the reasoning behind it with students
- Adapted the sentence starter of: 'This makes me think/feel/imagine' to 'This suggests' as we found that the word 'feel' did not always apply to every question

Application of resources

- Used the scaffolds with students in every lesson (as we worked on exam questions in every lesson)

Collection of data:

- Collected data and feedback from students via:
  - a short questionnaire
  - discussion
- Observed teachers using the sentence starters in class
- Gathered feedback from staff throughout
- Identified that on average, students gained 1.6 marks on each question from using scaffolded sentences

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

The most notable change to teaching, learning and assessment practices in the team was the heightened awareness of students' previous learning. This led to an increase in professional dialogue across the team and created further questions about how we could adapt teaching to maximise the transition from previous education.

Teachers are now hoping to create another action-based research project on the use of reading age data to further inform our first lessons with them.

Additionally, the use of a scaffold style task meant that staff had to clarify instructions, build relationships with students and model writing. Whilst this is deemed to be good practice anyway, it did refresh staff and reiterate the need for instructions to be clear and explicit.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Using a common set of sentences across all lessons allowed students to clearly understand the importance of the scaffold. In addition, students were able to make links and refocus, building their confidence. In one lesson, a student appeared to be overwhelmed when asked to apply newly learnt knowledge to an exam question, but then asked their tutor 'Will we have those sentences again?' and responded with an enthusiastic 'yay' when told that they would be displayed shortly.

Using a repeated strategy also provided a clear signpost to students that an exam response was needed at that part of the lesson and therefore also required improved written output. This demonstrated to teachers that they need to review all lessons (including those used for Functional English) to ensure that students always approach writing with clear preparation.

Collaboration between colleagues improved greatly, sparking debates around the value of including an analysis of other misconceptions and confusions in our initial assessment. It also led us to discuss peer marking as we had asked students to highlight the use of the sentence starters in a critique of their work. Staff felt that getting students to read and analyse their own responses was incredibly effective.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learner feedback showed that 98% remembered the teachers using the framework and 75% felt that it was useful in helping them to start an answer which had previously been a problem for many of them. 68% felt it helped to structure a response whilst 76% expressed positive aspects that they liked about using the scaffold, including 'helps to understand what to include/do'.

As well as this, we analysed a random sample of twenty 16-18 year old learners and compared results from one assessment point (without the use of the scaffold) to another assessment point where staff had used it. Although the data taken from the second assessment point captured the use of the scaffold in its early stages, we saw an increase of 32 marks in the overall score.

Staff consistently commented that relationships with students had benefitted from using clear and repeated guidelines. As the scaffolding sentences could apply to any previous exam boards that the students had studied, they also felt that this made their learning easier. Students also spoke positively of discussing their prior learning experiences and enjoyed having the freedom to voice their thoughts on their previous experience of English teaching.

Whilst we need to continue to tweak the phrases used, and the way in which we approach exam questions and how we utilise previous knowledge from students, it is clear that the framework supported them in starting and approaching an exam question.

Learning from this project

Clear gains:

- Students enjoyed the scaffolded sentence starters: they felt less confused, more willing to write and enjoyed the way they were repeated across lessons. Most remembered the sentences clearly in comparison to struggling to remember an acronym.
- Better teaching was observed with teachers as the sentence starters needed clear explanation. It evoked further discussion and ideas on how to build upon previous learning experiences faced by students.

Further Developments:

- To embed use of sentence starters into all writing tasks, in all lessons across GCSE English.
- To review and update our induction/ initial processes so that we can more fully capture student views on what has helped/hindered in prior learning of the subject.
- To continue to work on peer assessment with a view to getting students to fully understand how they have applied a framework and how it has affected their exam responses.

2a.   Visualise...with a visualiser!
Suffolk New College
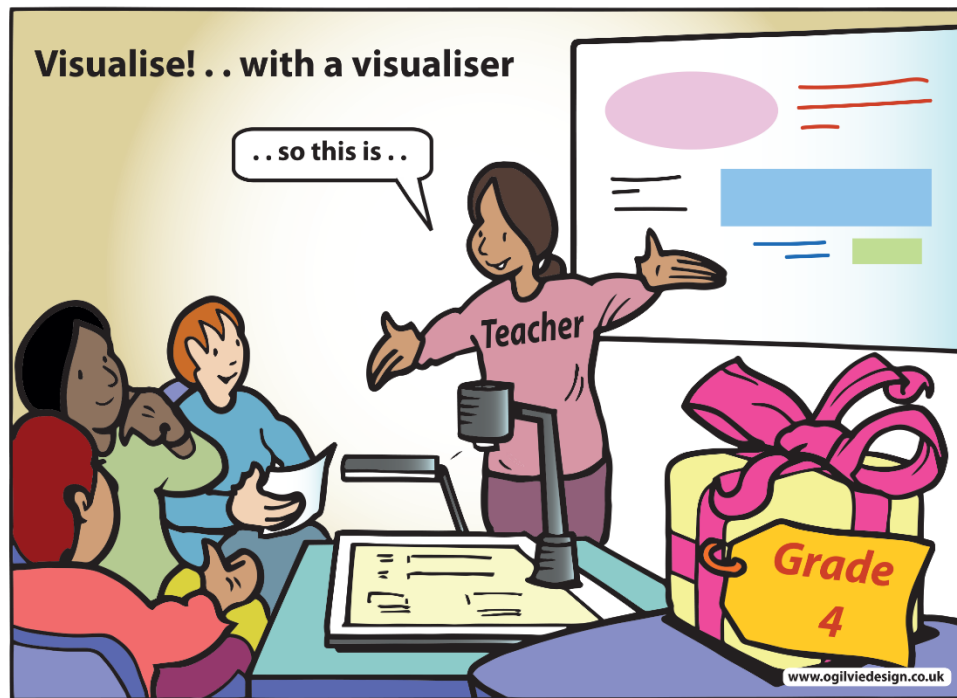
This project aimed to explore the use of a visualiser in improving the way we model text annotation and different stages of the writing process. We hoped to improve our students' literacy skills, enhance their educational experience in the classroom and improve GCSE English high grades.

Summary

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

Rationale

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

As Project Leader I wanted to address the weak reading and writing skills presented by many of our students. Often, they have grappled with these skills throughout school. A high percentage (approximately 30%) have additional needs including dyslexia and other barriers to learning.

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

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

Approach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I do think it had a positive impact on engagement – I think it was especially useful for learners who may not have understood the task as they were doing it. It consolidates the task very well."

"Students seem to enjoy seeing me annotating work – and making mistakes!"

"Great lesson using the visualiser today. The students were engaged throughout…Overall, it built the students' confidence as well as my own!"

"It's definitely having a bit of an impact."

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

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

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

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

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

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

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

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

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

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

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

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

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

Learning from this project

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

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

However, our use of a visualiser has not led to an improvement in all our students' mock results despite the positive data recorded earlier in this report. For some, the level of annotation and analysis rehearsed in the classroom was not reflected in their mock exams. Unfortunately, many students remain unmotivated and dis-engaged from the entire re-take 'journey' and this continues to be a challenge for me and my colleagues and a focus for any future action research activity.

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

2b.   Supporting and developing learners' oracy skills
East Coast College: Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
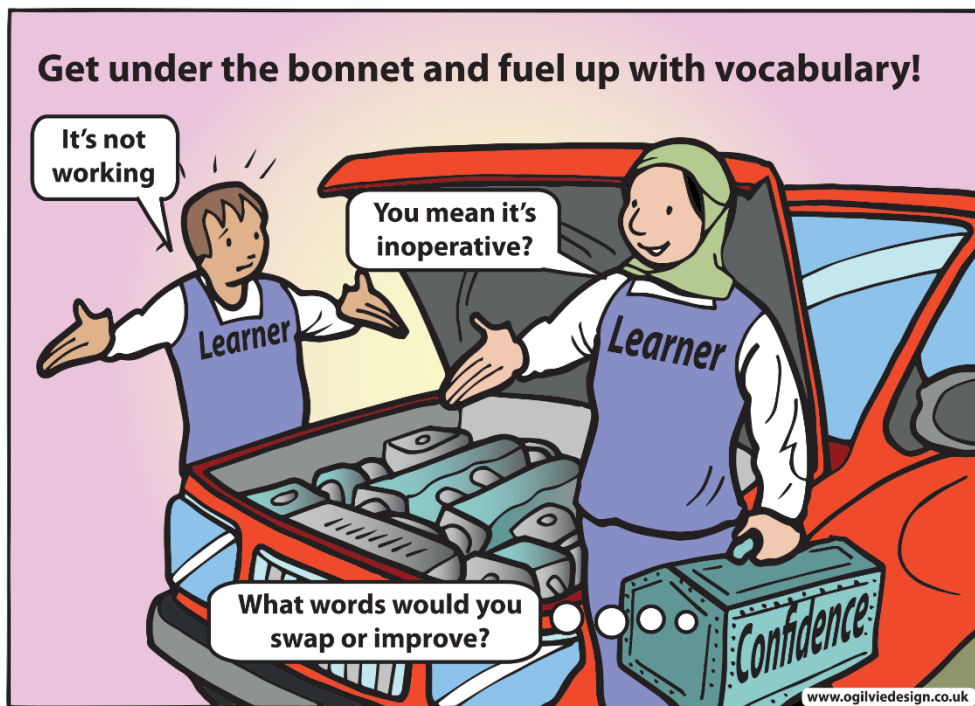
Our action research project initially set out to improve a wide range of oracy skills in response to teachers' concerns that these skills were poorly developed in learners who live in an area of social and economic disadvantage. As the project progressed, however, it focused much more specifically on the development of technical terminology through a variety of teaching strategies across a range of levels and subjects.

Rationale

At the heart of the project was the drive to find strategies to support the development of learners' oracy. We had identified that learners are not able to present their ideas and opinions orally as well as they could, particularly in front of peers. This area for improvement was felt to be linked to low

confidence and resilience in learners as well as the social and economic deprivation in the area.

The majority of the catchment area for East Coast College's three campuses is in the "worst performing" 10% to 20% of local authorities nationally against social mobility indicators and so it was clear to see the heightened need to support learners to become employable, apprenticeship-ready or university ready. In our project proposal we had stated that *"even learners who achieve well do not always secure the same outstanding destinations as their peers in other areas of the country…"*.

An improvement in life opportunities was the overarching, long-term challenge for our learners but we teachers were also keen to begin by solving the more immediate, smaller scale difficulties of increasing learner involvement in oracy-based tasks in the classroom. The potential benefits would not be limited to gaining better employment destinations, but would also support increased confidence in explaining answers orally and improving interview skills, with potential impact on structure and vocabulary in writing too.

Approach

Once action researchers from each site were identified, a core team discussed and listed some potential strategies that we believed would support learners to develop key oracy skills. One group member found information from Voice 21, an organisation formed from School 21, that had organised different skills needed for oracy into a chart (Figure 1).

As a starting point this helped us narrow down our strategies to focus on specific skill areas such as vocabulary, working with others and structure. Many strategies were discussed and considered and we remained focused on making the tasks simple to use in a variety of settings and with a range of levels.
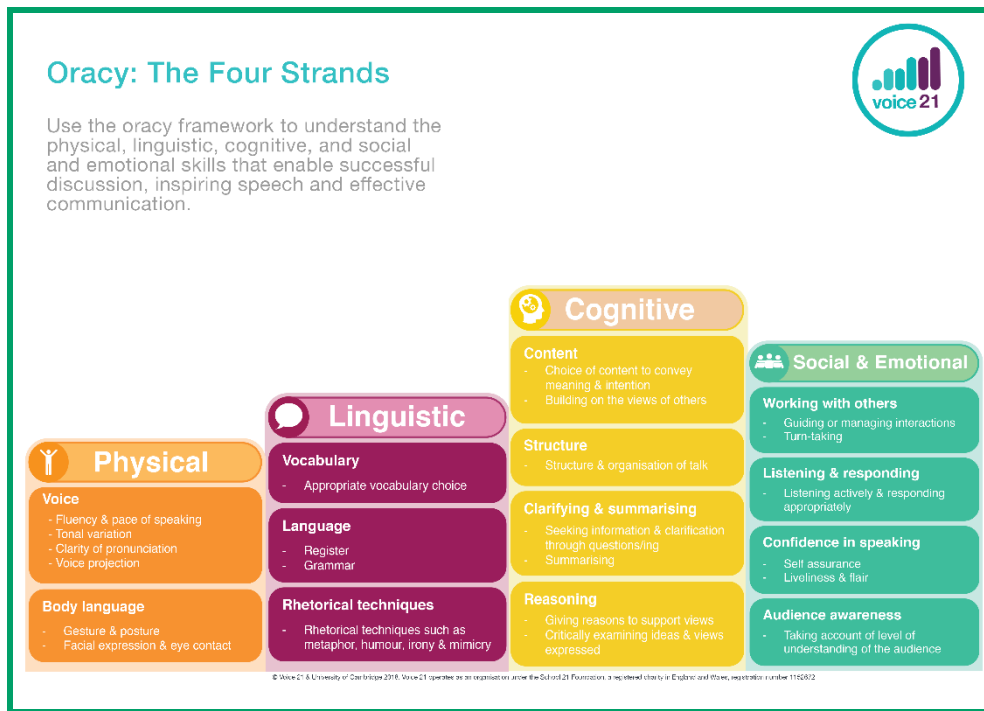
Figure 2b-1: Voice 21 – Oracy: The Four Strands

After much careful discussion the following strategies were selected:

- Tarsia puzzles (to support with vocabulary extension)
- Glossary (to support with vocabulary extension)
- Learners as experts (to increase agency, confidence and responsibility)
- Sentence stems (to support structure of talk)
- Discussion roles (to support working with others)

These strategies were presented to action researchers in the team; group members were asked to choose one or two that they could combine, to use with at least one group in a way that would be appropriate to their subject area. This left the strategy in their hands to be interpreted in a way that they felt would be most relevant to their students and their teaching.

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

Workshop glossary: Level 3 Motor Vehicle

Learners were tasked to read out their reports following vehicle inspections and as a group they then used the whiteboard to record terms that could be more professional or technical as well as those that could be phrased in a more formal or standard way. The group worked out for themselves what the alternative term might be while the teacher ensured that the group fully understood the term used in place of the original. The teacher compiled the words in a document and the group then continued to discuss the terms and continued to add to it.

GCSE English glossary

This strategy focused on learners building their own glossaries using different tasks within the lesson, including Kahoot quizzes and starter activities using vocabulary from the unseen texts they would be using in the lessons. The teacher encouraged learners to note down any unfamiliar words in the back of their English books, creating a space for a glossary. In lessons, she would mind-map new words on the whiteboard and discuss definitions. Following this, she would challenge learners to include two or more words from the board in their work. She adapted this strategy to challenge learners to use their ambitious glossary words within their speaking and listening assessments.

Expert with a glossary: GCSE Maths

The teacher combined two strategies: learners as experts and the use of glossaries. He began by creating a glossary containing all key mathematical words for the GCSE Maths specification. While all students were able to access it, he identified one learner to lead on it. The learner had the role of explaining the terms as they arose in lessons. Both the lead learner and the rest of the group wrote down key terms and definitions as they became relevant. The lead learner did not feel singled out by this as she recognised her own need; also, as she has English as a second language, she was less familiar with the terms than the other learners. The teacher accepts that this

could be a unique situation and reflected that he may not feel confident using this strategy with individual learners in other groups but that it was still a valuable exercise that others might be able to replicate.

Tarsia and Learner as expert: Level One Foundation English and Maths

The teacher initially used Tarsia puzzles with his learners to support them in discussing global warming. Once the Tarsia puzzle, containing terms such as 'fossil fuels' and 'deforestation', was put together by the learners, they were asked to explain their answers. The terms may have been too technical for some learners but the task served as an interesting way to introduce them.

At the mid-point, the teacher changed his strategy to "*learners as experts*", linking it to the Level One presentation assessment for Functional English. This gave his students an opportunity to present information about a topic they understood well and were interested in, turning the tables on a traditional knowledge relationship between teacher and student. The learner chose the topic of World Wrestling Entertainment but he found it difficult to express opinions about it in terms of his favourite wrestler or competition.

Learners as experts: GCSE English and Functional Skills English Entry Level 3 – Level 2

The teacher's strategy gave significant time to learners to research a subject of their choice and create a presentation around the subject. This strategy links to both the Functional Skills English and the GCSE English Language specifications where learners are assessed for their speaking and listening skills.

Learners were given three to four weeks of lessons to research and put together slides, a handout or a talk without either. The subjects ranged from The Little Princess Trust to 'What's Wrong with Teachers'?

Discussion roles and glossary: AS English Language

The teacher first used a glossary of critical theorists and theories as well as key terms such as 'lexical field', 'orthography' and 'graphology'. He used the glossary sheets in class to support learners' memories and use of appropriate vocabulary.

At the mid-point, the tutor moved from using just the glossaries to incorporating discussion roles (Figure 2b-2) to prevent discussions from becoming too one-sided.
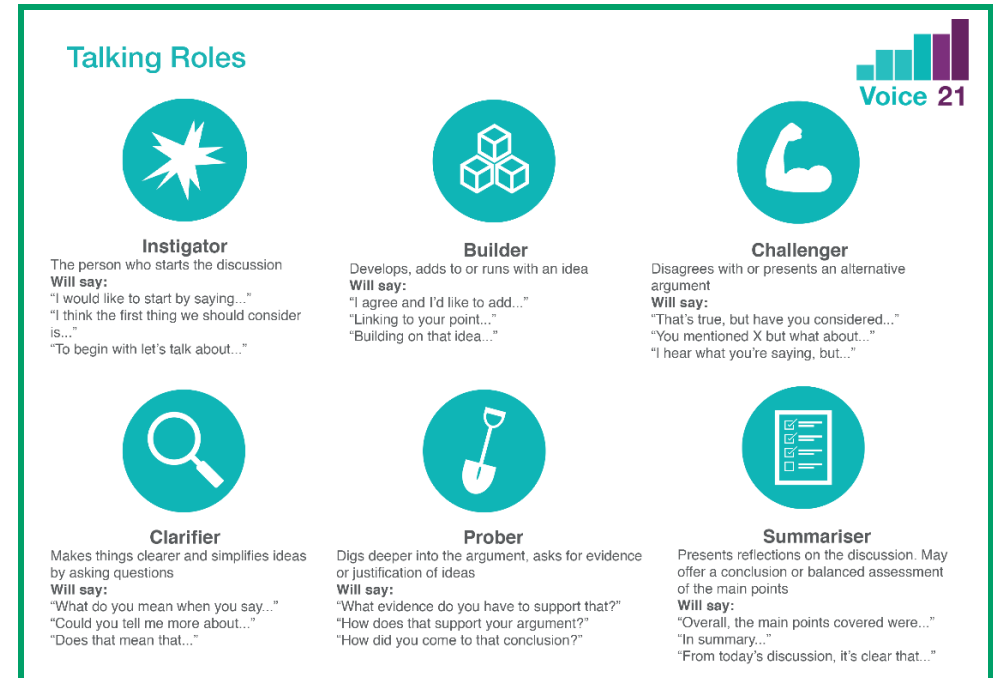
Figure 2b-2: Voice 21 – Talking Roles

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Collaboration between colleagues within the action research team proved difficult because of conflicting timetables and distance. It was challenging to meet and discuss progress and adaptations. This was mainly because the project was too ambitious in aiming to generalise rather than focus on one specific department. It was important for us to see how far oracy could be developed across different subjects rather than specifically in English lessons.

From our experience of the challenges and benefits of collaborating across college, campuses and departments, we are keen to see greater innovation and discussion between sites. Each campus can clearly learn from the others and, rather than this being through delivered professional learning, working

groups on different core issues or aims could support an effective, creative and synergistic environment to find solutions and ideas.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Workshop glossary: Level 3 Motor Vehicle

The main impact on learners' behaviour was their use of the MOT manual to find the more appropriate term. The teacher explains, "*Learners started to pick each other up when they used words such as 'rust' instead of 'corrosion' or 'doesn't work' rather than 'inoperative' during all lessons*". The group have continued to build on the glossary, and the tutor saw that they found it enjoyable and how it became a normal part of the lesson.

The learner that the teacher specifically focused on made significant progress within the first six weeks; Simon used the Progression in Oracy grid (Figure 2b-3) to identify that before the project the learner was not quite on the scale for any element other than "*physical*", but that by October half-term he was at "*confident linguistic*", "*developing cognitive*" and "*apprentice social and emotional*". The rest of the group showed improvements in confidence with technical language as well as increased confidence in discussions. Following discussions with the group, they recognised that their confidence in discussions and vocabulary use had improved.

GCSE English glossary

This was successful as some learners showed the ability to "*articulate ambitious words in a persuasive and engaging manner*".

Overall, the teacher felt that, while the strategy had some impact and she would continue to use it, she also felt the impact would be increased with greater use of it across the college curriculum rather than just in English lessons. One piece of advice she wanted to share: "*open up to learners honestly when you don't know a word*", as the impact of this can be to show it is not a weakness and encourage learners to open up too.

Figure 2b-3: Voice 21 – Progression in Oracy

Expert with a glossary: GCSE Maths

The teacher felt that the strategy mostly had the intended impact, "*and did succeed in advancing the students' confidence in reading specialised vocabulary over time*" stressing that this was particularly successful when "*words were repeated at key intervals*". The lead learner stated "*It was really useful, because I knew where I could look up words I didn't understand and didn't have to worry.*"

Following on from the success of the strategy, the teacher plans to focus on the glossary, create one that is "*better presented*" and provide one per table in future maths classes. He advises that access to key words and repetition, rather than reliance on learners' ability to take notes has been useful and is pleased that "*focusing on solutions to individual needs can be an effective way of finding generalised solutions*".

Tarsia and Learner as expert: Level One Foundation English and maths

While both strategies were difficult and appeared unsuccessful, the teacher recognised that the learner has increased the number of oral contributions since the start of term and tends to use more adverbs in his speech. While the contributions were simple, they were more frequent and demonstrated an increase in confidence. The teacher also notes that other strategies, not specifically designed to support oracy, have had an impact upon the learners' spoken skills: "*Whenever we play games such as multiplication squares (in Maths), he has quite some fun arguing with his friend about who has been cheating and becomes very vocal*", which points to another potential strategy to build on.

Learners as experts: GCSE English

When introducing presentation tasks, the teacher found that there were two questions her learners asked:

- *Can it really be on anything?*
- *Do I have to do it in front of the whole class?*

It was found that in school, most learners were given a topic to talk about and had to do it in front of their whole class. The teacher decided that, in GCSE, learners could present on a one-to-one basis, while in Functional English there needed to be a minimum of three learners in the audience.

Learners who rarely spoke in class successfully delivered presentations about topics that interested them or they were passionate about. One learner who normally remained quiet in lessons gave an emotive presentation about endangered species, bringing the teacher to tears. The learner has since spoken up several times in class, which is progress to be built upon.

Discussion roles and glossary: AS English Language

The teacher found that using the discussion roles led to "*more even group participation, maintaining the quality of focus through emphasis on key terminology*." The learners' discussions became more balanced so that all learners had an opportunity to speak.

Learners felt that the glossaries were helpful and appreciated them, but felt that the discussion roles were "*clumsy and difficult to follow*". Despite this, the teacher felt that the discussion roles supported him to intervene more effectively and "*push students to engage in qualitative exploration of the topic*". He also felt that he would move forward with applying structures like this to discussions in future.

Learning from this project

From all of the strategies explored in the project, the most popular with teachers was building a glossary. This suggests two things: that teachers can see that learners are struggling to retain core vocabulary and terminology and that glossaries are more easily transferable across different subjects. It is also low-to-no cost and does not particularly need to add to workload, depending on how it is used. While the overarching aim of the project was initially to improve oracy skills, the research activities focused more narrowly on supporting learners to use subject terminology or improve their vocabulary for speaking confidently.

From the team of six researchers, the use of glossaries on Level 3 Motor Vehicle programmes appeared to be most successful. The approach was collaborative which meant that learners were involved with the process of building a glossary and identified for themselves where they could be using subject-specific vocabulary.

The AS English Language teacher discovered that using prescribed roles in discussions can lead to more balanced participation. This highlights that opportunities can be shared more easily with structures to enable all learners to contribute.

On Functional English and GCSE courses, our approaches showed how the learners' confidence with speaking increased when they were talking about a familiar topic. The strategies also showed that giving learners space to research and speak about topics of their own choice allows opportunities for learners to use their voice for what is important to them, helping to build a supportive learning relationship.

2c. Listen to Learn

New College Stamford

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

Summary

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

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

Rationale

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

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

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

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

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

Approach

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

The project was split into 2 parts:

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

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

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

The second part of the study introduced a new piece of text with students first listening to an audio recording of the chosen text. The lesson then carried on as per usual. The purpose was to discover whether listening to the text first might aid our students to become more engaged with the material and responsive to learning about the writing techniques used by the writer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Following the project, we have initiated the following:

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

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

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

- several of our ESOL students have shown an improvement in their assessment marks after listening to the recordings prior to their mock assessments;

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

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

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

Student observations included:

> *"I don't think listening to the words improved my understanding but it did help me focus more on what to do."*
>
> *"I could understand some complicated words when they were read out because when I read them, I did not know how to say them."*
>
> *"Reading was quite slow at times which is boring but relaxing."*
>
> *"The voice was more natural than the reading pen ... it flowed better."*

Learning from this project

What went well

Key feedback from the project which demonstrates learning includes:

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

Even better if:

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

2d. Developing Oracy Skills

Harlow College
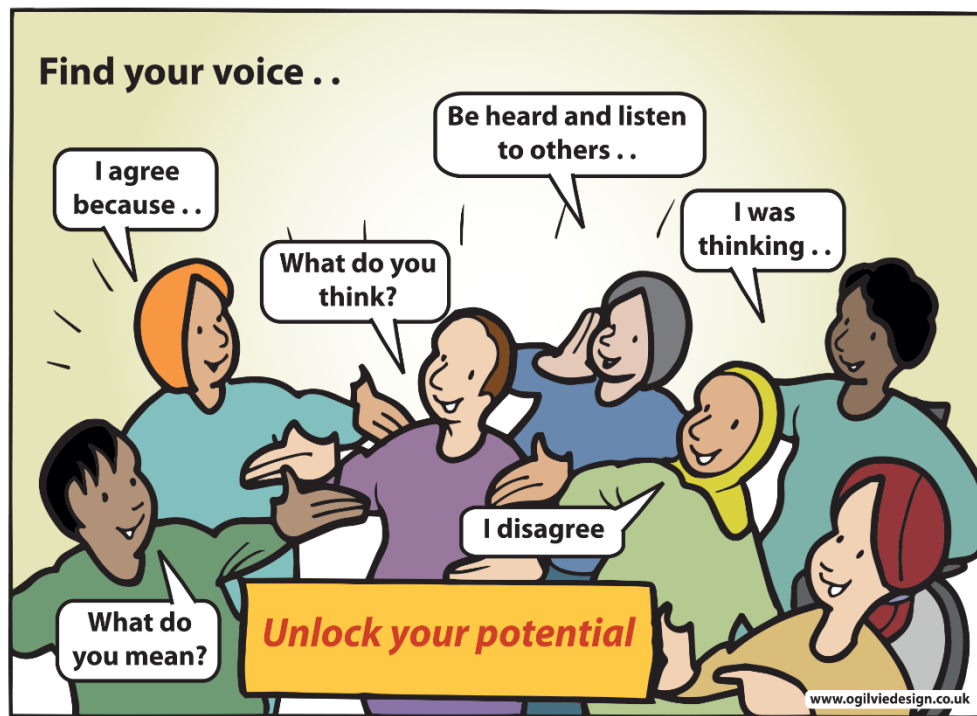
This project is based on my own CPD experience with School 21 where I developed my knowledge and understanding of oracy-based approaches to Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and was also completely enthused by the ideas and practices demonstrated by learners and staff.

Summary

Having seen children confidently articulating their thoughts and ideas with expertise and confidence clearly demonstrated to me how having effective oracy skills can empower, motivate and inspire young people – literally changing lives. What I came to understand is that oracy – the ability to reason, respond, and explain yourself in speech – needs to be afforded the same priority and value as reading and writing, not just seen as an add-on, or limited to a Functional Skills requirement.

Harlow is an area with high levels of deprivation. Learners from this area leave school with a lower GCSE grade profile than the UK average. The college also has a large proportion of children looked after, and/or studying English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, because of the large number of asylum seekers in the surrounding areas.

Getting our learners to speak, to engage with the world as individuals with something to say, is incredibly important. Not just for passing exams, but for inclusion, equality and diversity!

Rationale

One of the ongoing difficulties we face involves trying to enrich the programme beyond the traditional exam focus, embed stretch and challenge opportunities, and provide learners in a post-16 setting (vocational and academic) clear links to employability. These issues have been identified in learner feedback, walkthroughs, our inspection report (Ofsted, 2019) and, as a consequence, in our own SAR. Research from the government's National curriculum review panel (James et al, 2011) shows that there is a direct relationship between dialogic teaching and improved individual and collective academic outcomes.

A recently published report (Jay et al, 2017) shows that spending more class time on meaningful dialogue that encourages learners to reason, discuss, speculate, argue and explain can improve English results. Furthermore, the development of oracy at curriculum level through a talk-centred approach can have a *"pronounced effect on achievement across the curriculum, as well as enhancing learners' eloquence, confidence and wellbeing"* (Mercer et al, 2020).

In addressing the above, we believe that developing learners' ability to critically engage with texts, ideas, and the ideas of others through dialogic approaches can have significant benefits in terms of attainment, retention and progression.

Approach

Having been inspired by the work of Voice 21 and School 21 we spent time deciding which oracy strategies and resources could be adapted and implemented in a Post-16 setting with learners who find it challenging to voice opinions or explain ideas. We chose 2 groups to work with, a GCSE resit group from Hairdressing and Beauty, and a first year A Level Literature group.

What we noticed from the outset is that whilst the A Level learners had a wider range of vocabulary, and subject specific terminology (as well as the confidence of having passed their GCSE English, unlike the resitters) they were still reluctant and unwilling to articulate their ideas through spoken language

Given the duration of the project, we discussed a range of possible approaches that could be embedded quickly and that would be the least onerous in terms of adaptation, application, and assessment (of the learners and the strategy itself). We also wanted to choose strategies that could be used across both GCSE English Language and A Level English Literature, the two subjects we teach.

We wanted the learners to feel confident and consider themselves to be part of an exciting journey of discovery. The findings of our questionnaire at the beginning of the project showed that all the learners considered oracy to be important and wanted to be better at it.

We tried to apply and be aware of the Four Strands within The Oracy Framework used in Voice 21 (Figure 2d-1) in all of our classroom strategies, namely:

- Physical (voice and body language)
- Linguistic (vocab, language, rhetorical techniques)
- Cognitive (content, structure, clarifying and summarising and reasoning)
- Social and Emotional (working with others, listening and responding, confidence in speaking, audience awareness).

However, there was also an understanding that these were aspirational goals to be achieved across a far longer period of time.
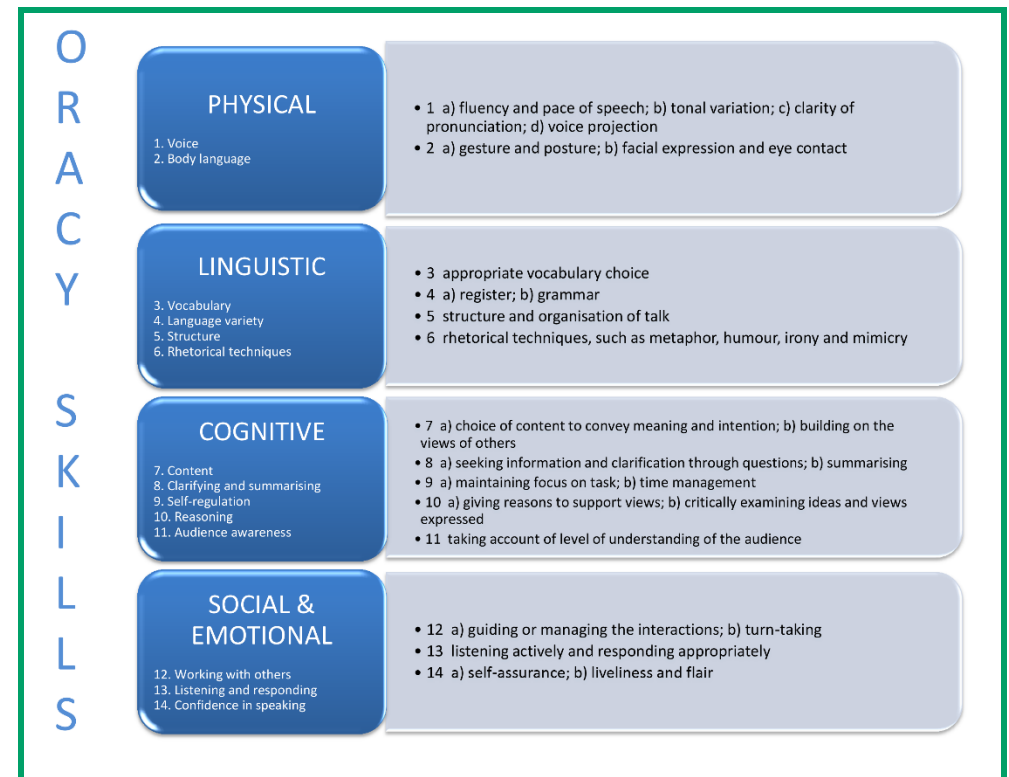
Figure 2d-1: Oracy Skills Framework

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

From the outset we made a deliberate decision to actively encourage talk by being conscious of talking as an educational resource. In terms of delivery, we prioritised oracy as an activity before the writing tasks – whatever we were doing in class had to be discussed, explained, or described. The 'traverse' strategy (Figure 2d-2) was used to get the learners talking about anything at first and for short bursts of time. This proved successful with the learners who got fully involved – one teacher commented that she had been trying all year to get one learner to speak without success!

Traverse grouping

Learners stand in two parallel lines opposite a speaking partner – learners are given a specific topic and time to talk to their partner depending on the group and activity. Once the time is up, a person from one end of the line moves to the other so that partners are always new to each other. This can be used as an icebreaker, warm up activity, or to assess learners' knowledge and understanding.

Figure 2d-2: Traverse strategy

Time was gradually extended and the topics changed in-line with the GCSE or A Level assessments. As the weeks progressed, and as a way of scaffolding responses to support learners, we used PETER prompt cards (Point, Evidence, Technique, Explain, Reflect) to focus on paper 1, question 5 for GCSE English language– something that the learners were familiar with. Learners really enjoyed progressing through the coloured cards, recognising the differences between the skills for each stage, and making the activity a bit of a competition.

In our classroom activities we gave learners longer to consider their ideas; we encouraged listening – no interruptions – to build on the answers of others. By changing the groupings of the tables (changed according to learners' feedback) this allowed for cross class/group talk. In the A level group, the tables were always arranged in a horseshoe shape so that learners were able to see and listen to the contributions of one another more effectively, as well as taking into account the 4 strands. By the 4th week, learners were moving tables around before I even got into the room. What we found from implementing the strategies was that the learners were becoming used to using speaking as a strategy to engage with learning, knowledge and understanding; as teachers we were able to assess their knowledge and understanding more quickly. The classroom felt more dynamic and responsive.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

We held regular meetings to discuss the outcomes of our oracy approach to Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and found a new confidence and excitement about how this approach could positively influence our learners. We also recognised that oracy is not a quick fix. We could see that some learners were developing their oracy skills across the weeks: they were talking for longer with greater focus, were more confident and were prepared to talk through ideas with others. However, we realised that for oracy to have a meaningful impact and see real change in our learners would require a buy in, a strategic and cultural shift that can be achieved only through practitioners having the understanding of how oracy can positively impact on learners' progression. The direct participants in the project have therefore taken the opportunity for professional learning through external training offered through Voice 21, The National Oracy Pioneers programme, and attendance at School 21 Great Oracy Exhibition.

Based on our professional experience, classroom practice, and reflection, we feel passionately that learners can benefit from the inclusion of our oracy project in our curriculum planning. Although Functional Skills groups weren't directly involved in the project, we can see that oracy will have a huge impact in enabling learners to pass their Speaking and Listening through increased confidence. As an area that supports most of the programmes in the college,

we believe that strong oracy skills will have a positive impact on learners' progression, confidence and motivation. We initially intend to work collaboratively with the English team to disseminate our findings, share practice and embed oracy in our curriculum planning for next year. The OTLA project is already identified in the Harlow College's QIP as a means of improving achievement and retention, with possible collaborative CPD opportunities to expand the use of oracy across college.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Given the starting point for our learners, evidence of improvement with a skill like oracy is difficult to track over such a short space of time. Oracy is not a single skill, and is powerfully intertwined with learner's self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of place in the world. For our learners, oracy (the capacity to speak out), makes you visible, and many of our GCSE and our Level 3 learners, feel uncomfortable about this. However, the results of our learner questionnaire, collated at the start of the project, confirmed our belief in the need for good oracy skills. 78% felt that they wanted to speak, but didn't have the confidence, 87% wanted to feel more confident in verbalising their ideas, and 75% considered that being able to explain yourself helped with their learning. At the end of the project we asked the learners to reflect on their experience of a more oracy-based classroom. Their responses were mostly positive to neutral, with no negative feedback.

The learners said oracy:

> *"helped boost my confidence"*
>
> *"it helped me speak up to other people"*
>
> *"It definitely helped my social skills…and share my ideas"*
>
> *"I feel that the oracy project helped me with my social communication with others. In particular, the writing task."*

From a professional stance, we are convinced by the positive impact oracy has had on our learners and classroom, and intend to invest time and effort in continued planning and research.

Learning from this project

We have found that our focus on developing oracy skills has had a positive impact on Teaching, Learning and Assessment. However, we also strongly believe that strategies need to be carefully considered, and planned for to maximise its potential in the classroom. We will be reviewing these at the end of the year, and modifying/creating our own resources to meet the specific needs of our learners.

A focus on oracy skills can change the dynamics and interactions of a classroom, making it more student led. However, oracy cannot be explored only by individual teachers; it needs the support, enthusiasm and commitment of the whole team.

Of the resources we used, some were more effective than others; the A level learners didn't like the discussion cards as they thought that they inhibited their responses and offered too many choices. Some oracy techniques need to be streamlined to allow for the time restraints of lessons. There were too many colour-coded cards to work through with the learners; some were ambiguous and needed modelling, or refining.

Putting into place our oracy skills programme several weeks into the term meant there was some work to do to convince the learners of its relevance, and for them to be less resistant. It needs to be planned for, and for teachers to be confident in its implementation from the start of the academic year, so that oracy skills are accepted as a key element in the culture of the programme/s.

In order to achieve results, oracy skills development should be planned for. It should be an active part of every lesson, for every learner, and afforded the same value as reading and writing. Oracy should not be seen as a bolt-on to reading and writing, which is often shown by the struggle to complete the speaking and listening component of the Functional Skills assessments. It is a central aspect of the curriculum.

3a. Improving engagement in 16-19 Study Programmes
Havant and South Downs College

The aim of this project was to encourage and develop a culture of reading via two separate interventions with two distinct groups (BTEC Business and BTEC Performing Arts).

Summary

Havant and South Downs College is made up of three campuses; South Downs, Havant and Alton with this study being completed at the South Downs Campus. The college has over 4000 FE learners and nearly 500 HE learners across level 1 to level 6, A-levels, BTEC, HND, FdA and BA (Hons) studying a vast array of subjects.

The idea for the project arose from our concern that many students simply do not see the value of reading; it is perceived as "uncool" by many and as a chore that is enforced by teachers and/or parents.

The business students had a presentation by a local author, Mark Legg, and were given a copy of his book *"The Business Builder"*. This book was chosen as it linked directly to their curriculum (Unit 36 – starting a small business). After reading the book and completing the relevant task from their assignment, the author came back in and spoke with the students about the book and his passion for reading.

The performing arts students watched the film Anna Karenina and were also given the book to read. The point here was to understand what students preferred and why (the differences between the two).

Rationale

There is clear evidence that shows the impact that reading can have on vocabulary, emotional intelligence and exam success. A study completed by the OECD revealed that reading for pleasure had a demonstrable effect on social mobility and was, in fact, the most important indicator for the future success of the young person (Douglas, 2013).

The challenge we faced is that reading printed material simply is perceived as uncool by many, in particular, boys (Topping, 2018) and can also be perceived as an activity that is 'forced' upon students by their teachers. The percentage of students who read a book or a magazine every day declined from 60% in the late 1970s to 16% by 2016. The rapid adoption of digital media since the 2000s has displaced the consumption of legacy media.

Clearly, digital media use has increased considerably, with the average student in 2016 spending more than twice as much time online as in 2006, and with time online, texting, and on social media totalling around 6 hours a day. In addition, only half of students visited social media sites almost every day in 2008, compared with 82% who did by 2016 (Twenge et al, 2018).

However, there is clear evidence that reading has a positive impact on students' emotional/social well-being, exam success and future careers. This means it is an issue that needs addressing.

Approach

Culture or "The way things are done round here" (Schein, 1993) is something that clearly does not happen overnight but we hoped that with small, incremental changes to students' mindset and the embedding of reading activities within the curriculum this project would make a difference.

As we were looking predominantly at changes in mindset, we decided to use mainly case studies and focus groups to find out exactly what students thought about reading, their perceptions of the importance of it and how much they do actually read. There was some quantitative analysis as well which enabled us to see how much reading students undertake and also where and when they prefer to read.

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

> *"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink"*
>
> **(Proverb)**

The project itself provided some real insights into the behaviour of students and the rationales that motivate their behaviour. The two sides of the project, business and performing arts, could not have been more different.

> *"I didn't want to read the book because I had been told to; I read what I want"*
>
> **(BTEC Business student)**

Engaging the business studies students in reading was a real struggle; they were very reluctant to read the book. Although they eventually did and the sessions with the author were very positive, the process itself was difficult. A key learning point here is that enforcing extra activities on students can have a negative effect, even though the task was highly relevant as an understanding of the book's content was directly linked to the course grading criteria.

The performing arts students were fantastic. Not only did they read the book, they loved it, preferring it greatly to the film.

> *"The book is so much better; you use your imagination and really lose yourself in it"*
>
> **(BTEC Performing Arts student)**

The students loved the book so much they petitioned their lecturer to get them the screenplay and then performed the play based on the book.

Figure 3a-1: Performing Arts students

> *"Some students who read regularly spoke of their joy of reading and this inspired those that do not read to consider it as a leisure activity. One student bought a book for the first time!"*
>
> **(Performing Arts Course Manager)**

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

> *"Learning new ways of working through mutual engagement opens up and shares practices with others"*
>
> **(Fielding et al, 2005)**

Working as part of a larger group with Southend Adult Community College and Cambridge Regional College has enabled me to visit and see exactly what the projects look like in the other institutions and take back ideas to share at Havant and South Downs College.

Internally, developing a culture of curiosity at the college is a real passion of mine and something that this project has furthered. Staff across various areas that rarely speak with one another have been sharing examples of what they do and getting to know how students are taught in different subjects that are very different from the subjects they normally work in.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Culture in itself is very hard to quantify and evidence. That being said, the feedback from the students, both business and performing arts, has been extremely positive.

> *"Reading increases your vocabulary; it means you can find out more things and then use them when you need to"*
>
> **(BTEC Business student)**
>
> *"The book shows the characters 'personal viewpoint' so you go through 'their story'. On the film, you don't get what's inside their minds."*
>
> **(BTEC Performing Arts student)**

> *"I personally think it helps with your brain and staying focused, when you read you have to use your brain and keep your concentration, as well as learning new words."*
>
> **(BTEC Performing Arts student)**

Learning from this project

Culture will not change overnight and, when encouraging students to read, it will take even longer. However, small shifts and a greater focus on reading via the adoption of initiatives such as this could have a positive impact on learners. As stated previously, the benefits of reading are huge. However, trying to win the "hearts and minds" of students when it comes to this proves difficult.

Personally, a key learning point for me was the comments made by the business student who didn't read the book because he was told to. When looking at future projects it will be a key part of the inception stage to consult more closely with students before making decisions about what intervention to complete.

The opportunity for staff to collaborate and be involved in action research as part of this project has been fantastic.

> *"It was great to have the time to try something out. It (the project) wasn't perfect but it was fun!"*
>
> **(Performing Arts Course Manager)**
>
> *If this project, or something similar, was repeated, then I would be interested in being involved again"*
>
> **(Business Lecturer)**

As always, this is just the starting point - the business workroom is now discussing ideas for embedding reading within their own sessions – that is a result in itself!

3b. Creating a Reading Culture
Cambridge Regional College

The concern that we wanted to address in our project was the lack of reading in our learners' lives, whether at home or at college. Cambridge professor Diane Reay comments –

> *"Research suggests it is the wealth and inclination of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of the child, that have the most bearing on a child's educational success today. If you're a working-class child, you're starting the race halfway round the track behind the middle-class child. Middle class parents do a lot via extra resources and activities."*
>
> https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/21/english-class-system-shaped-in-schools

Summary

We are a large FE College in Cambridge with a majority cohort of 16-19 year old learners on Study Programmes. We also have a growing number of courses for adults, 14-16 year olds in alternative provision and apprentices.

Within the demographic area there are two well-known and respected academic Sixth Form Colleges and one other Further Education College which is predominately focused on land based Vocational delivery.

Rationale

Our project was initially designed to improve the reading abilities of learners in our 14-16 Alternative Provision. However, soon after the project began there were a variety of challenges which prompted us to widen its scope. We decided instead to explore how a reading culture could be created and promoted more widely and explicitly at the college and so reduce the impact of the social and educational disadvantage that is part of so many of our learners' lives.

We were concerned that our learners identified reading as an activity that they undertook only in an English lesson. We wanted to broaden their perspective on the importance of reading in their lives and the enjoyment it might offer them.

The majority of our learners are enrolled on the GCSE qualifications for English and maths as a mandatory resit programme, having failed often in the past to gain a Grade 4. If they continue to struggle to access the reading material required on these courses, how would they ever progress or achieve? Their experience at college would then just be another failure for them in a list of already failed attempts at school, which would have an overall negative effect on their well-being, self-esteem and motivation.

Being a good reader is a crucial part of attainment in GCSE English and in vocational subjects. We hoped that by creating a reading culture at the

college we would encourage increased awareness of the importance of reading in all curriculum areas, at work and in everyday life generally.

Approach

At the start of this project we created a small Professional Learning Community (PLC) called 'Creating A Reading Culture'. The College held a PLC event on a Staff Development Day which gave me an opportunity to design and distribute a simple questionnaire for staff, to help us gain a snapshot of the reading activities that they undertake themselves and the extent to which they promote reading in their teaching.

We split the project into the three different strands:
1. Cambridge campus – exploring ways in which we could promote reading generally across the college;
2. Huntingdon campus – focusing on one small group and dedicating a part of their weekly lesson to reading;
3. Cambridge campus – support for a small cohort of Alternative Provision learners, again allocating time for reading and creating a Reading Room.

Finally, we decided that it was important for us to have some training on various phonic strategies to improve reading so I invited Tricia Millar from 'That Reading Thing' to deliver this training in September.

This was attended by some members of my English teaching team, the tutors from the Alternative Provision team, an English Tutor in our SEND Dept and Dom Thompson from Havant and South Downs College who was working on the same OTLA theme.

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

Strand 1 Creating a reading culture across the campus

In this strand of the project we explored different ways in which we could promote reading across the college. Some of the activities we undertook included:
- using marker pens to decorate the walls of a glass bridge (a key walkway in the college), using images and quiz questions based on the driving test

- asking lecturers to complete and put up around the college colourful, eye catching posters with the title of a book they were currently reading e.g. 'Cass Webb is currently reading...'
- buying in a variety of books and magazines to stock a shelf in the student lounge
- holding a Christmas writing competition on the topic of climate change
- lobbying for a popular area of the college called the WigWam area to be decorated with inspirational quotes. We also encouraged the science department to put articles of topical interest on a new noticeboard
- creating 'plant sticks' in a garden area allocated to Alternative Provision students that contain quotes and song lyrics to reflect seasonal celebrations; in the training restaurant at Christmas we involved learners in displaying song lyrics and topical texts on the table number holders.

Strand 2 Dedicated reading in Functional English lessons

Weekly designated reading sessions were introduced into Functional English lessons for a group of Entry Level 3 and Level 1 students on the Huntingdon campus. Over the year they were asked to read a novel, *'One of Us is Lying'* by Karen M. McManus. These reading project 'windows' lasted for approximately 15 minutes at the start of a session and included group reviews.

Strand 3 Alternative provision

We initially assessed our Alternative Provision 14-16 learners using the New Salford Sentence Reading Test which was developed for Hodder Education; this would help us to monitor their progress. We also had informal discussions about their particular struggles with reading. Some of these learners had been home schooled and were not used to college life so they were all dealing with multiple changes in their lives. As a result, we decided to approach them in a different manner which has resulted in more a positive outcome. We worked with them to create their own Reading Room and encouraged them to invest time in decorating it themselves so they felt they have some ownership in it. Learners have used it to read books, magazines, text books or listen to audio books. We have also provided and actively encouraged the use of 'reading pens' through EHCP funding.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There is now much greater collaboration between the English and the vocational teams. A wide range of vocational areas have embraced this project and are promoting it in a variety of ways. Strategies to improve reading are brought up in Heads of Department meetings and course reviews, and vocational lecturers regularly talk with me about the different ways in which they feel they are able to contribute to the project. Staff are now much more aware of the levels of reading abilities of their learners in their lessons, particularly if they are on a Level 3 course but the learner is working at a lower level for reading.

The introduction of dedicated reading time in Functional English lessons at Huntingdon was successful and will be scheduled into those lessons again next year. Enrichment English sessions are now taking place between 3-4 pm which provide opportunities for learners to drop in and work on their reading skills.

Stronger links have been made with our International/ESOL team in order to share resources to support our learners where English is a second language so that they can improve their reading and vocabulary.

We have successfully recruited our own English Higher-Level Teaching Assistant who will work with specific learners in order to help them improve their reading skills.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Case Study 1 – this learner has demonstrated improved behaviour, attendance, motivation and progress in learning, both in her English lessons and also across her whole timetable.

Case Study 2 – tutor observation/Q & A and feedback reviews involving individual and groups of learners confirm that there have been small but important incremental changes in learner attitudes towards the activity of reading in the dedicated reading session. One tutor commented, 'The initial impact of the reading project has been overwhelmingly positive.'

Case Study 3 – encouraging learners to set up and take ownership of a Reading Room, change its décor and not enforcing them to utilise it has meant that they now freely use the room to access a variety of reading material

Learning from this project

This project has been a real eye opener for us as an English team. However, I feel we have only just started to create a reading culture at the college and much more remains to be done.

It has also confirmed our expectation that a whole college approach is important to achieve a significant increase in changes in learner attitudes towards reading. Nevertheless, it has also shown us how supportive different college teams can be, from the Senior Management Team through to the Facilities Department. I have met some incredible and interesting people and I am in no doubt that I will continue to keep in touch with them. They have kept me motivated and inspired throughout.

The guidance and collaborative workshops provided by the ETF have been invaluable along with my extremely supportive and knowledgeable Strand Lead and Mentor who have provided us with continued support and encouragement at all times.

3c. Improving engagement in 16-19 Study Programme

Southend Adult Community College
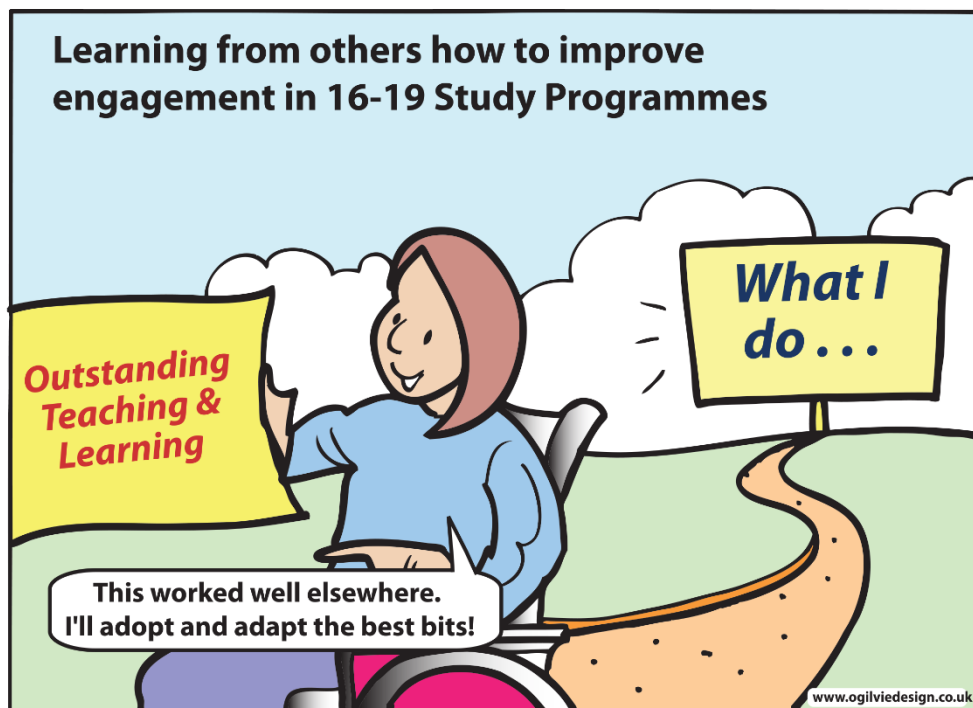
The aim of this project was to increase attendance and engagement in English Study Programme groups and therefore improve achievement. Any success would be disseminated to the maths and vocational teams where achievement is also below target.

Summary

The College, as its name suggests, works mainly with adults. We also have a small but growing provision for 16-19 year olds through a Study Programme, currently 55 learners. The majority are unable to access provision at the FE college in Southend for personal or academic reasons. Therefore, the majority of our cohort is made up of vulnerable young adults, with a poor educational experience and/or low academic skills, especially in maths and English.

In September 2018 we started to offer an alternative provision for 14-16 year olds and currently have 15 on a dual role relationship with the schools.

Rationale

In the 19 plus provision the College performs well, retention is high and achievement is above national averages and in some curriculum areas still increasing. This includes the maths and English Functional Skills provision.

Quality of teaching and learning is good or outstanding.

However, in the Study Programme, attendance in English classes is poor which impacts on achievement. Tutors are not trained to work with this age group and in some cases struggle to deliver engaging lessons with appropriate resources. Behaviour management is also an issue.

By working collaboratively with other colleges, it was hoped that we would be able to introduce new ideas and share good practice.

English tutors would plan with vocational tutors to maximise opportunities for embedding English in the vocational lessons and to ensure the English lessons were contextualised to the learners' vocational pathways.

It is not possible to contextualise every lesson and activity to the vocational pathway as the Functional Skills English assessments include speaking and listening, reading and writing activities on a wide range of topics and learners need to be prepared for this. In these lessons, tutors would identify resources more appropriate to the age group.

If learners can see the relevance of the English skills they are developing hopefully this will improve attendance and engagement which will have a positive impact on behaviour and achievement.

Approach

Vocational tutors provided their schemes of work to the English team to ensure opportunities for embedding English were maximised.

Meetings between the teaching teams have continued to be difficult to arrange due to working patterns and availability. Because of this the Study Programme Manager introduced daily "Blast meetings" at 9am every morning for the whole team including English and maths tutors. These happen before classes start at 9.30am making it easier for tutors to attend. A range of issues are discussed including topics due to be covered in vocational lessons over the coming weeks. Although not ideal, it is a start and, from September 2020, the timetable will be organised to ensure tutors have a slot to meet and plan together.

We are in the early stages of working with an external software designer who is developing an app with learning resources in a virtual learning environment aimed especially at young people. Our learners will be involved as pilot users of the app and provide feedback. The initial meeting has taken place and the designers are making revisions based on our feedback.

The project has been discussed with the learners and their feedback and opinions have been gathered on a more regular basis. One-word feedback on post it notes at the end of each lesson was given by the learners. The feedback has informed lesson planning.

Two English tutors visited Cambridge Regional College, one of our project partners to meet with the team, observe some lessons and pick up some good practice especially around behaviour management.

During my time working as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school I saw a successful raffle ticket system introduced to reward punctuality, attendance, engagement or good behaviour. I asked one of the English tutors to introduce this in two groups and within a week this had a very positive impact. In the first lesson learners who, until then had produced very little work, produced a good amount of writing. Raffle tickets were given out and learners told the more tickets they had the better their chance of winning the prize. The prize - a voucher - was funded with money from the project. Learners were actually surprised when the raffle draw went ahead and learners received a prize as they didn't believe it would really happen. They said *"we don't trust teachers"*.

More project-based work has been introduced and attendance improves during these times. An example is the organisation and hosting of a MacMillan coffee morning. During and after the project the learners discussed and identified which skills they had been developing – this included English, maths, ICT and employability

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

Learner feedback was collected at the end of each lesson – a range of methods was used including verbal feedback, post it notes or written feedback. As a result, the duration of lesson activities is shorter. Learners say they like lots of small tasks.

They like a mixture of vocational context, exam preparation and projects. This has taken the pressure off English tutors to feel they have to constantly contextualise work.

During the first Birmingham dissemination event another project talked about using flipped learning. I passed this idea on to the tutors. Unfortunately, this hasn't been tried as learners never do homework so they felt this wasn't suitable at the moment.

Learners said they felt they should be able to negotiate their assessment dates and this has happened to a certain degree.

Reflecting on how the learners reacted to receiving a voucher has made me think about when learners take their English Functional Skills assessments. In order to achieve an English Functional Skills qualification learners have to take 3 assessments in Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing. We stagger these over a period of 4 months. Attendance at exams is sporadic.

To try to improve attendance at exams and motivate learners to keep on track we issued college certificates of achievement for the reading exam. In some cases, this was the first certificate of achievement that some learners

had received in a long time. So far results and attendance at the writing exam have improved from last year.

As the result of one of our Skype meetings with our mentor and partners on the OTLA project we were invited to visit Cambridge Regional College. Two of our English tutors visited and observed classes to pick up good practice in behaviour management.

Whilst the college has a focus on improvements that need to be made both in the Self-Assessment Report and the Quality Improvement Plan, a member of the Senior Leadership team led the project to demonstrate the College's commitment. Ideas and decisions have been made jointly with the tutors and this has empowered them to be part of the improvement process. They feel that not only are Senior Managers on board but they are starting to see a change and some "quick wins".

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There is evidence of improved collaborative working between vocational and English tutors but this needs to increase and happen on a more frequent basis. Very recently the line management of English tutors on the Study Programme moved to the Study Programme Manager rather than the English Programme Manager. This has brought the teams together and, hopefully, opened up the lines of communication. The manager of the programme has introduced daily early morning "blasts" open to all members of the Study Programme team.

Groups have been rearranged so there are smaller groups of learners but at the same level.

At a higher level, on reflection, there will be a change in focus on tutor recruitment. Up until now we have placed tutors on to the programme with teaching qualifications, an English specialism and sometimes no real experience of teaching this age group. We are now focusing more on how potential tutors engage learners and manage behaviour. We will still require tutors to have the relevant specialist qualifications but we are able to support them with this. It is easier to teach/support a tutor how to teach English than

to find a tutor who can work with and engage this particular age group and manage their behaviour.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Because of the nature of the cohort we are working with, the duration of the project has been too short to show impact. A high proportion of learners who come to us take several months just to settle in to the routine of College before they are even ready to engage in learning. I feel the full impact of the project work will not be seen until next academic year when we start working with a new cohort and can implement from day one what we have learned from this project.

Although the project has now finished, we will continue with the work in the college and continue to trial and implement all the ideas I have "stolen" from the other projects. There are so many good ideas that have been tried and tested and we are excited to try them out this year and in to the next academic year.

Attendance in English remains an issue. However, initial results from the speaking and listening and reading assessments show an improvement both in attendance on the day and achievement.

Learning from this project

Working in collaboration with other colleges and listening to presentations at the regional meetings has been reassuring to the extent that we are not unique in the challenges of working with this age group.

It has been very motivating for tutors both in visiting another provider but also there is a change in the perception that we know where improvements need to be made and we are seen to be taking action by the team.

We have gained a huge amount of knowledge of good practice happening elsewhere and ideas that we wish to implement and trial.

This includes having a variety of reading material around college and on learners' tables when they arrive in each lesson, inspirational quotes around the building and registering the learners to take part in the Read Ahead Challenge. A small amount of the project funding will be used as an incentive for learners to complete this challenge.

Very importantly, I think the project has given "permission" to try out ideas and if they fail then learn from it. Ideas won't always work and that's OK.

We have had two new cohorts of learners starting in January and they do not have timetabled maths and English lessons. Instead the maths or English tutor will teach a "guest slot" in the vocational class as needed and then work with small groups on specific skill knowledge as and when the need is identified

Trying to arrange meetings between vocational and English tutors proved very difficult and this highlights the need to coordinate planning of the timetable so there is a weekly slot to enable planning meetings and staff training to take place.

Resilient action researchers – some hints and tips

Claire Callow (Strand Lead for projects 4, 5 and 6, ccConsultancy Associate) & Dr Vicky Butterby (Mentor for project 5, ccConsultancy)

Action research builds practitioner resilience through . .

Challenging existing thinking

Building confidence

Exploring ideas

Risk taking

Grounded in learner-centred practices

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The projects we were involved with as a strand lead and project mentor shared a common purpose; to explore, develop and reflect upon strategies for growing and developing English learners' resilience. Through developing resilience, our projects hoped to encourage independent working, develop learner-centred practices, and instil in learners a sense of achievement and success.

In essence, practitioners were undertaking action research so they could better support learners to negotiate, manage, anticipate and overcome current obstacles and potential setbacks - related to their English learning and to their wider lives and experiences too.

When we first embarked upon the various projects, we were full of notions of raising student achievement, improving motivation and engagement and developing teaching, learning and assessment approaches; we weren't particularly focused on **practitioner resilience**. However, one of the happy, 'secondary' outcomes of working on these projects has been greater teacher resilience and an increase in practitioner risk-taking and exploration.

Teachers have to work within a number of frameworks (set down by: the system; their organisations; awarding bodies; quality processes; and so on). This can sometimes lead to a reluctance to break away from the norm or to try out something new for fear that this might be construed as risky behaviour. Through this project, however, we have seen the growth of teacher confidence toward taking these otherwise perceived risks.

This growth in confidence has been a particularly gratifying outcome of these projects. As the ETF professional standards recognise: creativity, innovation, risk-taking and experimentation are so important to the development of a practitioner's professional judgment.

Being part of this action research – being instrumental in its conception, delivery and development – legitimised risk taking and experimentation; it gave practitioners and managers permission to not 'teach to the test' and allowed them to try something different and challenge existing thinking. In no small way, we saw how this experience liberated teachers' professional judgement and understanding, which then became a vehicle to drive the research forward.

This, in turn, afforded the freedom for projects to metamorphose: the initial focus sometimes changed, evolved or was refined (put quite simply, a 'better' question was sometimes asked). Armed with this new resilience, the action researchers in the various projects were also able freely to embrace learning around what not to do with particular learners, rather than seeing such learning as a failure. They also learnt that good quality action research can be just as much about discovering what doesn't work as what does.

What follows is a description of some of the themes that emerged during the ESOL project and which, in turn, allowed for greater experimentation by the resilient practitioner action researchers. This thematic explanation is then followed by some hints and tips for conducting action research which are the result of discussions with participants on the OTLA projects.

Grandiose theories or received wisdoms may not translate or work for your learners; contextualisation is key!

This was a common theme across the projects we were mentoring and supporting; implementing a 'one size fits all' scheme of work, or applying an 'off the shelf' intervention was not always straightforward. There were different reasons for this disconnect between established, 'evidence informed' interventions and the 'grass roots' reality of everyday life in FE.

In some cases, there were contextual differences, so suggested strategies for educational improvement did not always appreciate or meet FE-based learners' needs.

For example, when one of our research teams (an FE college with a high proportion of GCSE resit learners, many of whom have SEND), began to implement and evaluate the impact of Oakes and Griffin's (2016) VESPA strategies (a mindset tool originally devised for A Level students), they found they needed to adapt and contextualise activities so that those strategies worked for their learners.

The team did this in a variety of ways, including working with learners in small groups to explore and discuss the wider factors that shaped their everyday lives and well-being. However, the team discovered that, before learners could access VESPA, they first needed to understand what being ready to learn looks and feels like.

Another project focused on exploring active learning strategies for ESOL learners, building on recommendations from Ofsted to develop these practices. However, when the team began to ask learners which teaching and learning approaches they would like to experience, the team quickly realised there were cultural barriers to overcome. These barriers not only related to some ESOL learners' active participation in lessons, but also their engagement in participatory approaches to teaching and learning.

In some cases, learners worried that their ideas and opinions would be perceived as a criticism of their teacher: this was something they felt was unacceptable! With this in mind, practitioners had to develop creative and innovative ways of eliciting learner feedback. They also had to scrutinise received educational wisdoms about 'best practice' and 'what works' for learners, developing instead a series of active approaches for teaching and learning that understood the specific, contextual needs of the learners they were working with.

In some cases, projects found they were able to offer a direct challenge to HE-generated research about teaching and learning, strengthening the case for contextualised understandings of teaching and learning in FE. In a similar vein to previous research stemming from OTLA projects (ETF, 2018; McPartland, 2018), teams were able to refute Hattie's (2015) assertion that volunteers and learning support practitioners have little impact upon learner progress. Conversely, the team found that when structured development programmes were put into place for volunteers, and were welcomed and valued as part of the teaching and learning team, their work with Entry Level and ESOL learners had considerable impact.

The team found that through volunteer supported engagement at lunch clubs and gardening projects, learners grew in confidence, improved their attendance and made accelerated progress through their functional skills qualifications. For these learners, value-added became obvious and engagement in volunteer-led projects supported both literacy and social development.

In order to support learners' English development, you first have to understand the wider context of their lives and circumstances.

In each of the examples described above, progress in English flourished when learner-centred practices took centre stage. Listening carefully to what learners had to say (and indeed, taking notice of what they weren't saying) helped generate conditions where learners could grow in confidence, develop independence and build resilience.

Learner-centred practice evolved in different ways as project teams explored a wide variety of strategies and approaches for teaching and learning. In one case, by developing a heightened understanding of neurodiversity through connection with research and through actively listening to the experiences of neurodiverse learners, the project team were able to make small changes to their teaching and learning practices (including tweaking the language of classroom questions) that supported learners with their English work.

For project teams working with ESOL and pre-entry level learners, connection with research that explored the importance of eliciting learners' schematic knowledge, coupled with caring conversations with learners about their lives and experiences, further aided the development of learner-centred teaching and learning approaches.

In one instance, the creation of a holistic self-assessment tool, which learners worked through and discussed one-to-one with a volunteer, opened up conversations about values and identity as well as about English. This helped learners feel more confident during their English lessons, aiding active engagement in class and improving contributions during speaking and listening work.

Meaningful conversations with learners about their English learning is time well spent.

The teams overwhelmingly felt that time spent with learners having meaningful conversations about learning was time well spent. Fears that time spent away from the curriculum would be detrimental were quickly alleviated, as the insights learners shared (on mental health and well-being, on socio-cultural considerations, on mindset and motivation) helped develop a culture of trust and understanding that enabled practitioners to construct more effective and productive strategies for English teaching and learning.

Opportunity to talk about learning with learners is not regularly foregrounded in education, yet it was often during these conversations that critical knowledge about effective approaches for English teaching and learning began to evolve.

For some projects, these conversations became the cornerstone of their research findings. For instance, when one project team engaged in small group work with English resit learners, they found that time spent discussing learning was as (if not more) motivational for these learners as the motivation-driven interventions they were embedding.

Another project exploring English learners' mental health and wellbeing drew upon learner testimony to inform their teaching and learning approaches. Engaging in relational work such as this can be complex and time-consuming; practitioners across projects attested to the emotional impact of such approaches, especially when disclosures were made. Nevertheless, a common finding from our research projects suggests that feeling listened to and pro-actively supported in learning is especially important for GCSE resit learners.

Talking with learners about learning therefore seems particularly important in FE, as a way of acknowledging the deep-rooted sense of failure and disconnection many learners hold in relation to education, and as a way of co-constructing learner-centred English lessons that work hard to address the barriers to learning that learners may face.

When practitioners are supported and enabled through action research to explore and develop teaching and learning practices, new knowledge about how we learn and how we think is elicited.

One of the beauties of action research is that it provides a legitimate space for reflexive practice. When we are given permission to explore and develop aspects of our practice by allowing it to evolve and metamorphose, we often find that unexpected branches and shoots grow out from our original

research questions, awakening something in our learners and in ourselves about how we learn and how we think.

By fully and openly engaging with the research process, project teams regularly found that they were left with as many questions as answers. Often, these questions revealed a shift in thinking, from a generalised acceptance that HE or school-driven strategies for English teaching and learning would work in FE (because HE-produced research told them so), to an in-depth exploration and critical analysis of 'evidence-based' approaches for English teaching and learning in FE.

The contextual knowledge our project teams have produced through their research is invaluable for our sector, helping us better understand what works, and what doesn't work, for FE-based English learners.

Hints and tips for resilient action research

The hints and tips below have been generated by our project teams:

- Keep it small. Monitoring and managing is simpler on a small scale. When you think you've made it small, you can generally make it smaller! You can always upscale later as things develop.
- Before you start, be aware of contextual and cultural considerations which might get in the way. For instance, allow for learner flexibility and fit the project around learners and staff, not the other way around.
- Zero-hour contracts can be problematic. Be mindful around choices regarding the research team and learners.
- Keep detailed records and regularly step back to reflect. This helps to keep momentum going. You also need to focus on reporting and recording otherwise a project can run away with itself without anything to share/learning being passed on.
- Be a scavenger: try to find meaning from things, even when they don't fit your original anticipated outcomes.

- Communication and creating opportunities to communicate is key. Sharing and reflecting amongst teams leads to better buy-in from all and better awareness of practice.
- Create a collaborative, inclusive research community.
  - Tutors don't like being told what to do: involve them in the conception of the project and encourage their ownership. Allow them to work in their own ways and to put their individual stamp on group endeavours.
  - Involve the students by talking to them about what you are doing and trying to achieve. Make them a regular part of the recording and reflecting process.
  - Share the rationale for the project with everybody you can, including across the whole organisation: cultural change will be instigated only if you do so.

- Don't worry if you are moving in one direction and the path opens up in front of you! It's all part of a valuable process.
- Expect some things not to work out: this is all part of the learning and gives you insights into what you might want to try next.
- Your assumptions don't always have to be correct. It's often in the explaining, asking questions, exploring and reflecting where the important learning takes place.
- Engage the support of someone 'external' who isn't directly involved in the project, to check that the project is meeting deadlines, to keep momentum and to give feedback on which you can reflect as a team.

In summary, do the best you can with the people you work with, and the project will turn out, possibly not as you intended, but definitely worthwhile and valuable for all concerned. We have found that, through following these principles, we have helped teachers and others to develop resilience so that they can better meet and overcome the challenges that each day brings for the benefit of their learners and for the society we are all privileged to be part of.

4a. Building Resilience Through Self-Led Study
USP College

This project focused on building resilience through self-led study for 16-18 year olds studying Functional Skills (FS), GCSE resits and A Levels in an FE college setting.

Summary

The team comprised five English teachers at the Palmers campus and ten at the Seevic campus. A senior manager, a middle manager and two administrators also contributed, and four case study students shared how the project activities they were involved in have positively impacted their resilience through self-led study.

The aims were to establish a reading culture, to set high expectations for homework completion, and to individualise learning for catch up, skills-building or stretch and challenge. These aims reflect the college's priorities of delivering high-quality teaching and learning activities that positively impact student progress and lead to strong exam results.

Additional activities were later designed, such as book boxes and wider reading for pleasure lists, as teachers gained interest in the project and observed the benefits of action research.

Rationale

The focus on building resilience through self-led study was chosen as a way of helping students in their college studies, higher education and careers. It was hoped that increasing students' participation in self-led study activities would gradually normalise and embed it into their weekly schedules and start to reduce the resistance to it that has been observed in previous student cohorts. For example, GCSE students who usually shy away from self-led study would generate resilience through a little but often approach with timely feedback, and A Level students would maintain an interest in their elected subject by participating in activities away from the set texts.

Other intentions of the project activities were to make an immediate impact on improved student progression in the following ways:

- increase motivation to tackle self-led study
- gain confidence
- become better prepared for exams
- complete coursework to a higher standard
- develop transferable skills for the future

Research by Meyer et al into the benefits of self-led study supports the view that students must take accountability for their own learning to build resilience by working autonomously:

> *… the key ingredient in independent learning was the shift of responsibility for the learning process from the teacher to the student. Students acquired an understanding of their learning, being motivated to learn and collaborating with teachers to structure their learning environment.*
>
> **(Meyer et al, 2008, p2)**

Since GCSE resit and A Level students are required to supplement their classroom contact time with additional study hours and exams are individual endeavours by nature, it is vital to equip these students with the resilience through self-led study that will enable them to encode learning content and recall it within an exam environment.

Approach

Initially, three activities were proposed, including flipped reading, interactive programs, such as Padlet and Educake, and extra English sessions. Teachers discussed which activities suited their student groups and levels, and each chose at least one activity to trial. They developed resources and their own delivery approaches, and discussed tips, successes and pitfalls over the course of the project.

Because of timetable and campus distance restrictions, and endeavouring to maintain project momentum, many of the shared experiences (e.g. discussing tips, successes and pitfalls) occurred organically over email or during break times.

Each teacher took a different approach to delivering the activities, including:

Activity #1: Flipped Reading

- GCSE: read text extracts from the Resource Booklet
- A Level: read set texts

How did these approaches build resilience through self-led study?

By asking students to read text extracts for homework, the responsibility was on them to prepare ahead of the next lesson. This meant that we could spend longer on textual analysis and essay writing in lessons. It also gave students the opportunity to research unknown vocabulary and contextual references.

Additionally, a TV or film clip of the text was shared (if available), such as 'Frankenstein', to help students further comprehend the writer's ideas and review a modern adaptation for analysis of modern audience reception.

What were the barriers and how were they overcome?

Students who did not read the extract were asked to read it at the start of the next lesson while peers started analysis, and were urged to do the homework next time to feel more prepared. If the analysis and paragraphs were not finished by the end of the lesson, those learners were given a chance to catch up as homework, and if still not completed, would have to attend the extra English session. This strategy produced homework from three students who did not want to attend the extra English session.

Activity #2: Interactive Programs

- GCSE: Educake trial
- GCSE: VLE/Moodle
- A Level: Padlet

How did these approaches build resilience through self-led study?

The aim of the Educake trial was to discover whether setting homework tasks through an interactive program increases the amount of students' self-led study. The students involved in the trial found it to be user-friendly, mostly enjoyable, helpful for exam preparation, and a good investment.

A Level students were encouraged to interact with the resources and links on the Padlet both in lessons and at home. This gave them: greater control over the pace they took through the lesson activities; easy to find key information; quick access to homework tasks and deadline reminders; a platform to share examples of their own work; and a forum to log course questions.

Although only one course question has been logged so far (*"Can we go over the paper layouts?"*), it resulted in the link to past papers being uploaded to the Padlet, and students are encouraged to regularly submit practice essays as part of their progress reports.
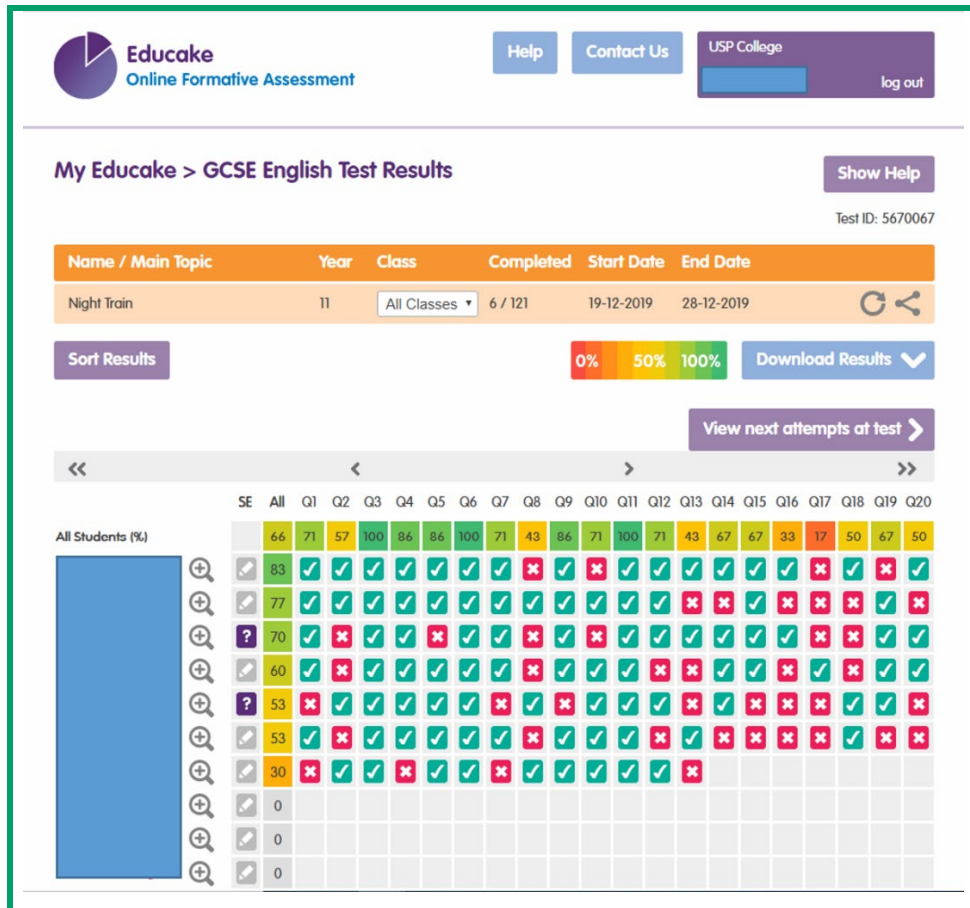
Figure 4a-1: Educake example - results from homework set during free trial

What were the barriers and how were they overcome?

Only seven students completed the 'Night Train' Educake homework. However, activities are simple to design, set and track in the program; the selection of questions is relevant to the exam material; and the price is reasonable for unlimited student accounts. It was therefore decided to set up

a subscription and roll out the program to all GCSE students. It is hoped that promotion and consistency in delivery will improve the uptake.

The VLE/Moodle has the capability to design interactive quizzes. However, despite running CPD training, teachers have not yet developed any interactive resources on the platform, preferring to use Educake instead.

Additional Activities Developed During the Project

- FS and GCSE: 15-minute reading starter
- A Level: wider reading for pleasure list
- A Level: book club

How did these approaches build resilience through self-led study?

The reading starter fostered a reading culture that, it is hoped, permeates from the classroom into the students' homes; and offered the opportunity for students' engagement with different literary genres such as magical realism.

The wider reading task encouraged students to choose a text that either focused on a topic that interested them, contained challenging vocabulary, introduced them to a new literary genre or simply kept their passion for reading alive amidst the compulsory reading.

Two A Level students were inspired to start a book club, which is strong evidence of the original thinking and creativity that can arise from focused self-led study. The students were enthusiastic to promote their book club and developed a strategy to recruit new members.

What were the barriers and how were they overcome?

Students with poor punctuality did not receive the full benefit of the reading starter, as it was run only once per week. Students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire at the start and end of the project aimed at gaining attitudes to reading. A larger increase in students reading at home had been anticipated, but teachers will continue to promote consistency to improve numbers reading at home.

Whilst comments made in the wider reading questionnaire showed that reading for pleasure can positively impact self-led study, evidence of this is yet to be observed in at least one student who responded, as she

consistently attends lessons without her notes. Reminding her of the motivation she felt during this activity could be used as a strategy for attention to self-led study in her set text analysis.

The book club is in its early stages, so the two students now need to promote it to their peers to capitalise on their initial inspiration.

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

For the reading starter, teachers were inspired to set up a book box. In the FS classes, the teacher reported that the activity had put reading on the radar, focused attention on gaining meaning from texts and that some students' reading skills had progressed. In the GCSE classes, the teachers reported mixed results in engagement. In one classroom, just 6/130 students completed the book review task.

For the A Level wider reading activity, teachers provided a list but also discussed other titles in classroom discussions. One teacher reported that more students were reflecting on individual study (e.g. discussing starting points and the impact of wider reading on their knowledge set). Discussions were not a prescriptive process, and arose spontaneously. Another teacher reported a learner who admitted enjoying the wider reading text more than the set text.

Teacher reflections on action research were recorded and the Professional Standards were reflected upon.

The Professional Standards that we have worked on during the project include:	
Professional Standard	**Evidence**
Professional Values & Attributes #4: Be creative and innovative in selecting and adapting strategies to help learners to learn.	We proposed three activities to help our students to increase their self-led study, thus building resilience to current and future learning.
Professional Knowledge & Understanding #10: Evaluate your practice with others and assess its impact on learning.	We each developed different approaches to the proposed activities, and shared our reflections and outcomes with each other.
Professional Skills #13: Motivate and inspire learners to promote achievement and develop their skills to enable progression.	We motivated our students to participate in reading-related self-led study activities, such as flipped learning and interactive homework. We also inspired two A Level students to start a book club, via a wider reading for pleasure activity.

Figure 4a-2: Professional standards that we worked on

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There have been small shifts in organisational practices. Most teachers wanted their students to read more and were challenged to devise methods to effect this change. The project meant that teachers were given a forum to discuss their ideas, and were empowered to follow their own initiative or to try colleagues' successful approaches.

Teacher mindsets were challenged too. One had initially only wanted to deliver the reading starter, but later trialled the Educake program. Consequently, a 'no pressure' stance towards colleague involvement aided motivation to participate, and commitment to just one activity helped to build confidence.

Additionally, a staff Padlet for action research was established to embed it into our normal working practice.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The two case studies for the project both involve a primary and a secondary student. This is because we wanted to capture both GCSE and A Level students and thought the best way to record their experiences would be to interview them. Therefore, a secondary student became involved.

For the GCSE case study, Student A (primary) participated in Activity #1: Flipped Learning Reading Homework. In his interview, he discussed how he had read a fictional text extract as homework and completed a PEEL paragraph to apply the linguistic analysis learned in the classroom. He expressed how doing flipped reading homework tasks had helped him to prepare for his November resit exam, in which he achieved a grade 5; an increase of two grades.

For the A Level case study, Student C (primary) chose a text to read in addition to her course set texts to see if reading for pleasure positively impacts self-led study. Student D (secondary) joined Student C in reading the text and they were then inspired to start a book club. In their interview, they discussed how reading together had been enjoyable and they wanted to include other students in the experience. This evidences their improved resilience through self-led study because they have established not only a reason to study outside the classroom, but an accountability.

Learning from this project

Rather than concentrating on a growth mindset, this project focused teachers' attention on encouraging their students to participate in self-led study activities to build resilience.

Teachers have taken their own approaches to the proposed project activities, and therefore have devised their own methodologies.

A selection of knowledge claims include:
- "Students who apply their classroom learning to reading essay tasks outside of the classroom are better prepared for exams." (Student A, Activity #1: Flipped Reading)
- "Students who utilise the content on interactive programs, such as Padlet, Educake and Moodle, are better prepared for classroom work." (Activity #2: Interactive Programs)
- "Students who engage with reading inside the classroom are more likely to continue reading outside of the classroom." (Student B, Additional Activity: 15-minute reading starter)
- "Students who read self-chosen texts in addition to the course set texts are more likely to be inspired to establish self-led and collaborative learning activities." (Students C and D, Additional Activity: wider reading lists/setting up a book club)

Some approaches worked better than others, and teachers gave feedback that activities were **more** effective when:
- there was consistent delivery
- the activity level presented some challenge, but not over-challenge
- activity completion helped to build student confidence through either success or constructive feedback
- the activity was self-chosen.

Approaches were **less** effective when:
- there were larger groups with more behaviour management demands
- students were less organised or motivated (for a range of reasons).

Teachers need to choose which activities would best suit the needs of their groups: whether to engage, inspire attention to detail, or give purpose of action.

To sustain the initiative, teachers will continue to run the activities until the end of the academic year although this will mean not stopping the activities until after the project has formally ended. The data will then be reviewed for any positive links between success and participation in project activities.

Action research will also be championed by extending the initiative to include maths teachers.

4b. Developing Resilience and Motivation in GCSE English resit learners

Buckinghamshire College Group

This project aimed to create processes and resources to aid the development of a more positive learner mindset towards the study of GCSE English for 16-18 year old learners.

Summary

Our approach focused on two specific strands:

Strand one included the use of 'heat maps' to identify strengths and weaknesses in skills needed for the qualification.

Strand two focused on delivery of activities alongside the GCSE English curriculum that developed learner resilience, engagement and motivation with the subject.

Stakeholders involved in the project were: GCSE learners, five members of teaching staff, five Advanced Practitioners, the Curriculum Manager for English and the Faculty Director for English and Mathematics.

Rationale

According to the Department for Education nearly 80% of learners that fail their GCSE English exam at school will go on to fail their resit at College. This presents a significant challenge for the whole FE sector, and with over 800 learners currently sitting GCSE English at Buckinghamshire College Group it was an area that we wanted to explore further.

As we know, learners who are typically resitting GCSE English often display disengagement and demotivation with the idea of progressing with the subject.

Learners have often experienced failure and are therefore entrenched in the view that the subject is too difficult and they are never going to get a better grade. The project, therefore, wanted to address the issue of learner resilience in the development of English Skills within GCSE lessons and develop resources and processes that would encourage a more positive growth mindset towards their study.

The aim was to enable learners to move from being disengaged and unmotivated, through a series of activities that would give them the understanding and the tools to develop skills and characteristics to become more motivated and engaged.

Approach

Our approach focused on two specific strands:

The use of 'heat maps' which should then inform the adoption of generic schemes of work, activities and resources within lessons to enable 'responsive' teaching that would meet the needs and subsequent starting points of all learners. It was hoped that this would enable learners to see

what they were good at, what they needed to focus on and that the learning approach at college was to build on their previous skills and knowledge. This, it was hoped, would remove the negative ideas of starting again or being taught what they already knew.

Strand two focused on the delivery of activities alongside the GCSE English curriculum to develop learner resilience, engagement and motivation with the subject. Activities were developed around the VESPA model created and developed by Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin (2018).

To facilitate the implementation of the above strands the following was completed:

- Development and inclusion of cross-college marking and feedback guidelines (Figure 4b-1).
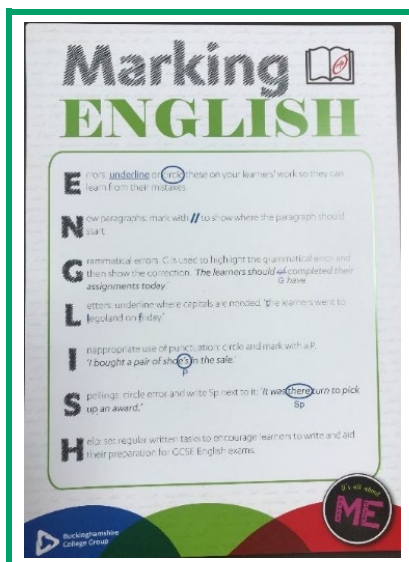
Figure 4b-1: Marking guidelines

- Initial briefing to English and maths staff on the strategic plan for the year and the approach we would be researching within the remit of the project. Initial feedback indicated that some staff were excited about the prospect of doing action research, whereas some were concerned about how they would deliver GCSE content and motivational activities within a lesson.

- Development and selection of activities to infill into GCSE scheme of work. As the project progressed this later became a separate schedule of key activities to complete for each month.
- Development of homework books for GCSE English to facilitate independent learning
- Completion of commercial / in house assessments to inform 'heat map' development.
- Implementation of the first resilience task.
- Campus briefings across all sites covering: English and maths strategic plan; development of resilience and engagement skills through the OTLA project; marking and feedback of English and maths skills; use of 'heat maps' (Figure 4b-2).
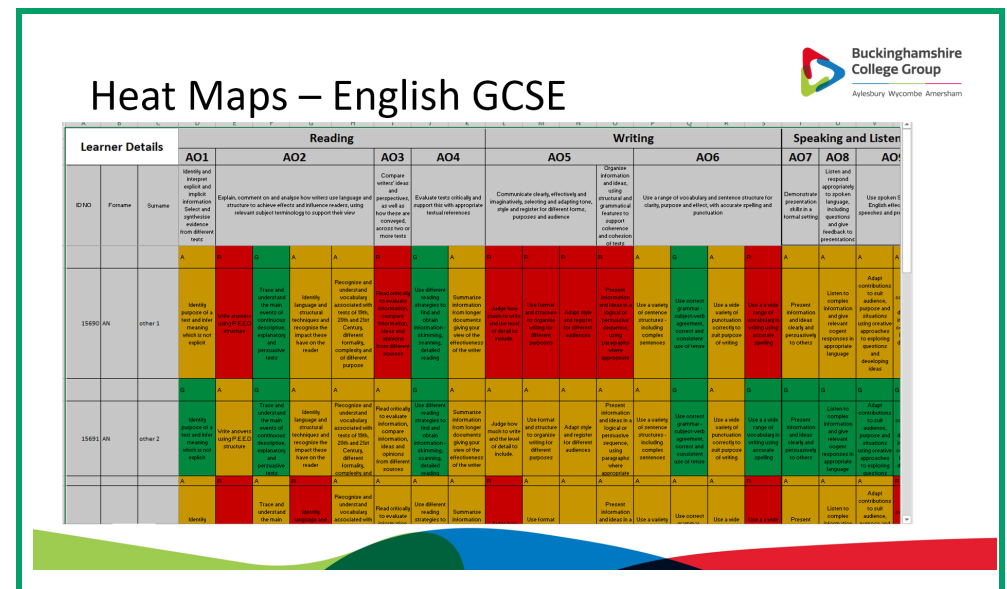
Figure 4b-2: Heat Map

- Support for staff in developing a more responsive approach to delivery.
- Governor Training day focusing on the use of 'heat maps' as well as an overview of the project and the expected outcomes. This was then followed with learning walks within English and maths to see how the 'heatmaps' and activities were being used within lessons. This gave Governors a greater understanding of the learners we have, their varied

starting points, the skills they need to develop to achieve a grade 4 in GCSE English and a greater awareness and understanding of the challenges within this area.

- Implementation of further resilience activities.
- Learner focus groups to gain feedback on the delivery of GCSE, use of 'heat maps' and use of resilience style activities.
- Further implementation and feedback on resilience activities.

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

We are beginning to see, through learning walks and observations, more responsive and personalised learning being facilitated in lessons with a gradual move from very teacher centred delivery covering the whole syllabus to more experiential teaching and learning activities. Delivery is focused through the heat maps on what topics or areas the learners need to know and then scaffolding activities and resources according to the RAG rating to then enable learners to develop skills and knowledge according to their starting point and own needs.

However, this sustained change will take time to foster and develop across all three sites as the majority of staff are new to teaching. Therefore, they are continually learning and developing their craft to deliver GCSE English. This has meant that Advanced Practitioner support to facilitate responsive teaching through the use of 'heat maps' has been crucial in developing staff confidence and resilience.

The 'Vespa' resources have given a structured approach to tackling learner motivation and resilience and have led to more discussions about how learners feel about studying English and what is possibly preventing them from achieving; this has enabled learners to identify strategies of intervention. Directly delivering these activities within the GCSE classes has certainly facilitated this process and we felt that this increased its effectiveness, as learners could make those direct links which may have been lost if the activities had been completed within tutorials.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Because of the work during the project, this new team are developing working partnerships and relationships across each of the sites: we are now seeing more collaboration in planning and delivery. Some staff have found team teaching with each other or the Advanced Practitioners valuable in enabling them to experiment with different strategies, techniques and activities to further engage and motivate learners.

When we reflected on our initial plan for the project, we quickly realised that to bring about what is essentially a cultural change amongst learners, our initial steps would not be enough and we would need to develop a whole college approach. This meant that we added more actions to our plan around developing this organisational approach which included: wider awareness raising though campus briefings; delivery to governors during their training day; and developing a consistent marking policy.

We also identified that our English teaching team would need support, and reassigned some of our Advanced Practitioners to support teaching staff within English. The result is that we now have a solid foundation on which to build, with 'buy-in' from English teaching staff and Advanced Practitioners to deliver and support more experiential learning linked to learner areas of development. There is also greater understanding from Governors and vocational teaching staffing of the challenges within this area. Subsequently this has led to more effective support and ensured continuation of our initial idea and plan past the end date of the project.

We plan to continue to use heat maps in the next academic year and will consolidate development of 'responsive' teaching. We will also revise our delivery of 'Vespa' style activities as a result of our research this year and will implement our changes and further develop our approach.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

During a December focus group, learners fed back positively on the concept of 'heat maps' and liked the idea of knowing what they were good at and what they needed to do to make progress. They also liked the idea that these were being used to inform learning, as most disliked the idea of re-learning what they already knew. They also liked the fact that college was more relaxed than school, that there were fewer learners in the class and there was more independent learning. They also felt that resources used were good in enabling them to develop skills and knowledge.

Most learners seemed to be finding the 'Vespa' activities useful and valuable in the short term, although it is a little too early to ascertain the long-term effects of these activities on end of year achievement. However, in terms of in-class activities staff have feedback that some learners are building their resilience. They are keen to know how their heat map has changed and what progress they have made or how their scores in tests are increasing.

Learning from this project

Staffing challenges did, at times, have an impact on time dedicated to the project. However, already having a heatmap format in place that had worked previously did aid progress in this part of the project in the first term. It reminded us of the importance of keeping the scale of the project small and how useful it can be to build on previous learning which then provided an effective structure to complement the implementation of the 'Vespa' activities.

Researching 'Vespa' activities as part of our application process also helped as we had already identified some activities that we could use. However, the interesting point here is that we picked activities we thought learners would like, or what may be useful to them and put them into an embedded scheme of work that linked to key English learning, mock exams and other key dates. However, when it came to delivery, we realised this was not the case. For

example, resilience task 2 was completed in January, yet we would now move this to the beginning of the year as a productive opening discussion on all aspects of the study programme.

We realised that we had not put enough thought into the differences in motivation across curriculum areas. We also realised that our scheme of work was not differentiated to meet these differences within curriculum areas. Some learners responded to activities more positively than others and we now plan to develop our 'Vespa' scheme of work to also consider activities for different vocational areas and vocational levels.

We also discovered that some staff were missing out the implementation of activities when they were embedded into the scheme of work. Consequently, a more overt schedule was needed to keep up to date with our delivery plan and more activities within a month were needed to enable a more effective and regular approach.

We also put more time and energy into a whole organisation approach, as we realised that this structure and support from colleagues across the college would be needed to facilitate the changes in learner behaviour, and that our original steps and teaching team alone would not be enough to bring about this change. This approach was not part of the original plan and did in some ways the hinder immediate implementation of the 'Vespa' tasks. However, on reflection, this was the right decision for our college and will enable us to continue with the use of 'heat maps' and 'Vespa' style activities beyond the end of the project.

This is now possible, as all colleagues have a greater understanding of the challenges learners face, the strategies or activities we can implement and the messages we can reinforce across the whole study programme. We learned that in order to significantly improve learner motivation and resilience the approach needs to be consistent across all aspects of the study programme to enable learners to make these changes and stick to them. It also enabled English staff to feel more supported and less like they were battling to develop learners on their own.

4c. Wellbeing and Emotional Resilience for Learning
Morley College
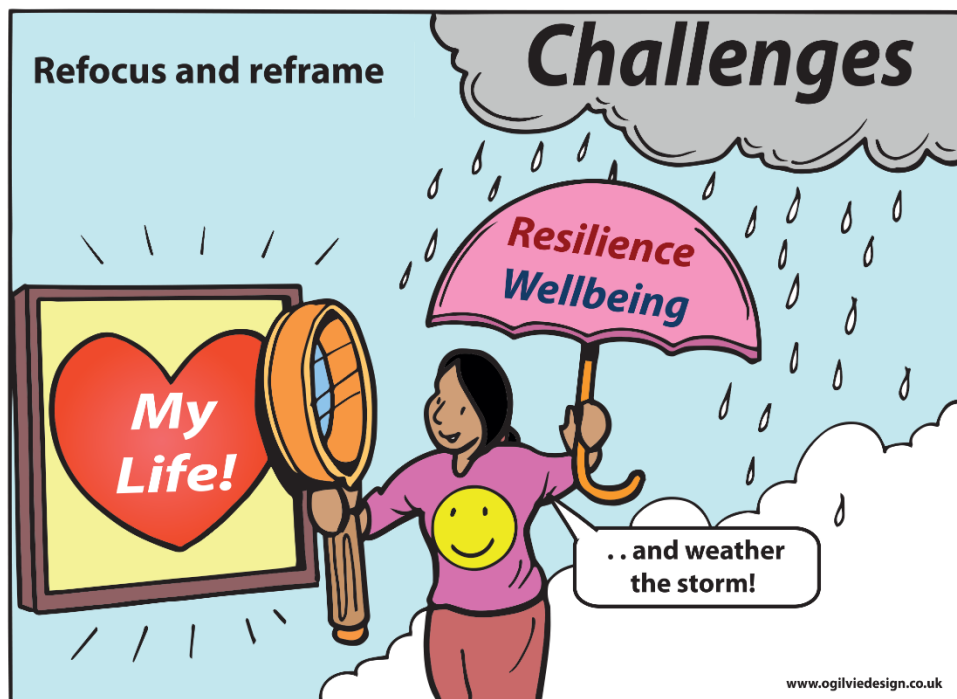
The aim of this project was to develop a bank of teaching and learning resources aimed at Entry Level 3 to Level 2 Functional Skills English for adult students that would embed core English skills, such as reading for meaning and speaking to communicate, with themed lessons on Wellbeing and Emotional Resilience.

Summary

The project leader and four hourly paid English tutors were involved in the project. We envisaged creating 10 hour-long stand-alone sessions that could be delivered at the beginning of a course potentially during a tutorial slot or within the planned teaching hours.

The genesis of this project came out of discussions with colleagues about how we could improve attendance and retention by thinking 'outside the box'. We wanted to see if non-standard approaches to improving attendance would have an impact on levels of engagement, attendance and retention.

We also felt that our cohort of students who are adults with daily challenges would benefit from 'opening up' about the problematics involved in staying in education, and exploring ways to overcome some of their difficulties with childcare, ill health and constrained financial circumstances.

Rationale

Some students who access English courses at the college find it difficult to complete their courses or make significant progress, especially when faced with detrimental changes to their circumstances or are suffering from long-term health conditions. These include, for example, job losses, denial of benefits, poor health, the death of a relative, episodic and re-occurring bouts of poor mental health or significant difficulties while caring for dependants with disabilities or ill health.

The impact of these circumstances is that they will enrol on courses but then begin to find it difficult to attend and eventually drop out, or are withdrawn for poor attendance before they can complete the course.

Many students who suffer from long term physical and mental health issues find it difficult to engage with and sustain learning, but continue to access courses, or are referred by outside agencies. Apart from the effect this has on students' ability to raise their level of English and gain meaningful qualifications, their level of resilience also has an impact on attendance and retention and the achievement rates for the English department. Raising the achievement rates at Level 2 and the overall attendance rate is an ongoing priority for the English Department.

Approach

We were clear from the start about what it was we wanted to achieve, and this enabled us to get going with the project. After identifying the tutors and groups to be involved, we were able to achieve the following:

- the production of a bank of 'wellbeing' resources at English Functional Skills Entry Level 2-3 and Level 1-2 – now available to tutors across the department.
- piloting of a selection of the resources across four English groups – taking students through a structured programme to identify key challenges in their lives, consider factors which could impact their wellbeing, and develop strategies for developing wellbeing and resilience.
- embedding and developing literacy skills throughout the course – students were presented with a wide range of reading, writing and speaking and listening activities, as well as IT tasks when completing weekly activities on google classroom.
- the introduction of a culture of wellbeing and emotional resilience – where students were encouraged regularly to consider the state and importance of their own wellbeing.
- development of a positive mindset in students – to help manage feelings and experiences and identify where they could employ a more positive outlook.
- increased confidence to share and discuss issues with others.
- collection of students' work, as well as mid-term and end-of-term evaluation feedback.

The materials have been well received by students and staff in equal measure; however, we need to review the continuing impact of the materials on our cohort. As such, we intend to take this work forward to the next academic year using feedback from tutors to direct our future development.

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

The project gave hourly paid teachers CPD opportunities, and all the staff involved in the project attended the ETF English Resilience: developing students' self-belief and perseverance training on 25 October 2019. This provided a helpful springboard for tutors involved in the project to meet and start a meaningful dialogue about the challenges our students face and how we can begin to support them.

Daily challenges:

Technology is one daily cause of stress that most of us have to deal with.
Read the grid below with some daily challenges that <u>other students</u> have to deal with.

	Type of challenge:	Why it is a problem:	How it makes me feel:	Is it in my control – why?
1)	Getting my kids to school on time	We are always rushing, and we always miss the gate before it closes. It makes me late for work / college.	I feel stressed out and anxious. I shout at my kids and it's a really bad start to the day.	Yes. I could stop my kids from watching the TV in the morning. I could make them have a list of jobs to follow and they could get a reward at the end of the week if we get to school on time
2)	Getting enough sleep	I often stay up later watching stuff on TV, looking at Facebook or playing computer games.	Really exhausted the next day. I can't concentrate properly at work or college. I get grumpy with my husband and kids in the morning.	Yes. I need to be stricter with myself. I should switch everything off at 10pm and go to bed.
3)	Coping with my health condition	Sometimes my medication doesn't work, and I have to go to the GP or the clinic to get checked out.	Sick and stressed out because I never know from week to week if I can stick to my work / college timetable. I'm always stressed about my boss or tutor are going to say.	No.
4)	Earning enough money to pay the bills every month.	I'm always trying to take on overtime to earn extra money, so we can cover the cost of everything.	I feel a constant pressure from my partner to take on extra work although I get really tired if I work too much.	Not sure. I could look for a job that pays me more money but I need to get my English and Maths GCSEs first.

Figure 4c-1: Learning materials – Entry Level 3

As the project progressed, the tutors involved met with each other to discuss the impact of the materials on the students, their teaching and themselves. Some valuable conversations were held and tutors started to challenge their own fears around the difficulty of some of the topics, potentially opening up emotional wounds for students in their care.

As project leader, I met with tutors and we talked about how students were learning and if it was felt that real change was taking place in the classroom in terms of facing those affective barriers to learning, such as poor mental health, after engaging in this programme of study. It became clear after a few weeks of the programme that students started to see that, despite the difficulties they had faced in their lives or will still face, they could contribute equally and that they have something of value to offer, regardless of their starting points and the challenges to those starting points.

The tutors involved in the project have been able to see the impact of engaging with the students in ways that they have not been comfortable with in the past. Their confidence in tackling some of the more sensitive subjects of the 10-week programme has grown and this is evident from learning walks. The tutors involved appear more likely to take risks with their teaching as they can see the positive impact the materials and subjects are having on the students.

Students have become more open about the difficulties they face in their lives and this has meant that they have sought support and feedback. Feedback from discussions with tutors has shown that students seem better able to concentrate during class and, where necessary, tutors have been able to signpost them to sources of support within the college.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The staff at the college are hourly paid and tend to work independently of one another. There is a culture of 'ships passing at the photocopier', but this project has given tutors a focus and reason to get together and work collaboratively and have valuable conversations about teaching. It has opened up opportunities for informal peer mentoring and helped tutors reflect on how these materials and lessons can effect cultural change in the classroom.

The tutors involved have started to see the benefits of sharing ideas, materials and reflections on teaching and learning. The project leader has had the opportunity to carry out learning walks that are not based upon college wide priorities and engage with the students and see the impact of the lessons on their engagement and enjoyment.

We have created better links with Student Services and are better able to signpost students to sources of support within and without the college.

Top ten tips to improve your wellbeing

We all know that wellbeing is important for both physical and mental health. But what does it really mean and how do you achieve it?

Here are our top ten tips to get you started ….

1. **Do something creative**
Being creative improves your mood and self-esteem. Why not try drawing, knitting, writing a journal, playing music, acting, taking a photo or planting a flower. The possibilities are endless!

2. **Value yourself and others**
Spend time reflecting on your strengths and what you have done well today. Remember to also look for the good in other people and tell them that you appreciate them.

3. **Eat well to boost your mood**
Food can have a real influence on our mood so choose healthy foods to boost your mood and energy levels. When in doubt, eat more vegetables and fewer take-aways!

4. **Connect with others**
Spending time with family and friends helps you share feelings and get emotional support. Why not turn off the TV and your phone, and take time to talk to friends or strangers and connect?

5. **Be active**
Exercise combats anxiety and depression as well as improving fitness. Just 30 minutes a day will help. So ditch the bus and take a walk, go cycling, climb the stairs or just take the kids to the park!

6. **Care for yourself**
Take some time for yourself. Do something you enjoy such as a hobby, go for a walk, read a good book or have your hair done. It doesn't matter what it is – it's time just for you.

7. **Be mindful**
Become more aware of the world right now. What are you seeing, thinking, smelling and feeling? Try sitting in a different chair or walking a new route to the shops – as long as you take time to notice it.

8. **Give back**
It feels good to give. Even small acts count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Or why not volunteer at your local community centre? You'll feel better and meet new people.

9. **Ask for help**
If you're feeling pressure, find time to talk with family or friends to stop anxiety, stress and negative thoughts from building up. If you're really down, ask your doctor about counselling or other help.

10. **Keep learning**
Learning increases your confidence, lowers stress and helps you feel more optimistic and satisfied. So why not sign up for a course, learn to fix your bike, visit a museum or try cooking a new dish?

For more help and advice, visit the **NHS Moodzone** at **https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/**

Figure 4c-2: Wellbeing poster

Evidence of improvement in students' achievements, retention and progression

The students involved in this project have fully engaged with the learning materials. In the Entry level group, who have been immersed in the project, attendance is currently at 90% which is 9% up from the same cohort last academic year, and all the students in the group have been retained so far. A learning walk and student case study carried out within the group showed that students were able to talk openly about the challenges they face and that they were able to take risks and share with one another the painful stories of their past.

The experience in the level 1 group has not been as immersive yet: attendance for the cohort for the term has remained steady at 84% over 18/19 and 19/20. This is still below the college target of 90% but a step in the right direction. Evidence from learning walks shows that students have found the lessons stimulating and have expressed to me that the content of the lessons has been motivating and powerful. The tutor for this group has grown in confidence and has decided to use more of the materials with the group.

Attendance for term 2 continues to be high, which may be indicative of the increased focus on wellbeing. All the students from term 1 have progressed on to term 2. This is particularly notable as the level 1 group is a non-accredited group and students often lose motivation at this stage of the academic year as there is no external qualification attached to the course and it can feel that there is a 'long way to go'.

The data is replicated in the level 2 group with attendance for term one at 82% for the past two academic years and has increased to 89% for term two. Some of the comments from the student evaluations also bear witness to the impact of the course on the students:

> *I really enjoyed the activities used in class for the past few weeks and I really understand what wellbeing means to me.*

> *Talking about this topic made me think about my wellbeing and solutions for me to improve it.*
>
> *Honestly this course is amazing and I'm very happy that I'm taking it.*
>
> *It really does increase our resilience and teach us how to take care of our minds and bodies.*

Learning from this project

Students were engaged, motivated and inspired throughout their learning of this topic. Many demonstrated a high level of commitment to attending class when they were experiencing illness, stress or other conflicting events in their lives. They participated fully in class activities and there was a high completion rate of homework tasks.

They have been able to reflect on the English skills they were developing along the way and enjoyed the range of activities used throughout the term. In one end-of-term evaluation, students expressed how this course had given them time and space to consider their wellbeing. There has been general consensus from students and tutors that making time to reflect on wellbeing and life challenges can enhance wellbeing and emotional resilience.

The impact of the course could have been greater if all tutors had been as fully involved as others, but some needed time to reflect and grow in confidence to tackle sensitive subjects and topics with students. Others felt that the materials need to be reviewed and revised in alignment with the recent Functional Skills Reforms. This will bring in greater opportunities for staff to contribute to and collaborate on these revisions.

We have witnessed as a team that enabling students to talk about some of the issues they face in a safe space has improved student engagement and focus, and general wellbeing. We have discovered that our students can benefit from lesson topics that resonate with painful experiences and that they can move forward from them with a more positive mindset.

4d. Resit Resilience: a curriculum-based approach to developing self-belief, confidence and meta-cognition skills of GCSE English Language students

The Sheffield College
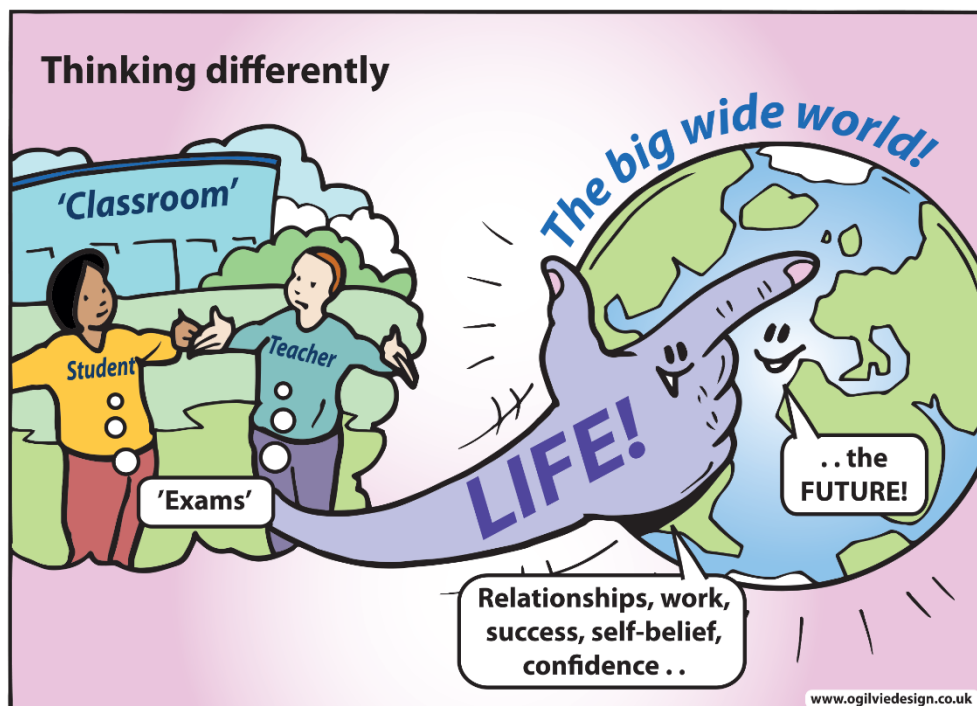
This project was designed to explore whether and how the explicit delivery of 'mindsets for learning' activities impacted on the confidence, resilience and achievements of learners on our GCSE English Language programmes.

Summary

Because of their intrinsic lack of self-belief and motivation, the struggle to engage students in the development of English skills is a major issue at The Sheffield College, just as it is at centres across the country.

A group of us working here recognised that although some teachers across our diverse college were employing different approaches towards developing

resilience in learners, others were not addressing this fundamental underlying issue explicitly. We therefore decided to engage in research.

This involved first accessing literatures, some of which suggested that supporting students in the development of their confidence and self-belief, combined with a focus on their meta-cognition and self-regulation skills, might impact positively on students' progress. It also involved our designing a Scheme of Work and set of associated resources to embed within GCSE English Language and Functional Skills delivery.

Rationale

Our aim was to research the impact of explicitly tackling the complex issue of learners' attitudes towards learning, essentially their capacity for developing resilience. The situation was that, despite being highly skilled practitioners, many of our teachers struggled to engage students who exhibited disengaged behaviours within the classroom.

We also recognised that for many learners the Condition of Funding was also reinforcing their lack of self-belief and sense of self-worth in relation to learning: this condition requires 16-19 year olds to repeat GCSE examinations until they achieve the qualification or are no longer required to do so.

Similarly, for adult students returning to learning after failing at school, a lack of confidence often created a significant barrier to learning. And, whilst many of our teachers addressed learner resilience quite naturally in the classroom through their skilful use of the language of motivation, as a teaching team we were not necessarily exploring such engagement issues explicitly and systematically.

Consequently, we decided to collaborate in designing a Scheme of Work and a set of associated resources, with the intention of delivering them every

week within a variety of English classes. Our aim was to assess the impact of such an approach on outcomes for the following people:

- 16-19 year old students studying GCSE English Language, across a diverse range of Study Programmes, and
- Adult students studying GCSE English Language, or Functional Skills English

Approach

The main focus of the project was to target any student who was working with a member of our core team of teachers whose main responsibilities included the delivery of GCSE English Language to Study Programme students.

The lead tutor had developed a Scheme of Work and an initial set of activities to be shared with teachers at a project training event before the start of the academic year. Teachers were encouraged to adapt these resources to suit the needs of their students and to accommodate their own different approaches to learning and teaching.

Teachers then delivered the activities to students whose programme of study included: Media and Performing Arts, Construction, Engineering, Plumbing and Motor Vehicle, Health and Social Care, Hair and Beauty, Sport and Uniformed Public Services. The activities were also used with adult students studying either GCSE English Language or Functional Skills English.

The students first engaged in an on-line assessment activity, which we used to gauge their levels of confidence and attitudes towards learning. It also provided teachers with a powerful basis to explore with individual students how their past experiences of, and attitudes towards learning influenced their current perspectives. Learners then engaged in mindset activities. Such activities were usually delivered weekly, before a break, and lasted between 5 and 10 minutes.

The Language of Mindset

Early in the academic year students were asked explicitly to flip and re-frame the language they used in relation to themselves and learning. Activities such as the one below opened up discussions between students and teacher around the power of language (both destructive and constructive) and the importance of reframing statements in a positive way.

Look at the statements below and decide if they show:

a) An open attitude towards learning
b) A closed attitude towards learning
c) Something different

Statement	Colour	Flip the statement
I've never been very good at school.		
I just need more practice		
I'm hopeless at this.		
This would be more achievable if I was smarter.		
This isn't natural to me.		
With intensive study I can crack this.		
I've not got an academic brain.		
After the break, I will feel much more refreshed and can make some progress.		
Let me have another go.		
I'm going to go over it again to make sure I've understood.		

Figure 4d-1: Language of Mindset activity

However, whilst some activities focused wholly on the development of students' attitudes towards themselves and learning, other tasks also enabled an explicit development of curriculum related skills.

The Scheme of Work was designed in such a way as to ensure that any related activities worked in parallel with the subject-specific Scheme of Work. The aim here was to help students to prepare for forthcoming challenges, such as mock examinations and build adequate levels of confidence for the task ahead.

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

Teachers involved with the project reported that their engagement with it has had a profound impact on their practice and their perceptions of themselves as teachers.

The current situation was that, although they were all highly skilled in employing a range of strategies to encourage students to engage in their work, no one in the team prior to joining the project had taken such a systematic and focused approach to encouraging students to challenge their self-perceptions and associated attitudes towards learning.

Through being involved in the project, teachers were now working together; the aim was to adapt and develop resources that would engage their learners in the development of positive attitudes towards themselves and learning.

It is important to note that involvement in the project initially had a negative impact on one teacher, inhibiting her exploration with students of their mindsets for learning. Project leads provided the tutor with support, and she was encouraged to adapt the resources to suit her delivery style.

For the rest of the team the impact upon their professional practice was very positive. It was not only productive in helping them to develop much more open relationships with students early in the academic year, but also enhanced their perceptions of themselves as practitioners.

Teachers reported a range of highly positive changes in themselves and their practice. They confirmed that the explicit addressing of learners' resilience in classroom-based activities has:

- Encouraged them to consider their language, what they said and how they said it more carefully: the aim was to enable students to reframe their learning experiences much more positively;
- Enabled a refocusing towards a more student-centred approach to learning, teaching and assessment;
- Encouraged a more holistic view of students;
- Put more focus on getting to know the students and their relationship to learning early in the academic year, which in turn has enabled students to perceive their teachers in a more realistic and constructive way
- Encouraged teachers to identify very small steps in learning, helping both learner and teacher to frame progress in positive and meaningful ways;
- Developed practitioners' sense of professional identity, so they perceived themselves from a pastoral as well as curriculum delivery perspective.
- Importantly, involvement in the project has also given teachers the confidence to take an action research approach to other aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The manager prioritised the project for discussion at weekly team meetings and CPD events. This ensured that teachers could frequently discuss and explore any emerging issues or challenges in the delivery of the activities. Involvement in the project has enabled teachers to:

- Engage in Continuing Professional Development with colleagues from other institutions across the sector
- Explore with colleagues, strategies to use with students which will develop their self-esteem, meta-cognition and self-regulation in learning skills
- Collaborate in developing activities which are not necessarily explicitly linked to the curriculum
- Share their practice with Functional Skills tutors in vocational areas
- Adapt their delivery approach to ensure that a more holistic approach to the development of students' skills is embedded within their practice.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Due to the short time scale of the project, it is too early to provide attendance and achievement data; however, it has become clear that the explicit addressing in class of mindsets for learning has enabled some students to:

- develop confidence in their learning earlier in the academic year than is usually expected
- experience an increased belief in their ability to make the next steps in their career pathway
- increase the value they place in progress and education
- develop a better ability to overcome significant barriers to learning, such as exam anxiety
- increase younger learners' self-esteem, particularly in relation to perceptions of their own intelligence
- decrease their engagement in negative self-talk in relation to their ability to learn and make progress in English
- It has also enabled them to:
  - be more positive in ways of talking about their work and themselves in relation to it
  - visualise their future lives and careers and the steps they need to take in order to reach them
  - open up an early and meaningful dialogue with their teachers in relation to the way they perceive themselves in learning.
- Importantly, involvement in the project has also demonstrated:
  - An increased confidence in adult learners in their potential to succeed, despite having very low self-esteem in relation to learning
- Adult students, as expected, engaged more fully with the activities because of their intrinsic motivation. As well as helping adult learners develop their confidence and self-belief, mindset activities have also helped individuals to address and identify strategies to deal with obstacles which they might encounter throughout their learning journey.

- A significant development has been:
  - Increased engagement and confidence in under 16 year olds, who often find joining college to be a daunting and difficult experience
  - A development of some, rather than having no, resilience amongst the most disengaged of learners
  - A significant decrease in the number of learners not returning to class after the break
  - Greater progress in the development of English skills in a shorter amount of time amongst some students
  - When the activities were conducted with smaller groups of students and in one-to-ones, they were very impactful.

Learning from this project

The embedding of a mindset for learning curriculum within GCSE English Language teaching, learning and assessment has proved to be a highly successful adaptation to the delivery of this subject for Study Programme and adult learners at The Sheffield College.

For many students there has been a noticeable improvement in their attitudes towards learning and themselves in relation to it, as well as a significant decrease in behavioural interventions.

Teachers' practice has improved, particularly in relation to their use of language in the classroom, when challenging students' negative attitudes towards learning and their ability to make progress in English. Significantly, practitioners have developed an even greater depth of understanding of the emotional challenges and barriers to learning faced by young people who have experienced repeated 'failure' in examinations.

Our aim was to research the impact of explicitly tackling the complex issue of learners' attitudes towards learning, mainly their capacity for developing resilience in relation to our GCSE English Language programmes. We have found ways of doing this for the benefit of our learners; and in so doing, they have learned to build resilience and now enjoy a renewed confidence in their ability to learn.

5a. Meeting Individual Learners' Needs
Community Learning Skills – Kent Adult Education Service
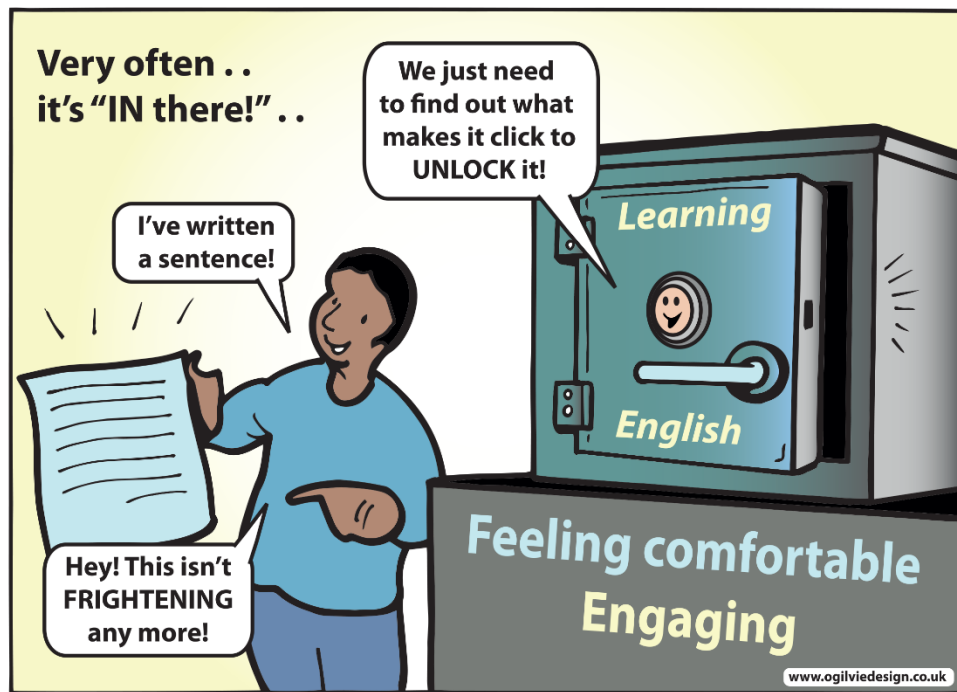
CLS has a high number of low-level learners who suffer many barriers to learning, resulting in a lack of confidence and achievement. This project resulted in highly dependent and unconfident learners becoming empowered to recognise their own learning and adopt appropriate strategies to develop independence. Subsequently, positive progression has been observed and recorded.

Summary

An initial injection of one to one time from a team of volunteers was used to help learners identify their own needs and develop their confidence. They were encouraged to self-assess from the outset and take on responsibility for their learning. Supporting documentation was developed for learners to visualise progress immediately.

We have extended the volunteer project to higher level learners with confidence issues. This has had the same success at promoting independent learning and subsequent progression.

Added value is demonstrated in the higher recognition of the volunteer team as a valuable resource. Robust and meaningful CPD has been instrumental in developing volunteers' teaching and assessment skills. Some volunteers intend to progress into teaching assistant or teaching roles.

A successful pilot has given rise to the planning of a countywide replication across the skills programme.

Rationale

Our main function is to provide learning opportunities for adults, young people and families across Kent in order to meet their aspirations for improved work skills; better personal development; strong families; healthy lives and positive contributions to the community.

We engage with local communities to match their needs, based on levels of prosperity, employment and priorities. CLS aims to ensure our services provide learning appropriate to the needs of individuals and families at various stages in their lives. In order to provide appropriate support, we need to be well informed; so, we hold regular learner forums where we can hear the learner voice and adapt accordingly.

The volunteer project was borne from learner forums, which highlighted a need for more individual help for low level learners; language practice sessions for ESOL learners; support workshops for higher levels and ICT training and support.

Approach

To ensure viability, we decided to use a volunteer team to provide the extra support needed. We thought if we input an initial investment of time to support learners and empower them to develop independent learning strategies, it would pay dividends in the long term.

The project was piloted in Dartford so we could measure success and solve any problems before planning a countywide roll out.

Pilot Plan:
1. Identify learner needs through further investigation with learners and tutors.
2. Organise activity timetable and set up infrastructure to support project.
3. Development of learner self-assessment; progression and progression summary forms to be used to monitor progress from learner and volunteer perspectives.
4. Volunteer recruitment.
5. Volunteer DBS checks, training and CPD including MOODLE volunteer hub and TEAM app.
6. Volunteer training on self-assessment and progress support forms.
7. Volunteer management and ongoing support.
8. Volunteer rewards.
9. 6 weekly reviews for learners
10. Project review
11. Organisational buy in.
12. Dissemination of project.
13. Roll out to county and external partners

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

The self-assessment tool has proven to be very useful. It was designed to facilitate discussion between learners and volunteer support workers. We noted that the inclusion of social, personal development and British Values allowed us to see more of the learner as a whole person rather than someone who had to develop their English skills. Interestingly the social skills were often affected by the technical. For example, one learner said he was not always assertive because his spoken English was poor. As learning progressed and English improved so did the social element.

Confidence helped learning and, in turn, learning helped confidence.

All learners discussed British Values with much confidence. They demonstrated strong moral compasses and spoke passionately about their beliefs. It resulted in a feeling of success from the outset. Learners appeared to feel valued.

I believe an interesting point for research has arisen with the identification of perceptions of British Values; are they not humanist values? Irrespective of background or culture our learners (within the demographic for this project) cited strong beliefs in mutual respect; intolerance of discrimination; making informed life choices and taking responsibility for them.

Self assessment progress chart ML Dec 19

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never	comments
Achievements						
I can work well on my own			Sometimes			
I can work well as part of a team				Rarely		Health issue is currently affecting social skills
I can concentrate on a task			Sometimes			
I can complete everyday forms					never	
I can follow instructions		Often				
I am good at spelling					never	
I can write a sentence			Sometimes			
I can use technology for everyday things					never	
Social						
I am able to be assertive			Sometimes			
I handle conflict well				Rarely		
I am tolerant of other people				Rarely		
I am good at listening	Always					
I am a confident person			Sometimes			
I can take responsibility when things go wrong	Always					
I communicate well			Sometimes			
Personal Growth						
I am willing to learn new things	Always					
I wish to succeed	Always					
I try to maintain a healthy lifestyle	Always					
I don't give up easily on things	Always					
British Values						
I respect other peoples' views and expect the same	Always					
I can discuss and agree on class rules with others	Always					
I make my own choices in life	Always					
I don't tolerate discrimination	Always					

Figure 5a-1: Learners complete specially designed self-assessment forms with the support of a volunteer

It was beneficial for learners to reflect on their studies after a 6-week period. Again, the self-assessment tool was used to facilitate a discussion where the learner could reflect on progression and chart their current position. This was then compared to the last reflective self-assessment log to see if there was any change. In all cases there was positive progression.

Figure 5a-2: Kent CLS learners practising their English and maths skills by engaging in Lunch Club activities.

One to one time allowed us to focus on individuals and their learning styles. We were able to facilitate learner self-discovery about learning and develop appropriate learning strategies. This empowered learners to take control of their learning and develop outside of the classroom.

Independence was growing as self-belief was developing. For example: one learner worked out that reading wasn't just about putting letters and words together. He also looked at context and clues. He realised that he could understand the gist of things without being able to read every word. This gave him the confidence to try.

He lost his fear and started to practise reading everywhere he went:

> "I'm no longer frightened of reading. It's in there. I just have to unlock it"
>
> **(ML, functional skills English learner)**

He started to select the DVDs he wanted to watch through using strategies he had learnt to piece together information. Before this point he had relied on his father to choose for him.

Using a Lunch Club as a learning platform was very effective. We set it up for low level learners who attended English in the morning and maths in the afternoon. Learners had a 1.5-hour break in between sessions, so we used half the time for one-to-one study and half for Lunch Club. Lunch Club involved learners discussing food choices; researching prices and nutrition; shopping; designating a treasurer, buyer and food prepper - it was a social as well as educational event.

Our volunteer devised maths questions for learners to work on, as well as exploring naturally occurring English skills. For example: How many sandwiches can you make from this loaf of bread? How much does the bill add up to and what do you each have to pay? What is the expiry date on that ham and what does it mean? Why are bananas good for you? What do you think of?

The learners thoroughly enjoyed the lunch club experience and the educational aspect:

> "Lunch Club is a very good thing to do. I am enjoying it. When I came to the class, I was not doing well but now I get extra support, I am doing better and look forward to coming to class."
>
> **(DD, ESOL Learner)**

> "Lunch club is good because it helps me to budget. I like to help prepare the food and I enjoy the lunch and being with friends. I like choosing a menu and talking about the food. The one to one practice is very helpful"
>
> **(PD, Functional Skills English learner)**

After the first lunch, learner LS stated:

> *"I can't believe we got all that for £1.68. What a bargain! I've really enjoyed the lunch and learning side of it."*

We introduced new foods to taste and then encouraged discussion about smell, sight, taste and touch. Using the senses facilitated improved, and sometimes sophisticated use of adjectives. LS was very animated:

> *"I really like this persimmon. I like its attractive orange colour. I like its delicious taste."*

DD had an opposing view:

> *"I don't like it at all. It has a weird look to it. It has a boring taste and the texture is too hard."*

Interestingly, learners were using vocabulary they wouldn't normally use in class. However, they are adults with life experiences and their own lexicons, which would not necessarily be reflected in their writing. It demonstrates we cannot make assumptions about vocabulary based solely on written evidence. One-to-one time can afford us more time for verbal assessment and a better understanding of the individual.

We will continue with this sensory exercise with the objective of learners adopting adjective use in a natural way and then transferring the skill to written work.

Learners started to explore nutrition independently and have been making healthier choices. Some have swapped cola for water and herbal tea. They have chosen to eat a boiled egg and salad over a ham and pickle sandwich.

The volunteer has a qualification in Food Hygiene so has been able to transfer practical knowledge to the designated food prepper. I believe the impact of Lunch Club is wider than English and maths. It is also instrumental in people making informed choices and improvements in lifestyle. It is a perfect demonstration of Kent County Council's ethos of improving lives.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

So far, investing in one to one time to develop learner confidence and independence is really paying off. Everyone involved is noticing a difference, showing that **'time' is a sound economical investment.** Tutors, volunteers and learners are working together in a very cohesive way, helping learners become independent and responsible individuals.

Working on this project has helped us connect more deeply with literature, debating, discussing and contesting established research in relation to our own findings.

We found it interesting to compare our findings to Hattie (2015), who was investigating how we learn and what motivates us to do so. Hattie says a common objection to his work is that he ignores poverty as a barrier to learning. He claims he does not. He describes poverty as *"a killer of high expectations and encouragement to succeed"*, and believes teachers should forward everyone a positive experience:

> *"It is my view that we educators cannot do much to fix poverty. Instead we can offer the best chances to help students, no matter what their home situation is."*
>
> **Hattie (2015)**

Having impoverished learners on our programme, Hattie's point is relatable. However, our experience with learners reveals that not all will experience enough positive impact from their teachers' high expectations to alleviate the damaging impact of poverty. Our work is supporting learners to gain confidence and independence. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that poverty is a structural issue – our high expectations alone cannot alleviate learners' experiences of poverty.

We also considered Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), where basic human needs must be met before a raise in attainment can occur effectively. This means a lack of money is a real barrier and not just simply an issue of attitude resolvable by a teacher's input, as in Hattie's own

experience. Most of our pilot learners are poor and must be extremely careful with their finances to survive, a constant worry to them.

Our extra-curricular activities have provided a safe, secure environment where learners can make connections. The extra attention and the practical work on budgeting has helped learners to think about providing their own solutions. This has helped break down barriers, provide positive learning outcomes and create self-esteem – a positive step in motivation according to Maslow's theory.

Hattie also discusses teacher aides as a distraction. He says they are popular among teachers, but Blatchford et al (2012) couldn't find any evidence to support learner progression through aides. Hattie states:

> *"Those students receiving the most support from teacher aides made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no support from teacher aides."* (Hattie, 2015, p.31)

Within this project, we have witnessed our volunteer support workers make a big difference to learner motivation and progression. However, they work differently to the aides Hattie describes. Importantly, volunteers work alongside tutors and support what is happening in the curriculum.

Volunteers are trained and receive ongoing training/mentoring; they are taught to assess and develop learner independence.

I believe this approach towards developing our volunteer team has made all the difference. Our findings reflect other FE-based research, including Redcar and Cleveland College's work on effective partnerships between teachers and Learning Support Assistants (ETF, 2018).

We have now started to work in collaboration with external partners to widen volunteer participation. It not only benefits learners but also provides potential volunteers with learning and training possibilities.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Eight learners have been involved in this pilot and have been progressing and achieving well in both English and soft skills. Lunch Club has been a great opportunity for learners to practise skills in a discreet way.

Our two case studies and supporting materials (including learner self-assessments; volunteer records and learner progress summaries) are a general indicator of the learner group and the progress they have made.

The one-to-one time given to learners has enabled learners and volunteers to co-construct strategies for independent learning. Learners are using these strategies outside of the classroom and growing in confidence in their abilities. They have progressed to the point where they can now be given work to do and left for short periods of time. They are understanding more about their own learning styles and thinking of ways to enhance their learning themselves.

It is too early to tell if there will be an effect on retention, although one learner was going to leave due to mental stress as he felt overwhelmed in the normal classroom environment. We gave him some extra one-to-one time, which helped enormously, and he stayed with us.

With a growing awareness of mental health issues and its effects, learning providers must become more proactive, promoting understanding and developing strategies for those learners in need. It is a complex issue, but a common thread is a need to build confidence, resilience and coping skills. Our project is helping learners develop these skills and we hope to see an increase in retention rates in the future.

Learning from this project

Lunch Club has been a very natural and effective way of practising English, maths and social skills. It also provides a forum where learners can discuss food from other countries and learn about different cultures, giving learners opportunities for social interaction they may not otherwise get. It has many positive aspects, and we believe it will be good practice to replicate cross-county.

The timing of extra-curricular initiatives is important. We noticed learners would not come in especially for this extra support even though they had requested it. We had to abandon one session due to lack of uptake and reschedule it on a day when the learners were already in the building and engaged with learning. Extra-curricular work between classroom sessions was popular and effective. We also found that extra-curricular work was more effective when we booked a separate room. Learners were distracted in their classroom as tutors and TAs were still present to prepare for the next lesson.

An interesting point to note: all learners on this project asked to take part. Nobody was compelled to join in. This could be one motivating factor towards the good progress made so far. We are hoping that others will see the benefits and take up the offer and we intend to continue to work on strategies to engage these harder to reach clients.

Collaboration with mainstream tutors has been vital. Collaborative work has enabled us to tie extra-curricular activity in with teaching, so they work in harmony to benefit the learner. This has helped reinforce classroom learning and will potentially improve achievement too.

The project has highlighted what a valuable resource a volunteer can be. Their contribution can be even more valued when it is pro-active and adds an extra dimension to the learning experience. The volunteers at CLS are viewed as part of the wider teaching team; they have management, support, training and CPD like any other staff member. Some are working towards a role as a teaching assistant or practitioner.

Ongoing training with a designated volunteer trainer has been important for the volunteer team to develop their skills and confidence. They are a very keen team who spend much of their own time researching teaching, learning and assessment. The team currently has four volunteers, each of whom who wish to work in education. There was one other, but he has now left volunteering to teach German for our organisation. He is studying for his teaching qualification at the same time.

The dual aspect of caring for learners and for volunteers is paying off as everyone appears valued and motivated. It is important to work closely with tutors so there is mutual respect and understanding, and everyone can work as a team towards shared goals.

We concur with Hattie's advocation to create circumstances for success and "remove barriers in whatever way possible." However, it is naive to think improvement is solely borne from a learner being influenced by a positive teacher attitude. Our research has shown that well used extra time to forge connections and learn about individuals has been invaluable for progress. Volunteers have been instrumental to this success. It is important to reiterate however that volunteers must be well trained and supported.

Accurate record keeping is essential to monitor the impact of this work. We have only just started but are already getting extremely positive feedback from all concerned.

Taking a hands-on approach as project lead has been vital. My work training volunteers helped me understand the impact of the project and notice where improvements could be made. For instance, I soon became aware that not all volunteers keep the same standard of comprehensive records. This is an area for further development, as constant monitoring and feedback is vital to understand the impact of our work.

We feel very positive that we will see good results over the next year and will encourage action research within the learning environment to ascertain and adopt best practice. We have now expanded our activity to Gravesend and will provide extra support for 70 learners with the aid of seven volunteers.

5b. Can the improvement of systems and practice lead to improved outcomes for learners?

Petroc
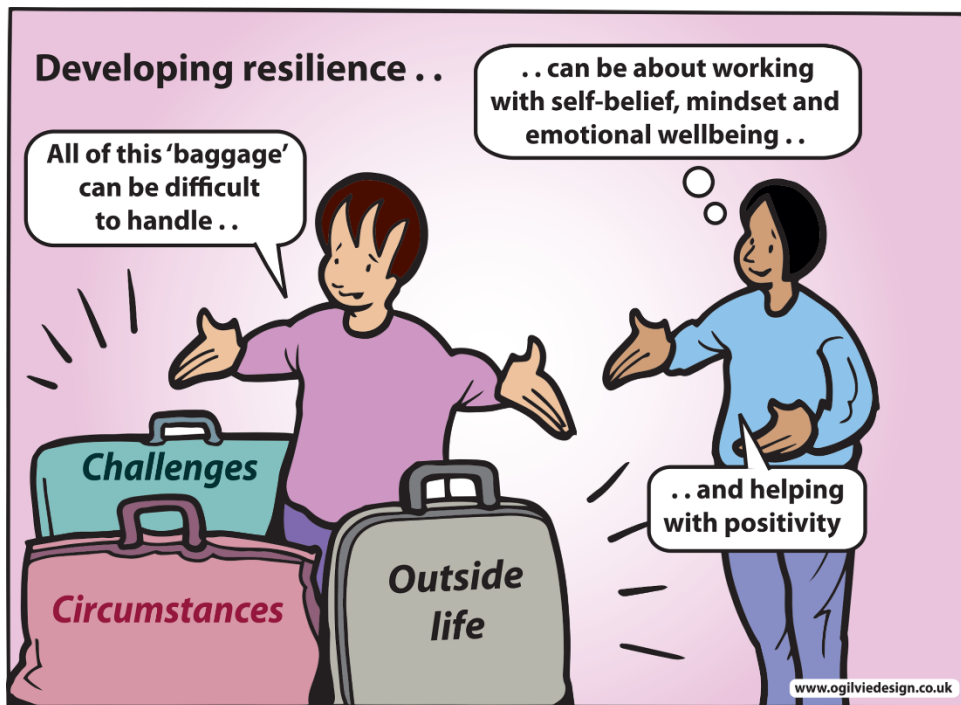
This project investigated learner response to a restructured English curriculum, with metacognition at its core. Learners swapped one hour of English teaching a week for an instructor-led VESPA session, focusing on the development of independent skills for learning and knowledge acquisition.

Summary

In the summer term 18/19, our teaching team embraced the concept of VESPA (Oakes and Griffin, 2019). As a college, we acknowledged that improving outcomes did not simply lie in addressing gaps in knowledge but also through addressing a lack of motivation, organisation and identifying appropriate learning strategies.

In the short time available we worked with two English cohorts on VESPA (vision, effort, systems, practice and attitude) by embracing Oakes and Griffin's suggested activities. The two groups who experienced this different focus in teaching did remarkably well and we saw a significant improvement in progress.

Our findings have raised as many questions as answers, highlighting the need for contextualised approaches to 'off the shelf strategies'. Of particular significance are improvements in learners' attendance and confidence. Moving forwards, we hope that our VESPA approaches will also assist learners who experience anxiety and fear when working independently in exams.

Rationale

In 18/19 we witnessed the widening of the attainment gap for our more vulnerable learners. What has become evident to myself and colleagues is the problem does not rest solely in ability. Expectations and learned behaviours are thwarting achievement and are creating a cycle of failure. Many students when asked to articulate their feelings on resitting English, expressed feelings such as, *"I just can't pass"* and, *"my teacher told me last year that I would pass."*

Previously, we had assumed that learners 'can't be bothered' when in fact they didn't have the 'practice' skills for independent study. Many cannot organise or record notes effectively - the process of learning, for some, like reading a book without understanding the words. Not understanding how to learn left learners frustrated and disengaged.

We tolerated 'learned behaviours' and we didn't challenge fixed mindsets. We assumed that mindsets couldn't change. Our views on this were challenged however, when we noticed learners who were committed and focused in their year one, became less so in year two.

We realised that we needed to make changes to support out learners. Not every learner implicitly understands how to learn; lack of access to learning strategies can lead to lack of confidence in ability as learners simply don't know what to do with new information.

The Working Memory Model (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974) cites the need for students to apply their learning through independent practice. Without reinforcement, information cannot become knowledge or skill (Oakes and Griffin, 2019).

We offer 3-hour blocks of English teaching but realised that students require coaching as well as teaching. To sustain a growth mindset within a cohort takes time, practice and an individual approach. Learners need coaching time in order to break down barriers and misconceptions. Staff also need coaching in leading independent thinking.

During this project, we explored the impact of replacing one English curriculum hour per 3-hour session with an hour of VESPA work, known in our college as 'The Power Hour'.

Approach

In order to implement VESPA strategies for independent learning, we revised our scheme of work from 3 hours of English delivery to 2 hours.

The third hour was spent with an instructor, who facilitated independent learning activities including: note taking, revision strategies and organisers.

Each term was designed with a different focus, helping build skills for learning. Term 1 focused on independent learning skills, term 2 on vision and progress and term 3 on systems and practice.

Each week, a range of strategies and activities were explored to support learners with their English learning, as shown in Figure 5b-1.
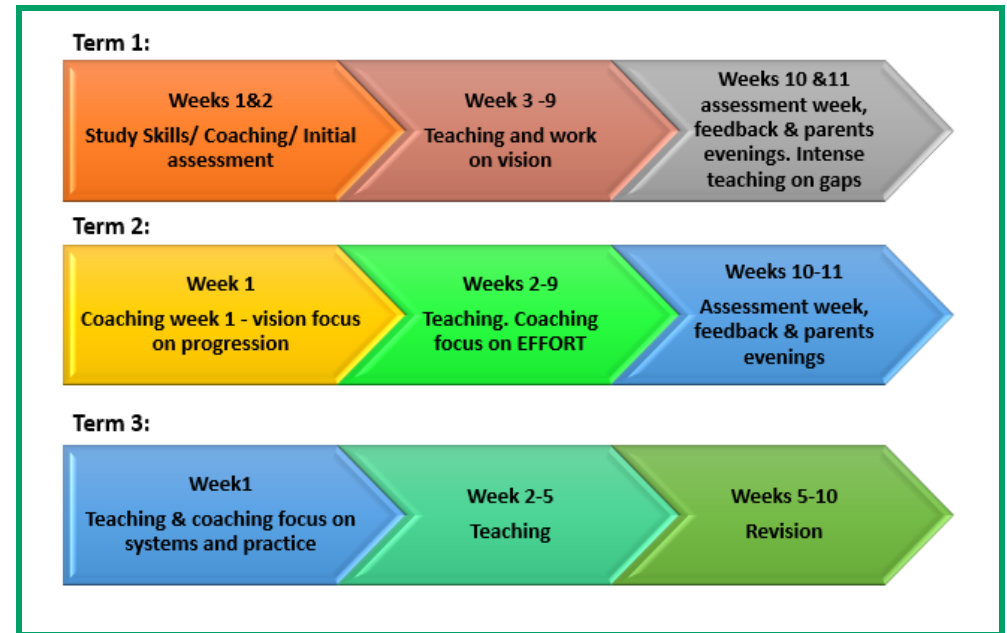

Figure 5b-1: Strategies and activities

The sessions centred on developing metacognition were separate to teaching sessions and had two intended outcomes; for learners to become aware of how they create knowledge and for learners to feel supported to regulate their behaviours in the process. As a college with a high proportion of learners with SEND, this was an especially important consideration.

Students and parents were informed of our new approach to teaching and learning. However, the cohort was not made aware that we were undertaking action research. We made this decision because we identified trust as a barrier to learning; could the uncertainty of an action research project jeopardise trust for students who have already lost confidence in education post GCSE failure?

In order to monitor the impact of the new 'Power Hour', students undertook discussion-based assessments at the beginning, mid and end points of the project, using Oakes and Griffin's (2019) 'vision questions'. Students have also completed a survey and have answered questions based on VESPA with particular focus on Systems and Practice.

As the project has continued, we have introduced additional questions for the case study interviews. These also include questions informed by Rosenshein's Principles in Action (Sherrington, 2019).

In January (post mock exam), ten-minute interviews were conducted with students so they could share their perspectives on the impact of our VESPA activities. This helped us understand whether learners were effectively applying VESPA strategies during their English learning. The interviews also helped us understand the impact of these strategies in relation to exam preparation and performance.

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

In addition to our separate instructor hour, lecturers are also embedding VESPA activities within teaching sessions. For example, the prioritisation grid is used to judge confidence in learners and often follows a 'hinge point' question (Wiliam, 2011) when checking for learning.

Asking colleagues to alter and adapt existing teaching and learning practices was not without challenge – an important consideration for anyone trying to effect cultural change within their setting. An unexpected challenge was a lack of motivation from a small number of staff to make changes to their practice. In these instances, staff did not necessarily need to improve content knowledge but, in the spirit of Wiliam's 'love the one you're with strategy,' we soon realised that for motivational work with learners to occur, motivational work with staff was also required.

Many teachers in the department were concerned that we were substituting content with wellbeing strategies. However, as a project team, we agree with Fisher (2013) that, 'education can, in other words, not only impart knowledge but also teach powerful capabilities for evaluating and applying such knowledge.' Colleagues who are invested see the benefits but agree with our project's finding that a stand-alone instructor lesson does not always lead to independent practice transferring to taught sessions. This was an important moment in our research, illustrated in the reflection below:

Our group 1 students who practised the motivation diamond in the facilitated session will still question the point of the length of the session in the taught session. As the term has progressed, we have advised the teaching team to refrain from using the term 'VESPA lesson.' The student interviews in January prove that this worked to some degree as many students when questioned about the effectiveness of the session responded with, 'we don't have VESPA just English.' However, we have continued to see a disconnect where learned, positive behaviours are apparent in the instructor session and not the core English session. Is this due to a different level of trust being built between instructor and student or is it the instructor's greater capacity to embed systems and practice? Again, we did not anticipate the impact of the personality or the capability of the Instructor when predicting outcomes.

(Project team reflection)

Similarly, with learning, teachers need to fully understand the Working Memory Model. During assessment in week 6 and week 10, learners' results did not demonstrate above expected progress scores - research suggests that this is not a bad outcome. According to Bjork (2007), 'the more they struggle and the worse they fail, the better the long-term memory'. Shifting perceptions and feelings around failure are important, especially for GCSE resit learners.

We also assessed attitudes to learning, with interesting findings. Learners responded favourably to questions about their English lessons in week 6, and this improved again in week 10. Typical questions on the survey included:

How do you feel when you are in English lessons?

How do you feel when you have a challenging English question?

The surveys conducted in instructor sessions demonstrated more favourable responses than those conducted in taught sessions. This could be due to several influences. The activities in the instructor session are created with the intention of raising self-esteem and motivation, is this quickly lost in the traditional classroom setting?

As previously stated, we haven't seen significant improvement in terms of attainment during formal assessment. This leads us to believe that improving systems and practice is not enough. We also need to acknowledge other factors when examining progress.

According to Melby-Lervag and Hulme (2013) the following are high and low impact factors:
- Low impact factors - Ability groupings & buildings
- High impact factors – Classroom practice and poverty

Our level 1 cohort has a significantly high percentage of disadvantaged learners (27%), can improving systems and practice help bridge gaps in learning or just create new knowledge? If it is the latter, how do we make this better? We have previously streamed learners with a prior attainment of grade 3 and in 2018, this had little impact as a significant number of learners with grade 3 prior attainment were on their third resit. The data suggested that exam fatigue and a break in trust (in systems and teachers) had a greater influence on outcome than sitting with peers who have a similar starting point.

To improve gaps in learning, we decided to introduce a Knowledge Organiser in week 15. We can give learners a framework such as timetables and learning/organisational strategies but we also need to give them resources that complement these strategies. We can't just assume they can apply new strategies to traditional teaching and resources. Again, we will check for progress in week 24.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The project has conveniently coincided with the new EIF that clearly supports student wellbeing and preparation for work and further study.

We have shared our VESPA schemes of work with colleagues in all curriculum areas. The most powerful collaborations at Petroc have been between the tutor support team and instructors. At the start of the project, we anticipated that we would uncover gaps in learning and more effectively address the obstacles that thwart independent learning such as students' inability to identify how they learn best.

We have uncovered more significant influences that affect student learning. One of the questions asked in the January interviews with students was, 'How do you feel about English lessons?' The answers ranged from, 'I hate it,' to 'I feel pressured,' and 'It's better than school.'

We took time to investigate the more negative findings and found that a significant number of students required learning support that was not in place in school. Years of struggle and persistent feelings of failure leads to resistance now. Further Education colleges are also at a disadvantage to sixth form colleges who have smoother transitions for post-16 learners and experience fewer barriers to sharing information. We have been able to support and identify even more learners through the project.

Many students had previously resisted support as they viewed it as embarrassing and a confirmation of failure. At Petroc, we have 'support' in classroom settings but have removed the label. We now simply "team teach" in order to bring support into the classroom.

Moving forward, it is evident that the need for VESPA and coaching is more prolific in Level 1 learning. This by far has been the cohort that has evidenced improvements in attitudes and attendance through the project. In 2021, we will be offering two hours of coaching and study skills as part of the three hour delivery.

We feel strongly that the project has demonstrated that learners have to be ready to learn before any new knowledge can be created. To be ready to learn, they need more than a pen, they need to feel safe, accepted, understood and confident in the teachers around them.

We also need teachers who have the capability to create a tolerant, energised and trusting space. We have introduced a 'praise board' at Petroc based on the findings of Rob Plevin (2019). Staff record positive actions of learners that are discussed in the staffroom and reinforced by all teachers in the classrooms. We are fortunate to have a team of staff who demonstrate emotional intelligence in abundance.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

We feel strongly that we (students and teachers) have benefited greatly from this project. We have seen improving trends in data, particularly in attendance. Petroc College's average attendance currently is between 75-80% in English and maths but in the focus groups this has improved to 85% and 93%, 15% above current college averages.

At times, it does feel that the same negativity amongst learners exists but in actual fact when a learner states, 'I've had enough now' I also interpret this as a sign of trust and confidence in me as a teacher to think on my feet and address their needs.

From the learner interviews we also see progress in the ability of learners to self-identify areas that are challenging. One student who has autism commented:

> *'My teacher knows when I'm struggling with difficult words and will make things more simple when I feel overwhelmed.'*

The learner also commented that he is no longer, *'afraid of English.'* This learner also described teachers at a previous setting as 'aggressive.' On further questioning, it became evident that this was more likely frustration, as this very able learner has previously described, 'shutting down' when things became challenging.

We have also seen some improvements in effort. A simple method in achieving this outcome is consistency and clarity in expectation. Surprisingly, two learners involved in the study have withdrawn from their vocational course but have requested to stay on for maths and English only. When questioned, one responded with, *"I know what I need to do for English."* In addition to this, the student also has clear vision. He wishes to achieve an apprenticeship and will require maths & English.

Learning from the project

The project has been an incredibly rewarding experience and for the project team - it has changed the way we look at the delivery of both English and maths. Previously, we had assumed that supporting learners meant awarding more hours to core teaching, the findings from this project suggest there is merit in other approaches.

We now understand that learning will only be effective when the student is open to learning, feels safe and secure in the learning environment, can be empowered through self-regulation and truly sees the importance of learning. This project has given us the strategies to promote and create the learning situations above.

We also previously believed that mastery (the cementing of knowledge) was achieved through repetition of the same tasks. This belief has been tested during the project as we have seen learners progress through trying new ways of learning and remembering.

The activities listed in the VESPA programme have allowed learners to identify strategies that best support them to learn. This we truly believe will help narrow the attainment gap for both our disadvantaged and Level 1 learners in our summer examinations.

The project has also shown us that we can't offer the same delivery pattern to Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 learners and expect the same progress. We believe that some cohorts will benefit from a greater degree of support with systems and practice than others. We see this project as our first action research cycle, next we will focus on how to achieve accelerated progress for Level 1 learners, as well as developing a research programme specifically for maths, exploring how to address low levels of vision and self-esteem.

5c. Meeting Individual Learners' Needs: The Promotion and Development of Strategies for Individualised Learning

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
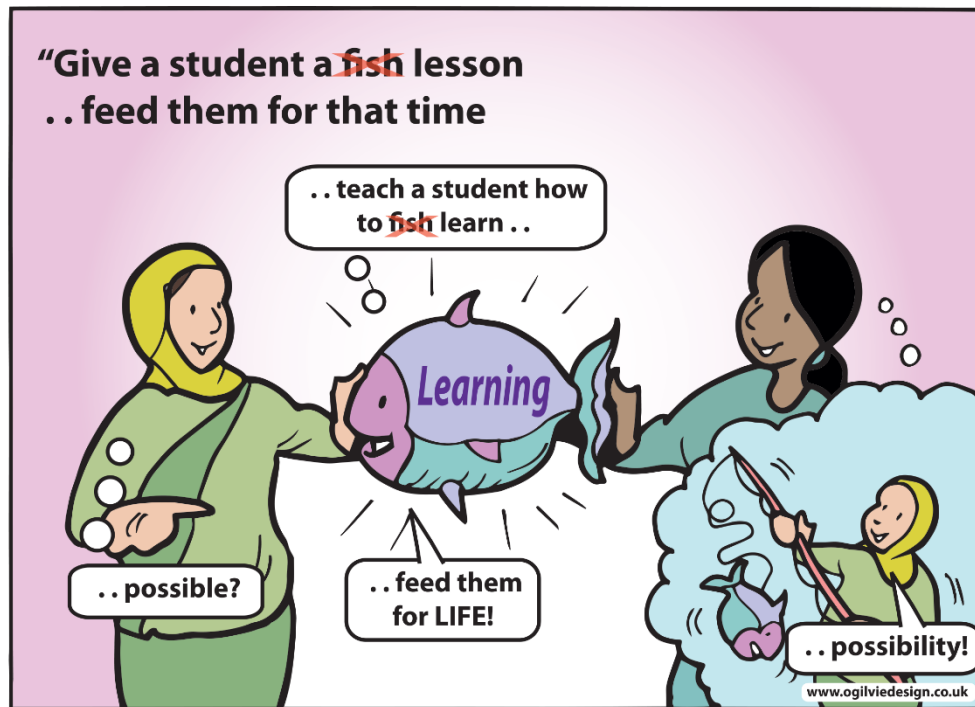
Active learning strategies are encouraged in FE, but how can practitioners determine whether the strategies they employ are helpful for pre-entry and ESOL learners? This project used learner feedback to select, pilot and reflect upon the effectiveness of different active learning techniques for pre-entry level and ESOL learners.

Summary

RBKC currently subcontracts adult learning with eleven organisations. Practitioners from four organisations - Kensington and Chelsea College (FE College), Clement James, Westway and Nova New Opportunities (third sector organisations) conducted mini-action research projects with learners within their own settings. It was important to collect and ask learners for feedback about what they would like more of in class, what they wanted less of and what they wanted to continue. The feedback was organised and collected by tutors in a range of different ways. This participatory approach informed the active learning strategies and skills to be tested by the tutors.
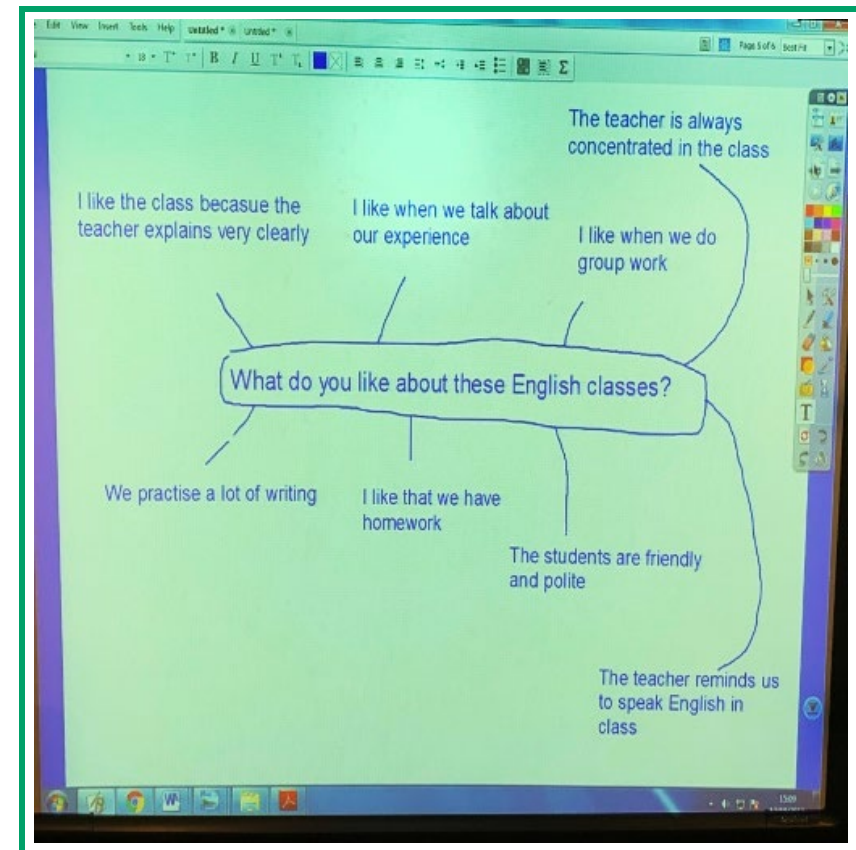

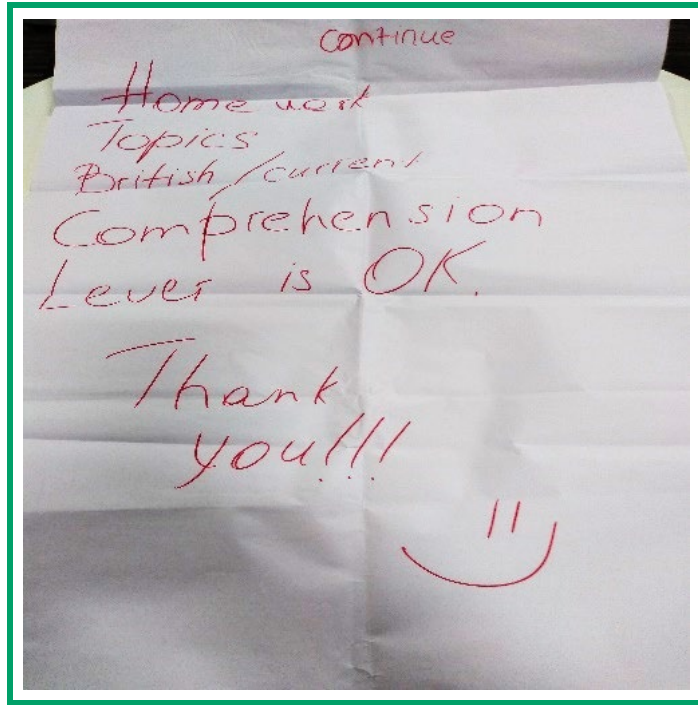Figure 5c-1: Feedback collected on an interactive whiteboard

Figure 5c-2: Feedback collected on a flipchart

Rationale

In-house and external observations and a recent Ofsted report indicated that some opportunities for involving learners in lessons were missed. In these lessons, opportunities to make use of learners' prior knowledge and life experiences (their schematic knowledge) needed exploration. This is especially important for English teaching and learning, where 'every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well' (Stott, 2007).

Work was also required to reduce teacher talk time and develop opportunities for personalised and active learning.

Tutors need encouragement and support to embed opportunities for independent learning, so learners can develop skills that help maintain a joy of learning whilst also continually improving their prospects. This was particularly important for RBKC, as tutors often work off-site in community centres, away from managers and colleagues.

The aim of this project was to use action research to explore how the challenges highlighted above could be met. In order to do this, we set the following objectives:

- To develop a community of practice, where positive and trusting relationships are built between organisations, managers and tutors.
- To create opportunities for tutors to develop their skills through peer-to-peer working and reflection.
- To enable tutors to access and generate a range of strategies and active learning techniques to meet learner's individual needs, helping build confidence and independent learning skills.

Approach

The Project Leader selected a team of seven tutors and four managers to promote and develop strategies for individualised learning. The team engaged with regular project and tutor meetings, and completed a programme of professional development, including action research training and training in various active learning strategies (e.g. phonetic approaches, flipped learning; assessment for/as learning; active reading techniques).

Managers and tutors alike were encouraged to undertake research, with the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) explored as a potential model of reflection. A tutor from a previous ETF peer exchange project shared active learning strategies she had already trialled, helping tutors decide which strategies they wanted to explore with learners.

A learner feedback tool was then disseminated for learners to complete called 'Stop, Start, Continue'. This was designed as a quick exercise, often undertaken with the tutor away from the classroom so as not to influence the learners. Data was also collected from questionnaires, practice observations, videos of learner feedback, learner evaluations and tutor reflections.

The Tutors decided and chose from learner feedback which techniques for active learning they would like to try. They gathered evidence from their sessions as to how effective the techniques were regarding learner engagement and confidence.

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

Sue Davidoff and Owen van den Berg (1990) suggest four steps for action research: plan, teach/ act, observe and reflect. The project used this as a basis to develop tutors' own action research, helping them take responsibility for their own development, CPD needs and planning. Critical friendships and peer observations were also encouraged; valuable opportunities for tutors to analyse and learn from one another's practice.

Tutors used learner feedback to assess what learners would like more of, using this feedback to select active learning techniques. Challenges around gathering learner feedback included: difficulties accessing online questionnaires; time constraints; learners having the confidence and analytical skills to communicate what they wanted. Such challenges demanded contextualised approaches so learners could fully participate.

For example, one tutor used translation to overcome low levels of English with their pre-entry class. Learner feedback was often not what was expected too. For instance, some learners, when asked how they liked to learn, stated they would like more input from the tutor. At times, tutors also observed learners feeling uncomfortable providing feedback about teaching strategies:

> *"Student's didn't want to fill in anything from 'Stop' part of activity. Found it uncomfortable."*
> **ESOL Tutor**

The examples above illuminate important cultural considerations, for participatory research and regarding learner reception to active learning strategies.

Nevertheless, the results from engaging with what learners want more of and trialling the active learning strategies were overwhelmingly positive. Tutors used a range of active learning strategies and developed a series of innovative resources, including: a chant for spelling based on phonics, discussion storyboards, spelling strategy PowerPoints, learner question and answer review sessions, peer assessment tools).

Feedback from tutors included:

On using a chant for spelling based on phonics:

> *"This exercise helps students to be much more independent when studying a new word. They learn how to practise, to check and correct the word by themselves, and not with the help of the teacher as usual. This is a huge step, especially for pre-entry ESOL students."*

On using grammar self-access material to accelerate learner progress:

> *"I started it a bit late into term. Starting from the beginning of the term would have given me more time to plan and the learners more time to practise the skill."*

On using a spelling strategy game:

> *"In this short game learners really had to work with their memory and find techniques to 'fix' the spelling in their minds – and put the strategies we had talked about into practice. There was a noticeable improvement after just three attempts – you could see learners really trying to look for clues in each word. Before this they would rely on writing the word down and assuming that by writing it, they would remember it. This game helped train them into thinking about the spellings, which is a crucial stage in remembering them for the next time they need to use them. The learners also enjoyed it – especially as the formula began to feel 'familiar.'*

Towards the end of the project, team participants described, summarised and evaluated their participation and identified changes in their teaching, learning and assessment practices. Tutors recognised the value of using more active learning techniques with their learners and developing their own skills. Learners felt more engaged and had a role in steering sessions, often becoming the tutor. Pre-entry learners worked on their own to practise their spelling without being dependent on the tutor.

Tutors recognised that using active learning techniques leads to a role of facilitator rather than knowledge giver. This correlates with the theory of participatory ESOL (Reflect ESOL, 2012) that stems from the work of Paulo Freire (Freire Institute, 2020), a need to move away from a fixed 'knowledge giving' model to one which empowers learners.

Tutors need to see themselves as part of the learning process, and as learners themselves; learning becomes an active dialogue between tutor and learner. Freire advocated a critical pedagogy, where learners were transformed and empowered by the learning, they were involved in.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Monthly team meetings, especially those held off-site, offered opportunity for practitioners to meet, collaborate and share their findings. Bespoke in-house and external CPD opportunities for managers and tutors during the project also offered an excellent basis for development.

The sharing of knowledge and experience by tutors has resulted in a more open and collaborative way of working. They have recognised the value of action research and using different techniques in their classes as well as how much more progress learners can make when they are more independent.

A tutor's reflections on using a peer assessment spelling gap resource:

> *"The learners commented that this was very useful – especially seeing all the sentences typed up in the correct form. It's satisfying for them to get their own efforts offered back as learning texts."*

A tutor's reflections on using a spelling chant strategy:

> *"90% of learners at stage 2 can remember and write words 85% correctly, huge improvement. The sound really helps them remember their spelling."*

A tutor's reflections on getting learners to write their own Trip Advisor review:

> *"Students were very enthusiastic about this style of activity so from their point of view I think it worked well. Given their equal enthusiasm for practising spelling I might ask them to make a list of spellings from the text and devise a test for another student – or incorporate these into a Kahoot quiz, which are also very popular with this group of students."*

This is especially important for Community Adult learners who are often on the first steps of their learning journey and been identified as hard to reach. Developing independent learning skills and techniques and reducing learners' dependency on the tutor can build resilience which can help them in their daily lives. This will also give them the skills to access information about other courses, employment and voluntary opportunities. The success of implementing active learning techniques in a pre-entry ESOL class proves that it is never too early or indeed challenging to build independent learning skills.

The active learning strategies trialled, developed and refined through reflection, have generated a bank of resources, shared across the service at tutor meetings and through peer observations. Resources will also be piloted in other subjects (e.g. in maths and ICT as embedded English). A tutor's toolkit of collaboratively designed resources will also be developed. This will be the foundation for an online bank of resources for adult community learning tutors.

The action research experiences will be shared with other tutors, hopefully encouraging them to also share techniques, challenges and strategies.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The strategies and resources developed within the project have enabled learners to engage in active learning techniques and activities. This has led to increased confidence and greater engagement with learning, especially when activities reflected real-life situations and schematic knowledge could be elicited:

> *"The learners felt they had contributed to steering the classes. The mini teach before each class taught the learners new skills, which they were able to put into practice straight away. Learners agreed the different themes were an interesting way to build on their conversational skills"*

Entry Level 3 ESOL teacher.

A pre-entry ESOL tutor reported using a phonics-based spelling chant resulted in correct spellings from one letter correct to three or four. Most of the learners can remember and write the word at an earlier stage than previously. This significantly improves the speed at which learners make progress.

An Entry Level 3 literacy tutor reflected that a peer spelling gap fill activity gave some unexpected results:

> *"It turned out to be useful in all sorts of (some unexpected!) ways – throwing up interesting examples of grammar mistakes and making the learners contextualise spellings to show they had understood the meaning. I did the feedback by typing up all the examples (anonymously) and encouraging learners to try and spot the errors and then handing them out a sheet of the correct versions. For ESOL learners in particular this highlighted common area of difficulty and helped them see what they needed to work on."*

An Entry Level 3 ESOL tutor used and adapted grammar resources to practise speaking and compare the past simple and present perfect with a roleplay. This made the learners more active participants. The tutor fed back that learners responded positively and planned to use 'Stop, Start, Continue' to engage learners in co-constructing lesson objectives and planning schemes of work.

> *"Do as a group activity and vote on which ones they want more of. Students respond positively to this."*

An Entry Level 2 ESOL tutor used regular self-access grammar quizzes as an active learning strategy. The tutor reported learners' increased engagement and progression.

> *"Doing this project allowed me to focus part of the lesson on improving a skill that learners wanted to excel or get extra practice on. Learners were engaged and looking forward to this part of the lesson and undertook extra practise away from class."*

A Level 1 Functional Skills tutor reflected that her use of a PowerPoint to provide strategies for learning spellings showed ESOL learners do not find mnemonics useful as they find them too hard to decode. They were more interested in rules, root words and etymology to support them with their spelling.

> *"I discovered that ESOL origin students really aren't interested in mnemonics (or rather, they find them too hard to decode) and as this group is almost entirely ESOL based I would probably not use mnemonics. Given their interest in rules and groups I am wondering about doing more on root words and etymology to explain how some spellings in English have come about."*

An Entry Level 2 ESOL tutor discovered learners wanted to speak better English for work. Learners were asked to research their home countries' festivals and produce a presentation for their class. The tutor found this approach very rewarding; learners became the teacher and enjoyed sharing information about their homelands with the rest of the class.

Figure 5c-3 shows learner work produced after a session on which suffix to use? – tion, -sion, -ssion or -cian. The learners came up with sentences on the whiteboard using words ending in 'shun' sounds such as –tion. The tutor noticed that this active approach to learning spelling yielded greater progression than more passive approaches.
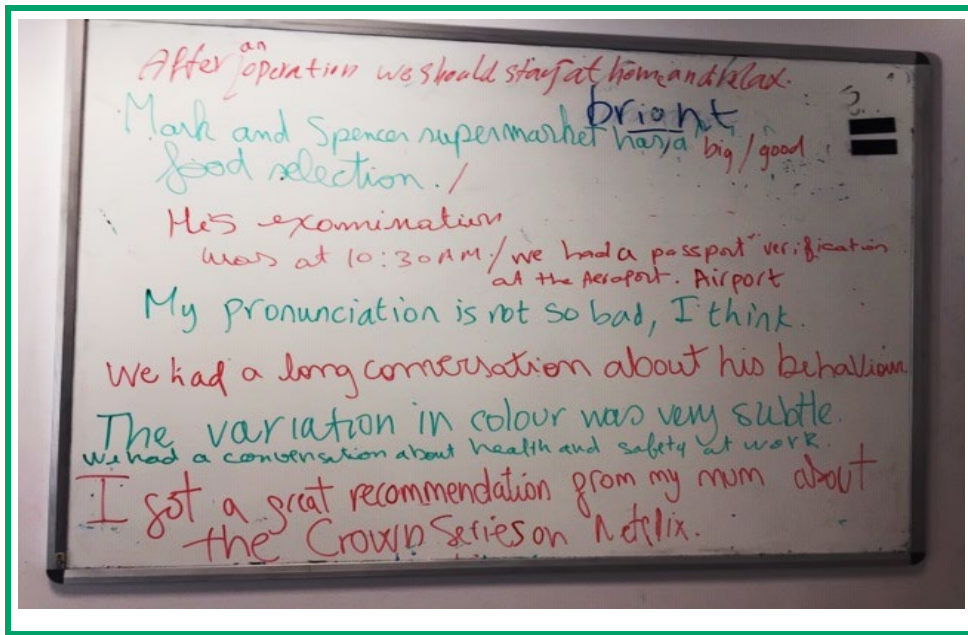

Figure 5c-3: Learner work on which suffix to use

Learning from this project

Active learning techniques can be used with pre-entry and ESOL learners, improving resilience as learners develop and practise independent skills. As well as accelerating learner progress, active learning develops skills for outside the classroom; for employment, accessing healthcare and further education. Our project revealed how learners built their confidence through active learning techniques, for example through role-play to practise speaking and listening.

Tutors value action research as a way of addressing issues in their sessions; the process of reflection helps refine and develop teaching and learning.

Tutors like to work, reflect and develop their skills using a range of different strategies. A prescribed approach does not always work. This was evident from the different methods used to collect learner feedback. An online questionnaire would have provided easier data to analyse but most tutors chose less technical methods. This was also evident from tutors attending CPD and adapting resources, 'pinching and personalising' for learners.

Collecting reliable feedback from learners is often challenging and learners in a community environment can be new at finding their learner voice - they need support with this. Feedback from learners was at times at odds with the project focus of developing independent learner strategies. In two classes, learners stated they wanted more tutor talk and listening to the tutor. This raised important questions regarding cultural factors e.g. learners' need to please the tutor; language barriers affecting communicating opinions and conveying critical thinking; differences in 'accepted' teaching and learning practices.

Some of the challenges of collecting learner feedback were overcome by our community learning tutors, who used translation to support learners to engage. This improved the reliability of the learner feedback, particularly in the pre-entry ESOL classes.

6a. From an exploding folder to a single resource: improving GCSE English resit students' engagement with unseen texts

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College
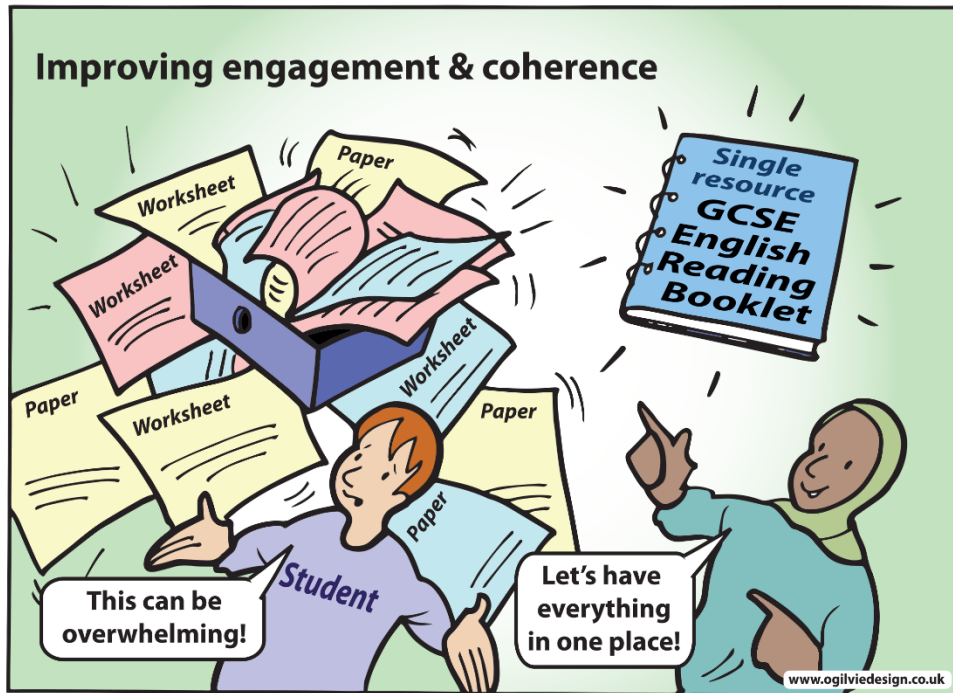
This project produced a 'Term 1 Reading Booklet' for GCSE English Language resit students studying across several campuses at our college. It contained a selection of extracts from a single fiction text, *The Woman in Black* **by Susan Hill. These were interleaved with thematically connected non-fiction texts taken from the 19th and 21st century, with coloured-paper and online versions available to increase its accessibility.**

Summary

The reading booklet represented a change from our previous approach, very commonly adopted in schools and colleges, where students are given a variety of unseen extracts and worksheets as individual handouts that accumulate in their folders over the year. However, it also built on our existing practice by incorporating content and formats we had found previously effective.

Staff and students who used the reading booklet were invited to feed back on it at various points in the first term. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, and this increased our confidence to proceed with creating a follow-up booklet for the second term, informed by suggestions from staff and students on how further to improve it.

Rationale

Staff expressed frustration that individual handouts, used hitherto for the GCSE English resit course, typically ended up stuffed into 'exploding folders' that were eventually binned rather than used for revision. This suggested that our students did not feel a strong sense of ownership over their work. They also reported feeling overwhelmed with paper.

The hope was that by replacing them with a single reading booklet, where materials could be refined and then presented cohesively and coherently, students would feel more on top of materials, and increasingly motivated to keep, and revise from, completed work.

A further positive by-product of using a single resource for teachers was also envisioned: less time spent photocopying 'new' materials each week, or trying to find them from previous weeks, and more time freed up to plan lesson delivery.

Figure 6a-1: An 'exploding folder' from the previous year

The presentation of materials for the reading booklet was informed by relevant educational research, particularly the work of Doug Lemov et al (2016) that shows how breaking longer extracts into 'bite-sized' chunks with questions that encourage close scrutiny of them, and require only short bursts of writing, can help build learner confidence and stamina, particularly important for the first stage of the resit course.

The booklet was laid out with clear headings indicating the focus of the particular section, and the part of the exam it related to. Then, typically, a table of 'useful words and phrases' with definitions would be given that related to that focus. An extract laid out in a similar way to an unseen exam text would be given, and for certain extracts the text would then be broken into chunks chronologically.

Individual questions might be tied to these shorter extracts with space to write directly underneath. Sentence starters might be offered, and prompts given to encourage effective approaches for writing in the exam. Extension tasks were also included to encourage broader thinking about the text and to stretch students who worked more quickly.

A total of six extracts were chosen from the beginning, middle and ending of The *Woman in Black*, and presented chronologically. Extracts that showcased particular structural or linguistic features were selected: for example, the opening of Chapter 2, where London fog is dramatically personified. Time was reserved, usually about 15 minutes, to then read the whole chapter from the book at the end of the lesson.

The twelve chapters were read over the first term, and longer chapters were read across the two weekly lessons. The hope was that this would provide a more immersive reading experience for students, in turn contributing to their overall engagement with the lessons.

In order to avoid narrowing the focus too much by exclusively concentrating on one fiction text we interleaved *The Woman in Black* extracts with thematically connected non-fiction extracts. For example, the previously mentioned extract about London fog was followed by two non-fiction texts: one Victorian extract which described a scene in London when there was dense fog, and another text, written within the last decade, focusing on the issue of air pollution in London. Two other non-fiction extracts relating to the topic of ghosts were included later on in the booklet, once the supernatural theme of the novel had been more fully established.

At the back of the booklet we included two feedback sheets relating to the reading assessments done just before and just after using the booklet. This meant that progress could be tracked and connected to the relevant work that had been completed in the interim between assessment points.

Approach

We worked collaboratively to agree the content of the booklet, and then one teacher was responsible for finalising the resource. Booklets were distributed to teams working across two campuses on four different sites before the start of term, and typically used for about a quarter of overall lesson delivery.

Across the term teachers were encouraged to share feedback and ideas of how they were using the booklet via a Padlet page. Their feedback was then taken and recorded more fully mid-term and at the end of term in a departmental meeting.

Students' views on the booklet were also gathered prior to half-term across classes via a lesson activity that elicited responses about how they felt

'overall' about the Reading Booklet, what they identified as positives, and what they felt were negatives. These thoughts were captured on post-its and were then analysed by the project lead who identified key themes emerging from the responses.

Late in term 1, just after the booklet had been completed, students from several classes were invited to give more detailed responses in relation to the key general themes identified through the earlier feedback. Their ideas were captured on paper-tablecloths and the activity was facilitated by GCSE English teachers from other classes, to encourage more forthcoming responses.

Two students were identified as case studies and interviewed in depth at the end of term 1 about their individual experiences of using the booklet. One student was new to college, and the other was a returning learner, who was taking the resit for a *third* time with us. Examples and extracts of the work the two students produced were also taken as 'souvenirs' of how the booklets had been used.

Ideas generated through this range of feedback activities then informed planning of the booklet for term 2, included more space for teacher comments and feedback, more exam practice questions and writing frames, and the use of shaded pages to signal more clearly to students whether pages related to Paper 1 or Paper 2 of their GCSE exam.

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

Teachers have consistently reported that having the booklet as a 'go to' resource has been extremely helpful in terms of organisational efficiency, tracking learner progress and providing students with a much more coherent revision resource than the individual worksheets it replaced. This has been corroborated by students: 'having everything in one place', clear layout, the ability to 'see' progress and review work done, or know what work had been missed, were frequently cited as key benefits of the resource.

We built activities into the lesson early on to elicit learner feedback on the reading booklet. Opening up a conversation with students at this stage provided a chance for them to influence decisions made about content and materials for the following term. Consequently, we remodelled the reading booklet to reflect their suggestions, visibly demonstrating that their views and comments are valued and have an immediate impact.

We also widened the focus of our second booklet to include extracts from a range of fiction texts, to more closely mirror the exam scenario as the end-point assessment loomed closer. These extracts were chosen from short stories that we also planned to read in their entirety within lessons, to maintain our focus on providing extended reading opportunities to build stamina and deeper engagement.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The reading booklet has freed up time in the first term for teachers to focus on the delivery of lessons because they are no longer gathering texts and creating worksheets week-to-week. Because students have had a single resource 'carried with them', anecdotal evidence suggests it has increased the sense of coherence and continuity for those who have moved classes or had various cover teachers across the term.

In terms of accessibility, there have been some clear benefits of using the reading booklet. Online versions, and coloured copies, have ensured students have had the key reading material for the term in an accessible format that can be reviewed before and after lessons. Additional Learning Support staff, working with students outside of class, have also reported that this has been of benefit, and our Learning Support department have created a new 'ClaroRead friendly' version of the booklet to further improve its accessibility.

An online version of the reading booklet is due to be shared on the Excellence Gateway, and it is hoped in the future that this will stimulate further conversations and collaborations with teaching staff across the sector who may adapt and/or pilot the materials in other contexts.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Students have spent time working from the booklet in one of their two GCSE English lessons each week, providing a consistent focal point that many students have said has helped them feel more 'in control' of their learning for the reading element of the course.

Only 7% of 130 students studying on the 16-19 programme surveyed in the first term reported a negative response to the reading booklet. The other 93% said that overall, it had either helped them feel more organised (37%), or helped with learning (32%), been interesting and enjoyable to use (15%), or simply been 'alright' (9%). Given the low motivation levels that can characterise learners in this context, this positive reaction has been pleasing.

More detailed discussion in the focus groups at the end of term revealed that often students who had criticisms of the booklet were mainly critical of the *content* of the booklet, rather than the use of it to replace individual handouts. Some said they found only analysing fiction extracts from the same text being read in class (*The Woman in Black*) constraining, for example, but they felt overall that the booklet format was helpful.

Both of the students interviewed in more depth reported that having texts, questions, space for answers, terms, definitions and sentence starters 'all in one place' was less overwhelming and had helped improve their motivation to revise at home.

They also both described how the breaking down of exam-style questions into more manageable chunks had improved their confidence in terms of reading analysis skills. Learner A demonstrated much fuller, more detailed responses towards the later pages in her booklet in contrast to earlier pages, which had gaps and shorter answers. Her annotations on the text were purposeful by the end, whereas at the start she had doodled on certain extracts.

ASSESSMENT

The end of term assessment for Learner A also reflected her increased confidence. She related how she had felt able to write far more in her writing assessment than she ever had before in an English exam or assessment. Her response to the language question, which was one the first booklet had focused on in particular, was a well-developed answer that contained some detailed analysis.
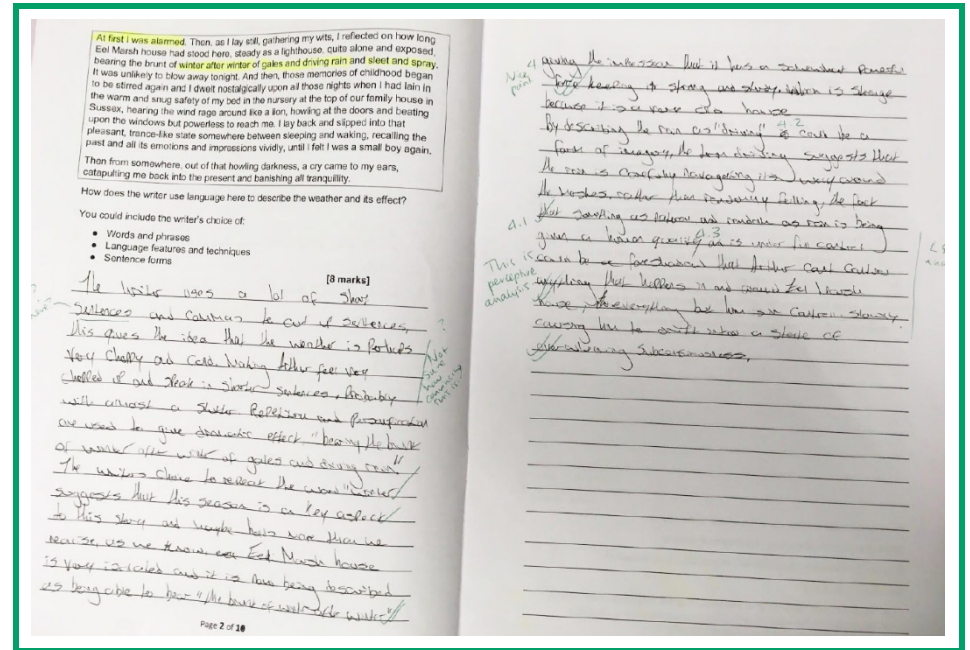

Figure 6a-2: Learner A - assessment in exam conditions

Learner B's initial assessment (which Learner A did not complete) was not developed, in contrast to the writing she produced when she started working from the booklet.

She later spoke about how she felt "daunted" by a "blank page" when faced with exam questions, and how the layout of the booklet, where it was "broken down" helped her to understand how to approach exam-style questions with more confidence.

Learner B took the GCSE exam for the fourth time in November 2019, and she achieved a Grade 5. Before she got her result, she spoke about how having something tangible to 'own' and revise from was beneficial in preparing for the exam, and also how the scaffolded approach of chunking the texts had helped her understand how to approach more in-depth reading analysis that had increased her confidence prior to the exam.

Figure 6a-3: Learner B – booklet work

Learner B's feedback and result challenge a perception from some teachers that the booklet activities might not suitably prepare students for the exam and might not be stretching more able learners. However, the experiences of both these learners do back up feedback from some teachers who have reported that this scaffolded approach has been beneficial for learners who have low *confidence,* rather than low ability. Learning from this project

Having analysed our data we have come to the following conclusions:

- When we were devising and piloting the booklet, there was an unusually high level of staff absence or changeover. This constrained opportunities to collaborate over materials for inclusion in the booklet and to share how it was being used. In the future, we would want to have more collaborative planning meetings, peer observations, and regular contact between staff focused on sharing experiences of using such a resource. We hope this will increase a sense of shared responsibility and endeavour for improving and refining the resource.
- However, the staff absences also highlighted that a potential benefit of such a resource is to provide a useful 'backbone' to lessons being covered by staff with little time to plan or gather their own materials.
- We have already had discussions as a team about how a booklet for the writing focus of the exam could be beneficial. We think there is scope for developing such a booklet that could include useful resources for this element of the course such as terms, definitions, frames, questions and marking codes.
- Teachers have reported that the pre-defined format of the reading booklet can be constraining, and the tricky question of how to balance respect for teacher autonomy and a need to differentiate resources for different contexts with the benefits of this resource, highlighted in this report, requires further interrogation beyond the life of this project. Perhaps in future smaller 'cells', teachers could devise their own versions of a booklet to increase a sense of ownership of the materials for all staff.

It was also a challenge to elicit feedback from staff working on geographically remote campuses and, although a Padlet page was set up, it was underutilised. It is likely that increasing a sense of 'ownership' over materials used in the booklet for all staff using it would further encourage 'buy in' to activities focused on sharing and reflection.

6b. Cognitive profiling for English literacy learning
City Lit
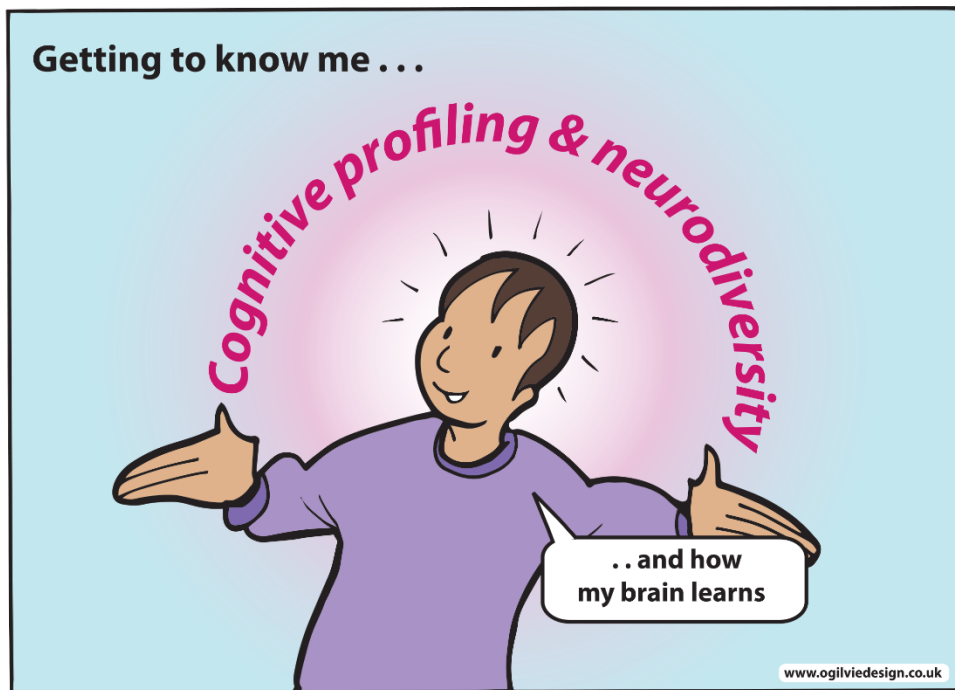
The aim of this project was to understand whether it was possible to use our knowledge of the cognitive profiles of English for Life learners to help us improve our teaching and learning strategies.

Summary

We wanted specifically to understand the neurodiversities of these English learners starting from pre-course assessment and continuing into classroom practice. We felt that, by designing an initial diagnostic assessment to reveal distinct neurodiversities as well as English levels, tutors could become more aware of the cognitive profile of learners from an early stage and develop appropriate learning practices to support better progress.

The project focused on learners in three non-accredited English classes within the Centre for Universal Skills at City Lit, an adult education college in Central London. These English for Life classes (Entry Level 1 – Entry Level 2, Entry Level 3 and Level 1) take a holistic approach to English literacy and communication development through a dedicated curriculum, distinct from Functional Skills.

The learner journeys of two adults from these courses (students AB, CD) were tracked. Four tutors were involved: two from the above courses (both experienced teachers of English literacy to adults); a Learning Support tutor, working one-to-one with learners; and an educational neuroscientist with expertise in SpLD. Other participants included the English coordinator-assessor and the Head of Centre.

Rationale

The rationale, broadly stated, was the need to get to know our English students better.

In 2017-18, it was decided that the Functional Skills curriculum was not suited to all our adult learners, especially those with specific learning difficulties. Progress was often limited with frequent repetition of levels. Therefore, new non-accredited English classes were created to address the specific needs of these learners.

Also, initial research and screening by an educational neuroscientist intimated that some learning difficulties had been mis-identified as dyslexia, either by learners themselves or others: these difficulties could have stemmed from general learning difficulty or other related factors, including speech and language impairment, poor working memory, auditory processing difficulties, short and long-term memory deficits, comprehension difficulties, acute and generalised anxiety, or poor phonological awareness, whether developmental or acquired.

The OTLA project provided an opportunity to develop a curriculum better suited to the neurodiversity of these learners. Also, it was felt that a more specific pre-course assessment that incorporated a screening of the cognitive profiles of our English learners would give us more information about their neurodiversity. Combining these assessment findings with advice from a neuroscientist could inform tutors about what practices might work best for different learners.

We also wondered whether advice from a neuroscientist might help students in literacy classes become more aware of appropriate strategies and practices for improving literacy, providing a language and analytical framework to help learners, tutors, support workers and managers learn more effectively.

Approach

STEP 1 – Develop a screening tool and marking scheme from Entry Level 1 to Level 1

1. Create new assessment materials to provide initial information about a learner's English level and cognitive profile, including:

   o Whole word and phonological spelling/awareness differentiation in reading and writing
   o Word finding ability
   o Working memory
   o Specific language impairment (SLI)
   o Inhibitory control
   o Capacity to comprehend theory of mind
   o Error monitoring
2. Use an on-line marking scheme using colour-coding and comments to enable tutors not expert in screening for SpLD or understanding cognitive profiling to identify levels and learning difficulties.
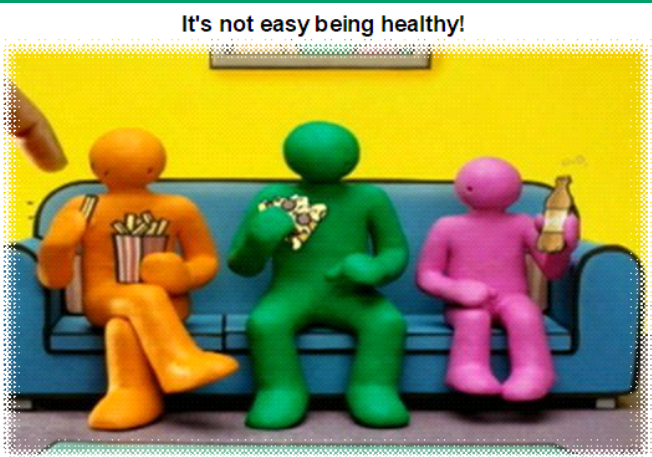
STEP 2 – Assessment and screening of individual learners

Over 30 learners undertook initial assessment and screening: these and marking schemes were also shared with tutors via Google Docs. Seventeen learners diagnosed with specific difficulties in reading and/or writing were considered as project participants.

STEP 3 – Identifying specific case studies

Although we were interested in whole class profiling, we chose to focus on 3 -4 students in each class, 2 as specific case studies.

It's not easy being healthy!

My GP told me that I had to eat less fat because I was at risk of heart disease.

    Easy, I thought. Cutting out fat can't be that hard. I was wrong. It was hard. Fat is everywhere, I found out. Many of the foods I love to eat have unhealthy fats in them. What I didn't know was just how much! So, of course pizza and chips have bad fats but so does red meat.

    It was easy enough to say 'No!' to pizza and chips but it wasn't so easy to give up red meat. Also, sausages had to go. No more sausages for breakfast. No more sausages for dinner. No red meat for any meal.

    I miss red meat and I miss eating pastries and butter, but when you have no choice in the matter, you find other things.

Figure 6b-1: Extract from Entry level Initial Assessment

English For Life L1 Reading and writing mark scheme   NAME ....

* ⊗ no indicators/concerns about SpLD
⊗ possible concern about SpLD /not sure about what SpLD may be presenting (note what the indicators might be in comments column)
⊗ definite concern about SpLD (note what the indicators might be in comments column)

Question	Aspect of literacy assessed	Screening /indicative of SpLD	Possible responses	Comment
1. What does the writer usually write about?	Explicit understanding.		Women's health	
2. How old was the writer when she became mentally unwell?	Explicit understanding.			
3. The writer has written the article to:	Understand the intention /key ideas of the writer. Comprehend explicitly and implicitly.	Reading comprehension. Implied and explicit understanding. Possible SLI, dyslexia ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	Explain how boxing helped her feel better mentally.	
4. In the first paragraph, the writer says she has 'two left feet'. Explain what this means.	Understand idiom. Explain understanding in own words.	Understanding of idiom. ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	Any response similar to: Awkward. To move awkwardly especially when dancing or moving.	
5. In addition to weekly exercises, list three things the writer does to get better.	Explicit understanding. Word Finding.	Word finding and explicit. understanding. Possible SLI. ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	Any of the following three: therapy, mindfulness, more time outdoors, reducing my workload.	
6. Did the writer have enough money to pay a personal trainer? Provide evidence for your answer.	Deduction	Breadth of vocabulary and deduction. ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	She didn't have enough money for a personal trainer. Evidence: 'With some financial support from my parents' or in own words.	

Figure 6b-2: Level 1 mark scheme

STEP 4 – Consultation and training with tutors

Tutors and the neuroscientist discussed findings from the initial assessment and potential new approaches and strategies to address specific learner difficulties. Training in key aspects of neurodiversity and in recognising the implications of different learner responses to activities was offered, and tutors recorded and used findings to refine the learner profiles.

STEP 5 – Learners interviewed on film

Learners discussed their experiences of learning English on film: viewing the films helped us better understand why they were doing the course, what they found helpful or difficult and why.

STEP 6 – Gathering qualitative data through observation and participation with learners

Our neuroscientist visited classes over two months and recorded learner 'behaviour' with special reference to strategies matched to specific difficulties.

STEP 7 – Gathering qualitative data from tutors

This was collated and distilled into Learner Journey Case Studies

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

The most significant changes in practice related to information provided to teachers about learners' pre-course assessment and placement. A more precise identification of learners and their needs emerged, enabling a more accurate placement in the classes being studied and also other non-accredited courses. The marking scheme provided a framework and common language by which to discuss students' English and to differentiate aspects of their writing and reading. This proved particularly beneficial with learners whose level and competency initially seemed spikey and inconsistent. Prior to this project, the pre-course assessment had been limited mainly to identifying different linguistic features such as punctuation difficulties. Now, we have developed a means of discussing why the learner might have been making these errors consistently despite having been 'taught' how to avoid them.

The early identification of neurodiversities and the chance to work with our neuroscientist did lead to some significant, albeit micro-changes in teaching and learning practices, with potential for further development. For example, one tutor more self-consciously differentiated her questioning strategies and sentence-writing exercises with a learner with Asperger's so that activities were less abstract, requiring direct, specific answers drawing on the learner's direct experience. Although she had done this before, she was now more confident using the strategy.

Another tutor learned why scaffolding writing exercises were not as effective with one learner as with others. He became aware of cognitive overload and, along with the learner's support tutor, recognised that giving the learner free time before writing to discuss the content and structure of a text can be more effective.

In one class a new technique has been adopted successfully whereby learners read and stop whenever they lose the sense of the text in order for

cognition to 'catch up'. Teachers have also experimented with students writing in flow and then making corrections as a strategy to encourage reluctant writers. The one-to-one tutor explained why the input about neurodiversities had helped her change her teaching practices:

> "It gave me a nudge into going back into thinking about using metacognition in the sessions and making small changes to make the learning really work for AB. Even when a task didn't quite work or make sense to AB we were able to talk about why this didn't work for him and how we could make it work."

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The main organisational change arising from this project was to the pre-course assessment both in terms of its aim and content and also by conducting on-line marking schemes, thus enabling immediate sharing with tutors.

However, perhaps equally significant is the establishment of a shared discourse that has enabled more specific conversations and collaboration to take place between different parties. The assessor, class and support tutors and Head of Centre/curriculum manager now have a common language to frame their discussions and analyses of learners' learning, including disagreements. The effect has been to open up issues and raise questions which had previously struggled for a voice. For example, from collaborating with the neuroscientist and with information about the initial assessment, a learning support tutor said:

> "It felt like it was breathing new air into the sessions. Her analogy about 'AB having to have his ducks lined up' stayed with me and helped me to really think about what was useful to him … her input generally made the work with AB more purposeful."

This one-to-one tutor is now able to coordinate her work more effectively with the class tutor because of a shared framework. The two class tutors have also been able to collaborate more effectively about learners' progress between levels.

This shared discourse and the qualitative nature of the research has enabled findings to be shared with the Head of Centre and thereby feed into institutional curriculum development. The recording of students' experiences of learning with questions framed by cognitive profiling has enabled him to understand their needs and those of the tutors more effectively. Students have been able to articulate, for example, their anxieties when faced with a blank piece of paper or at job interviews.

The framework provided by this project has created a means to approach curriculum development and content as well as appreciate the type of space needed by these learners in order to succeed and feel at ease.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Retention within these classes remains good. The main strategy to show the effectiveness of the project was to focus on the quality of each student's learning and reading and writing output. There have been some notable successes following changes in practices including what a tutor described as a 'first' regarding a learner.

Learner AB had previously struggled with writing whole texts. He lacked confidence and seemed anxious about written tasks and expressing himself orally. He took longer than peers to start a written task so did not produce extended written pieces in a 'reasonable' length of time. Effective strategies were developed to give him time to discuss the content of his writing and structure, not overload his cognition via excessive scaffolding, and encourage more flow to his writing. His one-to-one tutor wrote after implementing some of these practices:

> "I noticed a change in AB when I started implementing the feedback; he began smiling and also seemed to view the tasks as an adventure.
>
> The real turning point came when he was able to write a complete letter in about 15 minutes. He was clearly pleased and was able to acknowledge that he had done well."

The neuroscientist also noted an increase in AB's confidence, with increased participation in in-class discussions and more activity in writing during class time. By midway through the term, AB no longer needed coaxing or visible 'scaffolding' to start and complete written tasks. Using the strategies suggested he was able start an extended writing task with less lead time and with confidence about what and how to write. A number of learners in the class reported that they found the stop and recap reading strategy helpful. One learner, AB, commented on the usefulness of stopping when the meaning of a word was difficult and changing the word to a phrase that explained it better.

The tutor reported:

> *"Reminding him to stop and recap what he was reading, in much shorter bursts was very successful. He read some quite 'advanced' texts with excellent comprehension and recall."*

Learner CD benefitted from writing from experience and being asked questions with specific answers. He showed he could achieve more than anticipated using these strategies and enjoyed them. His written responses showed that he was more capable of writing independently than previously thought and was also able to read with more understanding once questions were adjusted.

Learning from this project

We have learned the following:

1. Creating pre-course assessments to generate data about learners' neurodiversity and cognitive profiling is possible and can support accurate placement.
2. This knowledge can be communicated to tutors and inform strategies and approaches.
3. These strategies, based on cognitive profiling, can be successful.

We have learnt that a more detailed understanding of and specific emphasis on neurodiversities can be a means of effecting progress in students' literacy skills. There was certainly evidence that some strategies that took learners' cognitive profiles into consideration benefited their learning.

As our one-to-one tutor said:

> *"The project emphasised for me the importance of understanding exactly how someone learns so that as their tutor I can adapt tasks to their learning strengths and not their deficit."*

Our work with the neuroscientist has provided a different perspective on learning issues within our English classes and we have learned a new discourse which has opened up debates within our Centre.

However, we realise we are only at the very beginning of developing our knowledge and understanding of our learners. The small-scale nature of the project, the limited time for the development of strategies and the lack of quantitative data means any conclusions are tentative.

We made a lot of changes to our practices very quickly and our experience has shown we need to refine our initial assessments and process to help us become more efficient.

Our original project would have been better suited to a more longitudinal study. We did not anticipate the extent of ill-health and absence of teachers and students during the project so were not able to observe as much experimentation and change as we would have liked. Nor were we able to observe as many learners as originally intended. Consequently, while we could document progress and confidently make some claims, this may have been because of having chosen the 'ideal' participants. We would also have liked to track our learner voice more thoroughly.

However, we hope to continue our investigations in the future, and extend the learning from this project into new practices to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for ourselves and our learners.

6c. Drop Everything and Read and Write (DEAR)

London South East Colleges (LSEC)

The London South East Colleges (LSEC) Drop Everything & Read, Drop Everything & Write (DEAR) Project, inspired by the National Literacy Trust national scheme to boost reading for pleasure, was devised in response to a need identified in our GCSE English and Functional Skills learners for a scaffolded approach to reading and writing.

Summary

A skills gap in comprehension, identified earlier by teachers, was impacting upon successful achievement. Summative/ formative assessments showed that learners were routinely mis-reading texts and failing to understand or confusing the basic foundations of any given text, leading to a 'de-railing' in understanding and, therefore, lower level answers. This gap between

becoming "efficient decoders" to "strategic readers" (Vacca, 2002) is identified as the pivotal point at which implied meanings and inferences can be deconstructed. The DEAR Project, we felt, could address such key issues by implementing appropriate interventions to skill up our learners.

At LSEC we felt that to support our learners to make this shift a three-pronged approach was necessary. In the transition from secondary to FE, learners we observed required a new incentive to read and re-discover the magic and pleasure of reading. The DEAR Project, partnering up with The Reading Agency and their Quick Reads Scheme would provide access to easy readers to help bridge the gap between "reading frequency" and "reading attainment" and drive a renewed pleasure in reading and hence motivation.

Secondly, scaffolds, via a guided reading programme, would be required to support learners with comprehension and critical analysis reasoning and critical questioning. Further, "increasing students' reasoning skills, metacognition and structured reflection was vital to develop confidence, resilience and skills of inference, deduction and analysis" (Laurie Smith, 2018).

By supporting learners through a guided weekly programme of close reading and analyses with scaffolds, an incremental process and ladder of questioning would equip learners with the art of deconstruction, key to deep close reading.

> *The first and most common reason for not being a fluent reader is that the learner does not yet know how to decode well. Decoding accuracy is the first pre-requisite to fluency.*
>
> **(Wolf, 2008)**

Thirdly, it would be insufficient for learners to be merely "efficient decoders" and "strategic readers": to attain well, they must also become skilled writers. We therefore felt that the DEAR Project must also equip learners with the

scaffold to support them to make the deep connections between the writer's methods and the application of these in their creative writing tasks. By becoming more conscious writers fully aware of their "art and craft", learners can take full command of their own "authorial intentions" and skilfully "craft" their writings to greater effect, (Myhill, 2014).

Informed by these research findings in metacognition, critical analysis reasoning and questioning and the art and craft of conscious writing, the DEAR Project at LSEC was born and launched in September 2019.

Rationale

Teachers reported that learners experienced malaise, inertia and a sense of defeat at the prospect of GCSE English resits, reading comprehension and successive analyses of unseen texts. Further, in the transition from primary to secondary and on into FE, learners often appeared to have lost that sense of excitement and the magic and 'buzz' that reading can inspire.

Learners also often appeared to 'be getting the wrong end of the stick', failing to understand the simple aspects of texts such as: Who the text was actually about; Who the narrator was; Setting of the text and the importance of context and period to the themes and pre-occupations of the writer.

Similar mis-understandings were observed in reading tasks completed by Functional Skills learners, leading to erroneous answers and successive failures in GCSE and Functional Skills exams for some learners. Furthermore, via DEAR learner engagement surveys, learners reported difficulties in comprehension due to complexity and obliqueness of language leading to barriers in their understanding and wider engagement in class.

Additionally, learners were struggling to apply with skill the language and structural devices they had been studying in texts, failing to make connections between analyses of writers' language methods and their applications in their own writings. This weakness in demonstrating structure and cohesion and a secure application of language methods in their own writing was impacting on grades. Given that writing responses carry most weight in terms of marks, this, we felt, needed to be addressed.

In response to these skills gaps, we reasoned that a dove-tailed programme of scaffolds for reading comprehension and creative writing tasks would provide a way forward. To support learners to move from efficient decoders to strategic readers would require some innovative incentives, and scaffolds would need to implemented throughout the project.

The DEAR Approach in practice

Therefore, a new programme of incentives was devised. In partnership with *The Reading Agency,* their *Quick Reads* Scheme was swiftly launched to re-engage despondent learners. Quick Reads, it was hoped would serve a dual purpose:

1. To help tackle feelings of dis-engagement
2. To boost appetites for reading by creating an exciting 'buzz' during English induction and during classroom warm ups.

Running parallel to this reading the *Quick Reads* Scheme, scaffolded approaches to reading comprehension and writing were harnessed in the classroom. A tiered approach to questioning with conscious use of metacognitive theories via CARs (critical analysis reasoning) and CAQ (critical analysis questioning) was applied weekly with each unseen text.

These reading comprehension resources were designed to embed strategies informed by cognitive load theories to support with re-engagement. Using the DEAR 5 W's (Who, What, Why, Where, When and How), matrices were devised for critical analysis reasoning (CARs) and critical analysis questioning (CAQs).

The aim was to break down unseen texts into more bite-sized chunks, so providing a clear focus for each question, helping to clarify meanings for learners initially and avoiding cognitive overloads.

Learners, via a laddered approach, would then apply these 5 W's questioning scaffolds to unseen texts. The intention, via a graduated questioning approach, was to help them to grasp the basic facets and context of each text prior to any deeper language or structural analyses. It was envisaged that by conducting these primary excavations of each unseen text and before any deeper excavations, potential mis-readings and confusions could be

ironed out together during DEAR Reading Circles and group analyses prior to independent study in reading and writing tasks.

Secondly, during our DEAR Writing Workshops, learners were furnished with DEAR check lists for each writing task. Using these DEAR scaffolds, it was envisaged that learners would gradually develop a discipline and rigour via which to more consciously apply craft, cohesion and structure to their own writing tasks.

The DEAR Project was designed with a six-fold intention:

1. To widen access and raise the active engagement of our learners in reading and writing.
2. To roll-out the Quick Reads initiative to stimulate renewed appetites for reading both inside and outside the classroom.
3. To equip learners with a scaffolded approach to reading comprehension.
4. To support learners to develop a more rigorous approach to the cognitive processing and analyses of texts and make connections with their own writing.
5. To furnish learners with a creative writing checklist and map to guide them through their writing tasks.
6. To nurture a greater desire, motivation, confidence and self-belief.

The DEAR Project in Practice: Reading Comprehension:

Themed lessons on texts were devised to escort learners through a series of questioning and cognitive processes from basic and key foundation questions (CARs & 5 Q W's: Who, What, Why, Where, When and How) to more complex questions. This reading comprehension matrix was intended to help learners gain confidence in their grasp and basic understanding of the foundations of any text. The intention was also to equip learners to steer themselves up through these basic questions, establishing a fool-proof foundation and compass via which to secure accurate understandings of the text they were reading. As learners escalated through these scaled (CARs) questions, each reading comprehension would then graduate to questions devised to challenge their critical analysis questioning skills (CAQs). DEAR Reading Circles were used to further scaffold learners via the mutual support of group / peer debates and discussions.

Through DEAR Reading Circles it was acknowledged that readers learn via teacher / peer modelling *"how to activate prior knowledge, to ask questions, to decide what is important in texts, to synthesise information, to draw inferences and to repair faulty comprehension"* (Wolf, 2008).

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Feedback from learners was collated via a number of strategies. Learners contributed their feedback on the DEAR Project via a Post It Learner Wall. After each DEAR lesson, learners were invited to post-it their responses to the DEAR lesson strategies utilised. Learner response was generally positive: learners reported that they found the mutual and collaborative reading comprehension strategies very helpful for breaking down both barriers in class and also in reading comprehensions.

The progress of two particular learners was monitored throughout the project. These were both adults, returning to the classroom after a period away due to employment and motherhood. Both initially expressed a deep anxiety about returning to the classroom and their skills in reading comprehension and in writing. However, over the course of the DEAR Project, the confidence of both grew steadily, as did their reading abilities, language and narrative analyses, and above all, their self-esteem.

Learner A demonstrated a great progression both in reading comprehension and, most interestingly, in her creative writing. Having entered the GCSE Course at a Level 1 she is now scoring consistently Grade 5 and above.

Learner B found the DEAR Reading Circles and collaborative approaches to reading and language analyses supportive prior to any independent study. Learner B has now moved from Level 2 and consistently scores Grade 4/5.

It was observed, via marking and assessment processes and feedback from learners, that both the DEAR Reading Comprehension Questioning Strategies (CARs and CAQs) and the DEAR Writing Checklists and scaffolded writing resources had led to marked progress in learners' work.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Through the launch of the DEAR Project at LSEC greater collaboration has been seen between the English department and LRCs. In addition to our work in the classrooms, *The Reading Agency Quick Reads* initiative was publicised in our LRCs and greatly supported by their teams giving rise to far wider dissemination cross-college. As a result, loans on the *Quick Reads* rose significantly and learners enjoyed swapping *Quick Reads*, sharing and supporting each other with their reading and participating in reading circles and writing workshops.

Feedback from both LRC staff and from learners on the DEAR Project and The Reading Agency *Quick Reads* has been positive and both the envisaged widening access to reading and boosts in active engagement in reading and writing have been evident in learners' renewed engagement.

Professional Learning from this project

The DEAR Project was successful at several levels. Firstly, the active manner in which learners embraced the project and engaged in the *The Reading Agency Quick Reads* initiative was refreshing and unexpected. Learners in FE, it would seem, when offered the right texts and a guided framework and structure via a Reading Scheme like *Quick Reads* will engage in reading enthusiastically.

Key to the successful roll out of the *Quick Reads* Scheme was the support of The Reading Agency and our LRC Team Leaders, Carole Burd and Karen Oliver. The DEAR Project was given a lively and highly visible launch in the LRCs, which, we believe greatly contributed to learners feeling a sense of ownership and desire to engage.

Further, it was intriguing to discover that our Post-16 learners really enjoyed a structured approach to reading comprehension. They found the laddered approach to questioning and the bite-sized and graduated sign-posted ways into text via CARs and CAQs helpful for illuminating their way through what, on first reading, appeared dark and dense texts.

A further discovery was the enjoyment learners gained from reading together in Reading Circles and teasing out meanings collaboratively via the graduated questions. It was pleasing to see learners offering peer support and probing one another's responses to text, answering questions, formulating their own ideas and developing the courage to read aloud to each other, to question the text, the writer and one another and also to read aloud their written responses, particularly in our DEAR Writing Workshops.

From a professional perspective, a key learning point for future planning will be to map into the design of our teaching resources the key connections between the unseen text, the language methods used by the writer, and the dove-tailing of writing tasks that can mirror these for our learners. The fusing and synergies of the approaches applied by Laurie Smith (King's College) and Debra Myhill (University of Exeter) have had a transformative effect on the design of teaching resources for my learners. For the future then, as well as scaffolding reading comprehension, we will be supporting our learners in a deeper, more metacognitive approach to their own creative writing and the production of their personal narratives.

One of the most powerful outcomes has been the cross synergy of ideas and their applications through digital technologies. During the DEAR Project and in our classroom delivery here at LSEC many of these e-learning strategies as Audible, Padlet, Mentimeter, Tricider, Google Classroom and IntoFilm have been trialled and found to be highly effective. These, along with the DEAR reading and writing strategies will continue to inform our practice.

6d. Letter Exchange Scheme
New City College
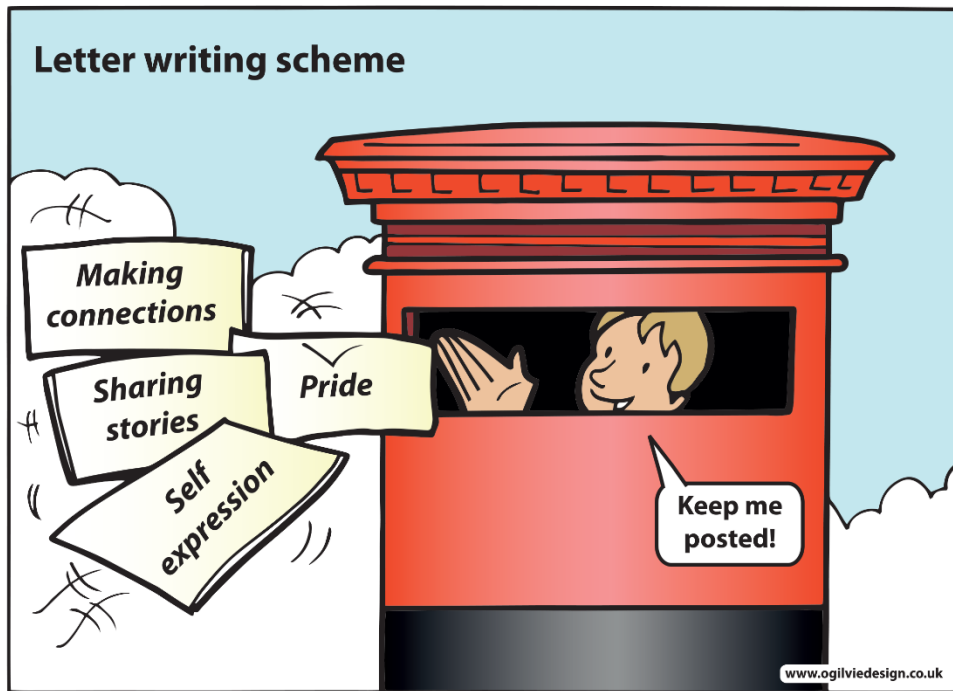
At the beginning of the academic year over fifty 16-19 year old Functional Skills English Level 1 students took part in a letter exchange scheme at four different New City College Campuses. They each wrote and exchanged three letters about themselves, their interests and goals in 2020.

Development was clearly evident in both the engagement of the task and motivation of the students as they carefully crafted letters. They were also very proud of collaborating with other students and being part of an action research project at New City College.

Many of these students asked if they could continue with the Letter Exchange Scheme as part of the project and groups of students from GCSE English and some adult students also asked if they could join the scheme.

Rationale

Today's relationships are often built around what is immediately convenient, and building good relationships was only one argument in favour of taking the time to write letters by hand. The New City College Letter Exchange Scheme was developed to engage and motivate learners to find their own voice and become more confident, proficient writers who enjoy the craft of writing.

A currently common response from 16 year old students, when asked to write a letter, was one of resistance to the task. This was followed sharply with the justification that no one writes letters any more, and that indeed today an email or text would be more appropriate. The task of letter writing was therefore often undertaken with little engagement or motivation for writing. This often resulted in an unsatisfactory product and poor learning experience. However, by presenting the opportunity to students to participate in authentic and extended writing practice as part of the Letter Exchange Scheme, it was hoped that their motivation and enthusiasm might quickly rise.

When this project was first initiated it was thought that the act of writing and receiving a letter might be novel for many people and also that students might find positive and confident social interaction outside their immediate peer group challenging. However, it was felt that establishing these kinds of connections was vital to a sense of belonging and engagement in learning. For some people writing to a stranger could have been the first steps to this. It was also thought that sharing stories and experiences could improve self-esteem and self-confidence.

Approach

Students were allocated a partner at another campus by teachers. The letters took the form of an introductory and a reply letter. The word count of the letters was relative to the level at which the student was working and was proofread carefully before the letter was sent to their partner student. Letters were sent in a batch by each college by an agreed date within each phase.

Four Lecturers from New City College were involved in the project, along with curriculum leaders and the Head of English at New City College. All the learners were from Functional Skills Level 1 English courses and the project involved approximately 50 students across four sites.

Teachers needed a commitment by the students that they would engage in the project and agree to some simple basic rules aimed to protect all participants' privacy. This was important especially at Level 1, where there is traditionally resistance to writing. Selecting the more motivated students to take part in the project gave the teachers a chance to see the extent to which the initiative was effective, and what modifications might contribute to its success in the future. This approach follows Zydney's (2012) social constructivist theory of learning.

The Scheme of Work outlined below was followed by all four teams over a period of time:

- Suitable Functional Skills Level 1 groups were selected.
- The letter exchange concept was introduced to the students.
- Profiles were carefully created by each student which helped them present themselves fully in the first letter.
- Letter 1 was planned and drafted (Figure 6d-1).
- Letter 1 proof read and posted.
- Letter 1 was received and distributed to students.
- Letter 2 (reply to letter 1) was planned and drafted.
- Letter 2 reviewed by peers; strengths, weaknesses and opportunities were discussed.
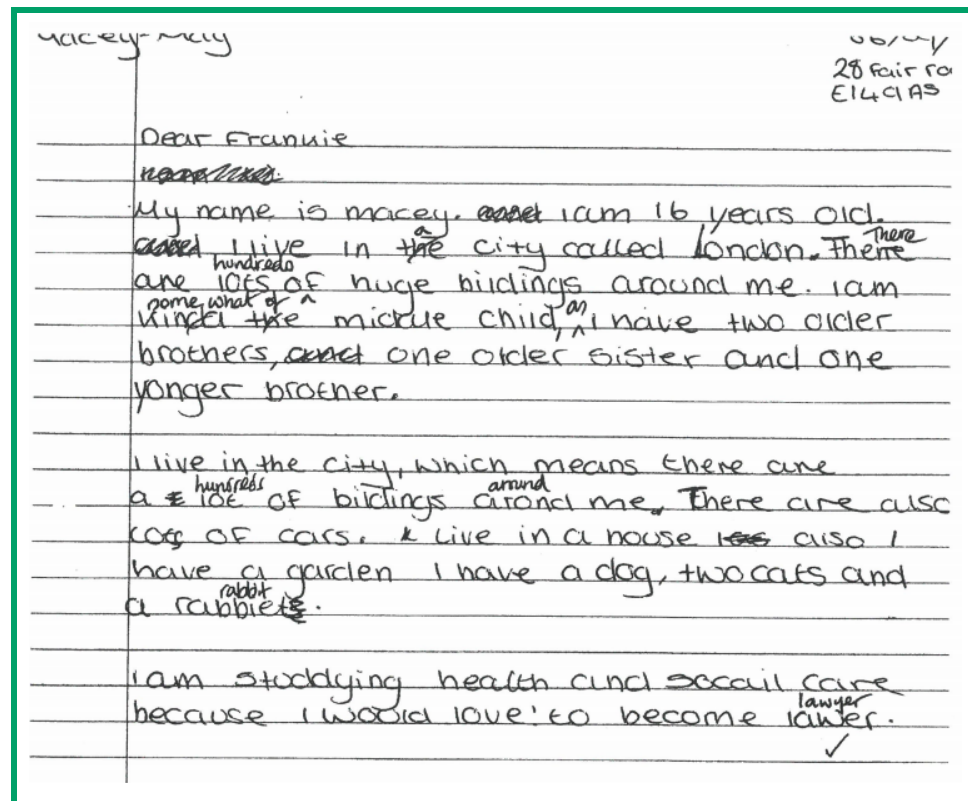- Final changes and proof reading were made to letter 2.

Figure 6d-1: Draft of letter 1

- Letter 2 posted
- Letter 2 received by partner colleges.
- Peer discussion of Letter 2 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities. Suggestions for responses and a social event was proposed, giving the students participating in the letter exchange scheme the opportunity to meet one another.
- Letter 3 drafted by students and responses peer assessed by students in group. Improvements made.
- Letter 3 completed and proofread by students and posted.
- Letter 3 received and class discussion about the letters received and plan for future communication.
- Plenary.

The Team leaders worked collaboratively to:

- Identify and share good practice and ways of working across teams.
- Develop a Padlet Dashboard.
- Provide across-team support and sharing of best practice.
- Present the letter writing scheme to other colleagues at CPD sessions.

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

During the project many students started to attend classes on a more regular basis as students were enjoying their lessons more and curious to get to know a pen pal. They were particularly excited after exchanging the first letter.

Interactions between students were positive as they engaged in the scheme and developed deeper connections with their peers. Equally, the connections among their teachers grew and they had a deeper sense of belonging and engagement with learning. Writing to a stranger required sharing stories and experiences, which also contributed to improving self-esteem and self-confidence. Over time some deep seated negative personal narratives began to become more positive, and confidence improved. The act of receiving a letter was more personal than the barrage of spam and what was often perceived as the inauthenticity of social media posts. Letter writing came to symbolise an investment of time, care and effort. There was also an enhanced sensory experience involved in holding and reading a personal handwritten letter.

It was thought that students might enjoy their lessons more, particularly after the receipt of the first letter. Attendance improved as lessons built on the project themes and ideas.

At the start of the course, students suggested that writing was something they had not thought they enjoyed. However, the teachers found that once students engaged in self-expression, they made deeper connections with their new peers. They said they found it difficult and did not think they were successful at it; nor could they identify clearly with the difficulties they experienced in their writing skills.

A piece of free writing revealed that the majority did not produce pieces of writing beyond 100 words and the writing itself had a high proportion of spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. The sentences in the writing were mainly short or very extended and the ideas communicated were simple and not always coherent. In their everyday lives, most students said they did not engage in writing beyond messaging or on social media. Very few students had ever received a personal, handwritten letter or postcard.

From a wider perspective, behaviour in the classroom was often characterised by low level disruptive behaviour and disengagement and few students were genuinely motivated to improve their skills.

Some students also asked questions that provoked discussion and debate. Students actively planned and reviewed their written work. This led to the development of skills such as peer marking. Some students chose to read their letters out loud in class and confidence grew with this. They were more able to articulate where they needed to improve, and some students chose to develop their skills outside of class time. The letters they sent became livelier and more interesting, as now they were being written for an intended audience and were therefore more carefully compiled. There was also a greater awareness of the value of quality handwriting and the craft skills involved.

For many students at the end of the scheme, letter writing started to symbolise an investment of time, care and effort. There was also an enhanced pleasure in holding and reading a personal, handwritten letter.

The new Functional Skills Level 1 English Guidelines were used in assessment, with a focus on spelling, punctuation, grammar and writing composition. Work was assessed by teachers at each stage of the project.

As the project progressed teachers exchanged observations about learners' developing skills, confidence and enjoyment of the project as the letters were exchanged.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Although we have not created a new safeguarding process in the organisation in relation to the declarations by the students, the existing process continues to be followed. During the project, the college acknowledged the importance of safeguarding students and their sense of safety in potentially threatening situations, including matters of welfare and mental health wellbeing.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Developing personal profiles was a rich part of the scheme, as students had not previously represented themselves in this more considered way to a peer they had not already met. It was evident that letter writing and the exchange of letters was a confidence building process that benefitted the students.

Some of the discussions that took place at this point generated a good deal of meaningful practice. Students actively took pride in planning and reviewing their written work. Peer marking was developed as well as critical analytical skills.

Some students chose to read their letters out aloud to others and could often articulate how both their own and others' work could be improved. The letters sent became livelier and more interesting, and handwriting, grammar and vocabulary improved.

Attendance rates improved as there was clear enthusiasm and engagement in this project. The strategy of focusing on areas of spelling, punctuation and grammar to ensure that the meaning was clear for the reader has had a positive impact on student assessment outcomes.

The most important evidence for this were the learners' letters and teachers' accounts of what they planned and how learners responded to the task (and to the letters from peers). These outputs have great credibility and show the possibilities for changing the thinking and their attitudes towards peers.

Learning from this project

Students turned out to be much more receptive to the letter writing scheme than first anticipated. This appeared to derive both from the pleasure of developing craft skills of handwriting, using a quality pen on quality paper, and being able to express themselves informally and in a purposeful and structured way. Additionally, the letter exchange scheme offered the opportunity for students to experience a platform different from social media through which to get to know new peer groups. Many of the students involved are keen to develop the letter exchange scheme with other groups of students in other parts of the UK. Contact has already been established with the following colleges: Mid-Kent College, East Riding College, Derby College, Manchester College.

Other 16-19 year old and Adult GCSE students have expressed a keen interest in being involved in this project next year and in particular in communicating with others elsewhere in the UK. This is a unique opportunity for young people and adults from Inner City London, some of whom may also have newly arrived in the UK, to get to know others already established in the UK.
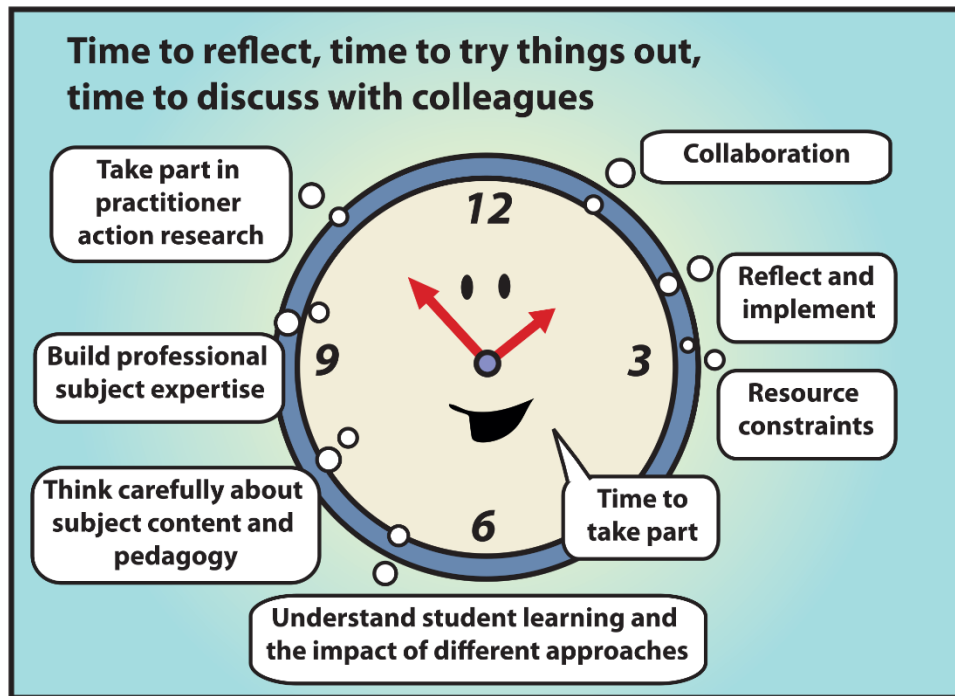
In future, it would benefit learning if closer assessment of the students' progress were shared beforehand and more formal peer assessment were to take place. Workshops could be held to develop the craft of handwriting, which might prove to be beneficial to many students.

The positive impact that this project has had on the teachers and students involved is evident both in terms of raising awareness of the benefits of positive communication between peers and the pride with which many students want to present themselves, their skills and their talents to another peer. This is learning which has quality and much value both academically and personally.

As we move forward, it is hoped that working collaboratively will create new, stronger working relationships between each of the campuses and lead to the sharing of ideas across the whole group.

Time to reflect

Sue Lownsbrough (Strand Lead for projects 7, 8 and 9, ccConsultancy Associate)

Time to reflect, time to try things out, time to discuss with colleagues

- Take part in practitioner action research
- Collaboration
- Build professional subject expertise
- Reflect and implement
- Think carefully about subject content and pedagogy
- Resource constraints
- Time to take part
- Understand student learning and the impact of different approaches

As a Strand Lead I am writing this final report as a reflection on what others and I have learned from the experience of taking part in the OTLA English programme, while working with the team (comprising Strand Leads, mentors and the management team), and with the practitioners and organisations involved in the project.

As part of this writing process I have sat and pondered, while gathering ideas and trying to sort them into a cohesive and coherent message. It was during this process of reflection and planning that a common theme emerged: that of time – time to reflect, time to try things out, time to discuss with colleagues.

This report will focus on what has been learned about:

- supporting practitioners and their managers, both by their organisation, and by us, over the course of the project and
- what can be achieved when the right environment is created.

The Condition of Funding initiative was introduced in a very tight timeframe, in a period of funding cuts. There has also been an increasing pressure to judge quality in terms of data. Consequently, a tutor's caseload of responsibilities, beyond their time in the classroom, has significantly increased. Time to take part in practitioner action research and have professional conversations with colleagues is at a premium in many organisations. This has had an impact on:

- time to build professional subject expertise;
- time to think carefully about subject content and pedagogy;
- time to develop a deeper understanding of student learning and the impact of different approaches.

My own research

The project prompted me to conduct some research (outside of the project) that I had been considering for some time about the effectiveness of the traditional model of one or two training days to develop practitioners' skills and knowledge in teaching, learning and assessment to improve learners' progress and achievement.

Taking part in the OTLA programme gave me the time to consider and reflect on challenges faced by managers and practitioners in the sector, how to overcome them, and how to ensure how those funded to support professional development, including our OTLA English programme, can create support and space to maximise the benefit of professional development opportunities.

Time for collaboration

Parts of the OTLA programme were focused on professional conversations and the sharing of best practice: these included induction meetings, monthly meetings to share progress, discussions about issues and successes and two dissemination events, as well as CPD opportunities to develop academic writing skills.

Though organisations already knew that these were the requirements of taking part in the project it was often challenging to arrange mutually agreed times and dates for meetings, and it was sometimes impossible to avoid last minute issues such as covering for sickness. Further, although the project used digital approaches to overcome some of these issues, such as using Zoom for online meetings, the limited amount of time available in any one day remained an intractable issue for many.

The issues outlined above remain a constant in the sector. and support for managers to overcome them in professional development plans and opportunities would help to ensure maximum benefit but could also open up a conversation about a "Rhythm of CPD" (as also noted by Claire Collins in a speech during a dissemination event). If professional development is to be successful, training events need to be part of a continuum, not a one off.

Despite these issues, practitioners come away from training and sharing best practice events buzzing with ideas and motivation. This was especially notable at the final OTLA dissemination event, as shown by all the comments I have since received from participants such as *"I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this"* (BB); *"Thanks everyone for your superb ideas"* (BCC); *"I have loved taking part in the project"* (MC); *"It has been an honour to take part in such a project"* (SDC).

My research, separate from but spurred on by taking part in this project, sought to gain views from the sector about how training can be arranged most effectively to create an environment in which practitioners can develop professional expertise, develop a better understanding of student learning and the impact of different approaches, and ultimately support learners to master the skills they need to achieve in study, work and life.

Time to reflect and implement

So far, the findings of my research indicate that practitioners need time to reflect on what they have learned, consider how to try it out in the classroom and to build on it. Most who responded to my research questionnaire reported that they disseminate what they have learned to colleagues, but most stated that time constraints frequently hamper their intentions to try some of what they have learned. Based on experience mentors were suggested as a positive intervention to maintain the impetus and implement changes.

These two points: plans from managers to support training commitments and post training support have also emerged from taking part in the project:
- having a mentor has been reported as invaluable by the participants to help to keep them on track and motivated when things in their organisation have been challenging;
- as a strand lead and a mentor, I have witnessed the challenges of both managers and tutors to create time to take part in some of the collaborative activities.

To summarise: planning professional development opportunities for the sector needs to take account of the time and resource constraints of organisations and individuals if we are to present the greatest opportunities for tutors to do what they do best – teaching, learning and assessment to support learner progress and achievement.

OTLA successes

So why is an OTLA model better than more traditional, one- or two-day training courses? Normally, the traditional model of learning from an 'expert' would be seen as better, especially when it includes time and support for the participant(s) to embed the new learning in their practice as discussed above.

This however was not what I experienced and learned from working on the OTLA programme. Often practitioners have felt that recognition of their professionalism has declined over recent years; and changes in approaches and policy have been without reference to the professional expertise of the sector. On the other hand, this OTLA English programme was able to

demonstrate that expertise and professionalism is still strong in the sector. And it is the tutors who have the expertise; they have the knowledge and understanding of approaches which work for learners, and they are brimming with ideas to trial and develop them, though they have felt constrained for a range of reasons.

However, given time and a supportive mentor, and an encouraging culture, tutors can pinpoint areas of teaching and learning that they need to address and want to research, trial in the classroom and then refine, based on their experiences and the insights they have acquired from those experiences.

The project has given practitioners the safe space to realise their professional aspirations and this has re-ignited their optimism and motivation. Below is a small sample of some of the excellent work that has come out of the project

Examples demonstrating the scope and innovation emerging from taking part in the project

Example 1

One such example came from an organisation which, because of unforeseen circumstances, were unable to complete the project. However, in the short time they did take part, they trialled using an Assessment for Learning approach to develop apprentices' English in the workplace.

The trainer and one apprentice who did take part found the approach empowering, with the apprentice taking charge of what they needed to learn and the capacity to explain what progress they were making. On the flip side they found that the project needed a much longer timescale, given that apprentices in the workplace do not have the same face-to-face contact hours as those who attend college or a work-based learning provider each week.

Example 2

Another project looked at engaging learners who had already achieved their GCSE at grade 4 with English topics which the learners felt they needed to develop for their courses. The English tutor worked collaboratively with level

IT tutors to develop a series of diagnostic assessment activities and subsequent teaching and learning sessions which the learners themselves identified.

One learner I interviewed said that she had never realised that English extended beyond the English lessons. She cited one example of an activity (planning writing) which she now used much more widely than in planning writing. This included working out the steps needed to ensure that an IT programme she was creating worked effectively.

Example 3

At one college the librarian worked collaboratively with the ESOL tutors to set up a reading challenge for level 1 ESOL learners with the aim of engaging the learners in reading with the intention that this would help them with their forthcoming reading examination. Learners were encouraged to engage with choosing and selecting items they wanted to explore which promoted learner autonomy.

The project enjoyed several unexpected outcomes which included:
- development of vocabulary
- reading articles in magazines about topics relating to their lives and work
- learners engaging more fully with other college activities: for example, one learner now had the confidence to join the college gym.

These examples demonstrate the range of participants' ideas, the collaboration developed across organisations and most importantly the positive impact on the learners involved. I suggest that none of these projects would have emerged from attending a traditional CPD event.

A role for traditional CPD

However, traditional models of CPD do have a place in the "Rhythm of CPD". Tutors new to the profession no longer have a subject specialist qualification to study for. Similarly, they may find that they need traditional forms of CPD to generate ideas about what they might like to try in the classroom.

A further consideration is that, in relation to the theme of time, a training course will be grounded in best practice research which often requires a lot of background reading which the trainer does when planning the course. Busy tutors simply may not have the time to do this.

Other outcomes from the project

Support for a new approach is needed by all taking part

At the outset of the project I witnessed some nervousness among practitioners about what was expected of them, how to approach the research and what it involved. In the best examples the practitioners had been involved from the outset, bringing their professional knowledge and expertise to the proposal, and so were full of energy and enthusiasm.

For others the enthusiasm grew as they developed confidence in their approaches and made necessary adjustments to the project, and they were clear about the steps they needed to take to get buy in from stakeholders including the learners, cross institution colleagues and managers. Confidence also grew as they established a relationship with their mentor and professional conversations developed.

At this point in the project participants benefitted from time spent with their mentors clarifying what was needed, how they would move forward and what kinds of evidence needed to be collected to ensure their findings were robust and would influence professional practice across the sector. Most practitioners had not been involved in research projects of this nature before and needed time to develop the skills and knowledge needed to move forward with confidence.

Similarly, some of the participants' managers would have benefited at this point from support to create an environment which gave the participants time to fully engage with the project. Their priorities, and the demands made on them, can easily be overlooked and many busy managers would welcome

support in managing how best to support their tutors in appreciating and implementing what they will need.

Practitioners' innovation and enthusiasm unleashed

The project unleashed a huge wave of innovation and enthusiasm from practitioners as they gained in confidence while moving through the project. This has largely giving them the motivation to overcome the challenges faced by all tutors in the post-16 sector, including an ever-increasing caseload of responsibility and the associated constraints on their time.

Findings from the project

Several findings stand out for me and warrant further research and development:

1. Learners' active involvement in their learning such as by choosing their own texts can make a huge difference to their engagement and motivation
2. Working collaboratively with vocational tutors helps the learners to see that English runs throughout all courses, work and life.
3. Basing learning on skills development rather than Assessment Outcomes or examination questions is often more effective for learning and makes learning more relevant for learners.

In conclusion I have to say that participants found the experience of engaging in an OTLA project enlightening and uplifting. Their enthusiasm was reignited and they acquired a new energy in tackling some of the intractable problems that face them on a daily basis. It has been a worthwhile and valuable experience throughout. My research, spurred on by my involvement with the OTLA programme, has been especially valuable for myself and will lead me to continue my research journey with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

7a. Creating a Reading Culture
Bishop Burton College
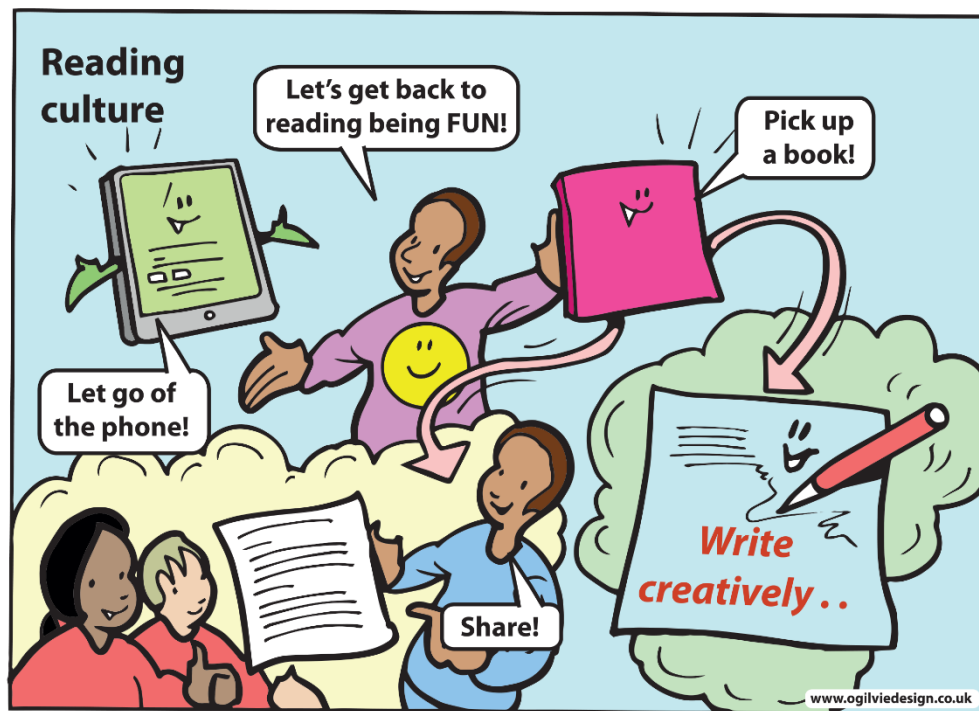
The purpose of this project was to increase learners' time spent reading and to demonstrate to them the impact that reading can have on their ability to communicate with the world around them.

Summary

A Reading Culture Group was established by three English teachers, two of whom are Teaching and Learning Coaches (TLCs), across two college sites. The group consisted of the three teachers and one group of learners per teacher.

These learners were 16-18 year olds on vocational study programmes, who were working towards Entry/Level 1 Functional Skills and GCSE English.

The project would focus on three activities which would develop a reading culture in the groups, as well as develop learners' skills related to reading and writing. These included a 'Read Anything Initiative', a book swap and finally, the opportunity to enter a writing competition where the winner was published in the local paper.

Rationale

Evidence suggests that a limited exposure to literature will have a negative impact on a learner's drive (and ability) to learn how to express their thoughts, opinions and aspirations through their writing.

Our project aimed to overcome this resistance to reading by demonstrating that literature can be accessible and interesting, as well as a tool to aid expression. We hoped that the project would demonstrate to learners that reading in order to develop writing provides them with the skills they need to pass exams and also enriches their lives, gives them a voice and aids in their progression in to employment and beyond.

Approach

Stage 1: Read Anything Initiative – Learners were given a clock or questionnaire to complete, stating what they believed they read on a daily basis. They initially needed assistance with this as they believed that when we spoke about reading, we were focusing purely on novels. Once we discussed all reading, such as shampoo bottles, timetables, and so on, the learners became more engaged. This backed up the idea that students only associated novels and fiction with reading.

Once learners had completed the questionnaire or clock a group discussion arose around how learners chose what they were going to read and what they liked/disliked.

From this, we found:
- the majority of learners read what is needed for studies, not for fun;
- learners are more likely to read something that had been recommended by a peer;
- learners wanted to read something that will immediately engage them and that has a clear purpose.

The learners were then put in to Thinking Pairs (Kline, 1999) at the beginning of each session where they were asked to summarise what they have enjoyed reading in one uninterrupted minute. After the learners had shared their experiences this was then brought into a whole class discussion. Some of the questions raised from these discussions were:
- What was the last thing that the learners had enjoyed reading?
- How long ago was this?
- Why do they no longer read for 'pleasure'?

It became clear, from this, that most learners stopped reading for pleasure aged 11, when it was no longer compulsory to read at school.

Following this, learners were tasked to read anything of their choice (e.g. social media or a bus timetable, and progressing on to areas currently less familiar e.g. newspapers, book from the resource centre etc, differentiated by individual learners).

Stage 2: Literature Swap: Learners (who have progressed from Stage 1 and have been encouraged to identify a genre they like to read from the variation of activity from the Read Anything Initiative) brought their texts in to share with others. This was also shared on a Padlet. Again, they were put into thinking pairs where they summarised, in one minute, why their partner should read it, using persuasive techniques they had been working on within their GCSE and Functional Skills lessons. This could be a literary work, an article or even a useful document linked to their vocational subject - whatever they wanted to share.

The learners were also given time to read for ten minutes at the start of the session. Some read in the library and others in the classroom environment, depending on what was more suitable for that group of learners: for example, Foundation stage completed reading or were read to in the classroom, Level 2 / Level 3 BTEC learners were more engaged when reading in the Learning Resource Centre independently.

During this stage there was a learner who was reluctant to carry on reading. After discussions it became clear that he did not enjoy the book he was reading yet he thought he had to continue. This was rectified by us going to the LRC and choosing a different book. Once this was completed the learner was re-engaged and enjoyed the book that he was reading. The learner thought they were expected to complete all books and were not familiar with the practice when reading for pleasure of leaving a book and choosing another.

Another teacher went down a different path and took the learners to a local primary school. Here learners were actively involved with reading with younger pupils. The feedback here was that the learners were amazed at how passionate the younger learners were about reading and this reignited their own passion.

Stage 3: Writing Competitions: Learners contributed to writing competitions using a sample text for inspiration. They were taught how to complete 'shadow writing'. Students were to create some writing using what they have read to help them with ideas, structure, vocabulary and punctuation. The connection between the development of their reading skills and increased exposure to literature was highlighted by their tutors as they created the competition entries (150 words creative writing).

The winner from the competitions was chosen by vocational tutors and then published in the local newspaper (Figure 7a-1). This demonstrated to the learners how, through reading more, they were able to have a voice in their local paper. All other learners' writing will be published in a high-quality booklet at the end of the year.

Figure 7a-1: Newspaper article about the winner of the competition

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

As the project progressed the three teachers involved developed their skills as reflective and evaluative teachers. They all felt that engaging in the action research project gave them the encouragement to try new things in the classroom, especially those they anticipated would meet resistance. They became more aware of the need to compile evidence of whether a teaching and learning approach was working for their groups and provided areas to think about with regards to responsive teaching that they may not have considered previously.

For example, by collecting evidence from learners about how much they read at the outset of the project compared with the amount they found themselves reading at the end of the project we were able to see how effective the teaching approach had been. We took account of changes in behaviours, thoughts and opinions as well as what they read as evidence that

our teaching approach was effective. Developing their reading and writing skills was value-added for the learners.

Staff feedback showed that the action research training empowered them to experiment in the classroom, to try something that doesn't end up working for some learners, to reflect upon this realisation and to modify approaches and try again. For example, the staff intended that all learners would be part of the Reading Culture group, but found for some that the expectation of each stage was too high. However, they succeeded by modifying the approach from the learners reading themselves to the teacher reading to some groups and the use of audio books for those who found reading for themselves too demanding.

The project also encouraged the English teachers involved to look further than their own teams and colleagues for collaboration; for example, collaborating with the Literacy Lead in the infant school was a valuable link as we were able to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phonics-based teaching methodology employed in Early Years education. As more of our learners progress through the phases having been taught phonics at school, I anticipate that I will be able to incorporate this into our teaching, in particular for the newly introduced spelling requirement of FS English.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

By engaging in this project, three English teachers working across two different sites had the opportunity to develop their professional relationships and communities of practice by sharing best practice in a way that they had not been able to do before. The teachers who engaged in the project have commented that the dissemination and training events gave them the opportunity to discuss and consider their practice with colleagues from other providers. They felt that it was refreshing and gave them a new perspective to assess how best to help our learners develop their English skills in meaningful ways.

Further collaboration includes the relationship developed between the English teachers and the Learning Resource Centre staff, as well as the students talking to the librarians about the kinds of books and authors they would like to see on the shelves in the College library. This conversation was unlikely to

take place in the everyday business of the library. The librarians also got involved in showing the students how the journals could now be obtained digitally. Library staff are now considering the viability of introducing a more in-depth induction to the library, with the view that learners from all areas, even those not participating in English can be involved, creating a reading culture that will be college wide.

In terms of further cross-college collaboration, inviting the vocational TLCs in to judge the creative writing competition initiated discussions about how we could encourage the students to read more widely, such as through building library sessions into the timetable. This will be implemented next academic year.

TLCs from all departments were also given a visualiser to use in the classroom in order to encourage the use of the printed word for vocational study, rather than only online resources. This encouraged the TLCs to engage in the project and role model how a 'Reading Culture' can link directly into learners' chosen vocations. These initiatives have sown the seeds of a culture of a more holistic approach across the organisation to developing a Reading Culture.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Questionnaires regarding their reading habits at the beginning of the project included learners commenting that: *"I don't read books…takes too long…old people like [books], younger people like their phones"* and *"At senior school you would be called a swot or geek if you read"*. This indicated some of the reasons for a lack of engagement in reading literature for pleasure.

The same learners questioned at the end of the project reported that they had enjoyed the experience of reading again and were engaged and on task during the reading sessions without the involvement of the tutor. Tutors reported that attendance was good throughout the project with attendance at 95% for the learners involved, compared to 89% attendance in English classes across the college. Learners actively looked forward to the sessions and would ask in advance if the reading session was going to take place that week.

Student	Quotes before study	Quotes after study
A	I do not enjoy reading; I only read what I have to for studying. I never read anything else.	I am surprised at how many different things I do read. It is nice to know that by reading it does not always mean a full novel.
B	I would like to read more; however, I do not have time. I am busy with work, college and having a social life.	When I completed the literacy clock, I was surprised at how much time I spent reading social media. I decided to make small changes and read something more meaningful. I am now reading a book every 2 weeks. I cannot believe I used time as an excuse.
C	Reading is boring. I really don't enjoy it and there is nothing that anyone can do/say to change my mind.	I did enjoy reading Gangsta Granny, recommended by X (another student). I won't say that doing this has been life changing, I'm not going to rush out and start reading loads of books but I am more open-minded about reading.

Examples of changes in learners' attitudes towards reading

Teachers who engaged in the project were able to show changes in learners' reading behaviours. Some learners who were disengaged with reading at the outset were encouraged to explore different genres, increased their reading time from zero hours to 45 minutes per day. After engaging in the project, a teacher was reported as saying, *"Student A has regained her love for reading. She is now reading for an average of 45 minutes a day on the bus home from college…she has now read a variety of different genres and will often be seen around college with her nose in a book or in the LRC looking for new reads"*.

Further evidence that the learners changed their feelings towards reading include how the group self-managed their reading behaviours: for example, one group set up a book club type activity where they were all reading and

discussing the same novel. A second group chose to read a single book out loud to each other, even including two students who were not members of the class. Others chose to read independently.

Reading a variety of texts enabled learners to produce some fantastic competition entries and it is hoped that it will contribute to the development of the skills required to write more creatively for Functional Skills and GCSE exams. Not only has reading introduced them to new terminology, interesting spellings, developing vocabulary, demonstrated use of punctuation but has also built their knowledge of the world and provided them with information they can draw on to respond to transactional and creative writing tasks.

As a result of the Reading Culture group activities, all students felt confident to engage in the story writing task and reported that the reading had generated ideas. They were also sufficiently confident in both the quality of the story telling and their ability to read aloud that they read their stories to their peers. This is something they were reluctant to do before the start of the project.

33 learners, across both colleges took part in the project, with 21 completing the writing competition. Whilst learners were encouraged to participate it was not a compulsory activity so we were amazed at how many learners chose to take part. Learners were encouraged to use 'new and exciting' vocabulary from texts they had read during this project.

Learning from this project

We learned that sometimes the expectation that learners are able to pick up a text and start reading, even if it is for their reading ability, is not always possible. However, by using alternative approaches such as audio books and reading to the learners, all learners were able to enjoy the process of reading especially when they were told it was fine to stop reading something you were not enjoying and read something else.

The research confirmed that learners viewed reading as an academic activity solely linked to English lessons and this had become an attitude embedded throughout their school life from when they stopped reading for pleasure at about age 11.

We learned however that by empowering the learners to choose their own texts, recognising and building their existing reading skills the time became pleasurable.

Our views about the extent of reading digitally were confirmed by the project questionnaires and that the nature of most on-line reading led to learners reading only brief texts. This meant that they found it difficult to read longer texts.

We also discovered that reading paper-based texts was viewed as an old person's activity, which possibly explained much of their reluctance to read magazines, books or other texts.

The latter stages focused on how to develop their skills as a writer. The publication of the stories gave the learners tangible evidence that being able to write gives them a voice and is not a skill restricted to use in an English lesson or examination.

The tutors have learned from this project the value of including the views and opinions of the learners through the use of questionnaires, empowering them to choose their own reading material and helping learners to recognise that not only do they have reading skills but that they also use them all the time. These findings were significant in the overall success of the project and can be replicated in other curriculum areas.

Finally, the tutors learned the value of trialling different approaches and of holding professional conversations with colleagues across the country to develop themselves professionally. They now feel empowered to do the same for other topics.

7b. Creating A Reading Culture: Using Accelerated Reader to improve reading skills
Bolton College
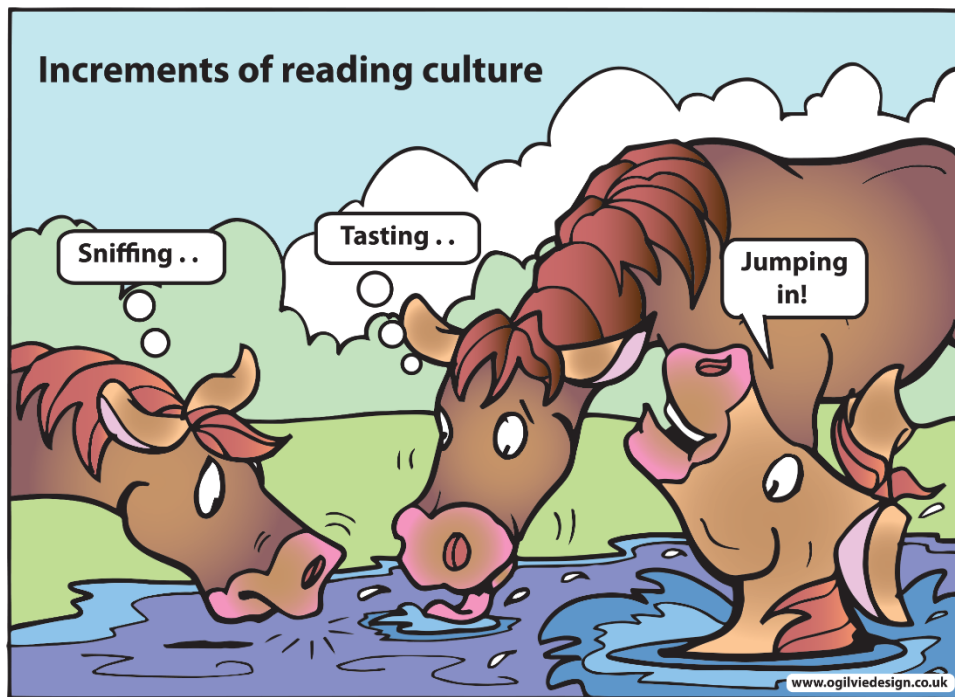
This project set out to engage with learners who had the weakest performance in relation to national rates in 2018/19. Learners were engaged with the Accelerated Reader programme, where a software assessment identified areas of development and the reading level.

Summary

Bolton College is a Further Education college located in the North-West of England that provides a range of vocational courses to both young people and adults.

The English department chose classes from Foundation Learning (FL) and the vocational area of Motor Vehicle. The project involved regular liaising between English tutors, Foundation Learning tutor, Motor Vehicle tutors and

the library. Learners were then provided with a weekly one hour-long dedicated reading time in the College Library within their vocational hours, using texts which met the level of ability identified by their Accelerated Reader as well as their interest.

Rationale

Our aim was to address why low-ability students resisted reading for pleasure and thus denied themselves the benefits of developing thinking skills. A report (Ofsted, 2017a) acknowledged that Bolton had 16 year old students scoring below the national average for 5 or more GCSE passes and a higher unemployment rate than the North-West average. Nearly half its population were among the country's 25% most deprived areas. To make matters worse, other recent studies (Duncan et al, 2014; The National Literacy Trust, 2010; Hernandez, 2011) show a clear relationship between poverty, a lack of reading fiction and secondary level education failure.

The vast majority of our young learners do not identify themselves as active readers and certainly not readers of fiction. Many dismiss reading fiction as a non-functional skill that has little relevance for improving their lot; and many have created significant barriers to any learning that uses it. They often identify it as an obsolete skill, especially given the ready availability of non-textual content for instruction and advice.

Further, if reading must occur, they generally prefer to access it electronically, and self-sourced because of an underlying mistrust of institution-provided content and ideas. Consequently, learners often associate 'reading skills' with texts that do not hold their interest and consequently become disengaged from learning. We reasoned that, by instituting a regular timetabled event in which students read fiction, we might provide them with an environment that would begin to normalise the reading of fiction in a relaxed environment.

The ultimate goal was to improve student retention and academic outcomes. We chose Motor Vehicle for our project because it is typically composed of

academically lower-achieving students who, in turn, often struggle to engage with the rigour of the tertiary level of the subject. We also chose Foundation Learning students, showing a similar relationship between low academic achievement compounded by special educational needs and disability (SEND).

Approach

- The English tutors decided on an action plan and a questionnaire which comprised open questions and mind-maps. The intention was that learners should develop an appreciation of the fact that they already used reading for purpose and that they had patterns of reading already in place.

- The location and manner of the reading was discussed. It was agreed that the library was the best environment within which to encourage an enjoyment of reading. This was also the best place, with its computers, to run the Star Tests and Accelerated Reader book quizzes that measure progress. Accelerated Reader training was necessarily undertaken by the English tutors and Library lead. The test itself stipulated a reading age and therefore required a level-appropriate book. The library staff had already colour-coded books from a shortlist of texts containing quizzes, as suggested by Accelerated Reader. It was easy to learn and control this system because it produces reports that guide progress for each learner and class (see Figure 7b-1).

- English tutors liaised with the library manager to consider the appropriateness of existing stock for the anticipated reading levels of students. They also sought to buy in further stock that would engage Motor Vehicle students, mostly males and typically very low ability readers. We decided on abridged versions of contemporary fiction and graphic novels.
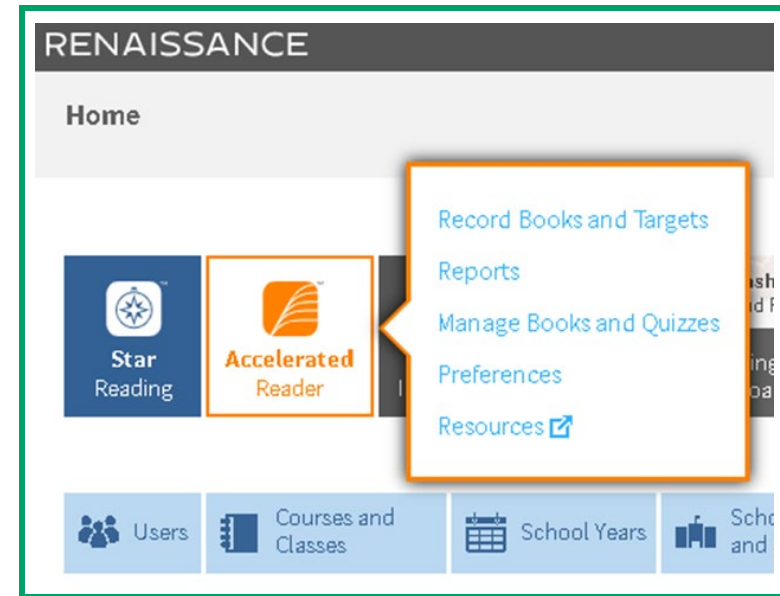

Figure 7b-1: Screenshot of Accelerated Reader interface

- Between September and December, Motor Vehicle and Foundation Level lecturers brought students to the library for an hour on a weekly basis. They were guided by the librarian and English tutors to the dedicated reading section of the previously selected texts and encouraged to find a space and place to read. Learners initially didn't mind the testing system, accustomed as they are to online exercises, and were able, with generous support from English tutors, to decide on an accessible, colour-coded text to read over the coming sessions.

- Learners attended the sessions on a weekly basis. This proved slightly problematic, as it sometimes clashed with coursework deadlines, together with the fact that several were often absent on the day. However, the way to normalise the students' reading and generate momentum was to gently insist on this schedule; many learners responded by attending consistently and finding a quiet place where they could settle in to read for 30 minutes or so.

- Learners often sat in front of computers to read texts, but this proved a distraction, as did their access to personal devices. A degree of discipline and advice was cautiously offered. Learners would interrupt their own reading by checking or using their phones, and tutors would carefully discourage the habit for fear of affecting the positive reading atmosphere we were attempting to institute.

- At the end of December term, students completed a test to measure any changes in Reading Age, completed questionnaires regarding their reading enjoyment and discussed the project and their feelings in focus groups.

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

- The key revision to standard practice was the use of vocational area time to support the learners' enjoyment of learning in an environment that promotes a peaceful approach to reading. All tutors agreed that the library was by far the best environment in which to encourage the students to relax and explore texts.

- Learners offered mixed responses. Some felt they had regained an interest and enthusiasm in reading fiction for pleasure and went on to being more engaged users of the library.

- The findings from the Accelerated Reader Star tests and the focus groups, plus the feedback from the vocational area relating to the time constraints placed upon them, has suggested a more diverse and strategic approach to the use of both time and student-type. Foundation Learning level students showed a slight rise in Reading Age overall (see Figure 7b-2), with one or two notable improvements suggesting a very positive reaction to the practice (see Figure 7b-3).

Figure 7b-2: Class Average of Reading Age in Foundation Learning

Figure 7b-3: Individuals pre-test and post-test Reading Age in Foundation Learning

- Because of focus group feedback, we have begun to explore the best genre of texts available to engage the learners in more bespoke ways. Many students agreed with Motor Vehicle tutors' suggestions regarding vocationally-oriented texts, veering away from the fictional element but nonetheless expressing a wish for an ongoing reading-enriched environment on a weekly basis.

- Instituting group discussion to explore the nature and enjoyment of reading was met with mixed and interesting reaction. A revised approach to the use of time is being considered.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

- The project has shown how successfully different areas of the college can collaborate when negotiating a cross-curricular initiative that could potentially have resulted in conflict or apathy. Through regular emails and, more usefully, face-to-face discussion, all parties were able to find resolutions for the key issues of student motivation and class availability. On several occasions Motor Vehicle wanted to cancel the session but we compromised by taking one class instead of two, or selecting students who were not about to miss a deadline for their coursework.

- The profoundly hearing-impaired learners, both of whom scored particularly low on the Reading Age could still use interest-appropriate texts according to their needs, thanks to discussions between the students, English tutors, the student support staff and the librarian.

- All stakeholders agreed that the project was sound in principle and were keen to support it on an ongoing basis. A revised approach to timetabling was discussed in order to place less pressure on individual students who were falling behind on their Vocational course, whilst being mindful of the fact that these students are likely to be why this project is running.

- Foundation Level students, with the lowest Reading Age scores in the cohort, particularly benefitted from a regular period of reading for pleasure, so this has remained in place.

- English tutors have gone over to Motor Vehicle for face-to-face discussions about the ongoing conduct of the project, offering support and suggestions to find ways how best to motivate the students.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The improvement in the two different sets of learners, Foundation Level and Motor Vehicle, need be presented in different ways. Foundation Level had explicit results in terms of the measurements from Accelerated Reader. Of the seven students who took part, four had improved their Reading Age, and the class average rose marginally.

Of particular interest was their Student Growth Percentile (SGP), measuring their development against peers who were taking tests at a similar time: three students were placed in the top quartile nationally. The Accelerated Reader results showed up differently for Motor Vehicle: across the three classes, the tests suggested marginal increases and decreases in Reading Age, but again, some growth showed on their Student Growth Percentile.

Students' engagement, according to data gathered via a questionnaire largely showed appreciation of reading as important, as was a quiet reading place. Many students commented that reading had been seen as something to be endured at school so they had derived little pleasure from fiction reading. The type of book they preferred, if any, was comics or image-supported texts.

A number of the low Reading Age, high needs students from Motor Vehicle absented themselves from reading as it came directly after a break-time. This made us think more closely about how best to support their access to the project and is a current topic for discussion.

Several students from the three Motor Vehicle classes expressed a preference for reading on their phones: their views were that texts in the form of hard-copy books were archaic and virtually obsolete, and that reading fiction was unnecessary. Besides, they would prefer to read the news, vocationally oriented texts or simply video media. This was discussed on a case-by-case basis.

Their comments were welcomed and one tutor explained that it was not so much the story or the text that was significant but the critical questioning that happened during reading; this helped to extend a person's thinking beyond their existing frame of experience. The more argumentative the learner, the more sophisticated the response needed.

Learners broadly appreciated the efforts made by the college to support them, as shown in their responses during a focus group meeting. However, some tutors of the vocational area and English still felt that students were often trying to please rather than engage.

> **MV Level 3:** *"Why should I read stories? I like watching YouTube videos and listen to podcasts about cars and design. I'd rather spend my time reading things that are going to benefit me."*
>
> **MV Level 2:** *"I used to read when I was in school, and write… I'd forgotten what I like… you don't make time for it do you?"*
>
> **Transcribed from focus groups with Motor Vehicle learners**

Learning from this project

Learners who engaged with the project were able, with close English tutor guidance, to use the time and effort being offered them productively. The best means of engaging learners appeared to be discussing their interests with them, finding out their interests and, drawing on their own knowledge of fiction, try and connect thematically with available texts.

Occasionally the most useful strategy was simply to take a text from a shelf, engage the learner with the ideas prompted by the opening sentence and see if that could engage them. Modelling this kind of textual-interrogation gave them encouragement to continue reading and appreciating how such narrative hooks could be useful.

The potential distraction of phones was ever-present, which meant that tutors had to acknowledge the existence of the distraction and then gently encourage students to return to reading. One way was simply to ask a student what text they were reading, ask them questions about why they thought characters behaved as they did, and then leave them to regain their reading momentum independently.

The project should continue to engage students in reading for pleasure reasonably effectively provided the activities offered fit their needs, that is, more graphic texts and perhaps online reading. English tutors and the librarian effectively predicted this, as shown in their summer purchases, and they will continue to invest in texts according to student interest.

Learners are always most engaged when being listened to, so to encourage more effective engagement we might consider either discussing students' choices as shown in the texts they have chosen to read, or perhaps getting some kind of qualitative feedback through their rating and evaluation of texts.

Whereas progress in Reading Age has been limited it is noticeable that the very facilitation of a programme organised around Accelerated Reader has benefitted many learners by rekindling their appreciation for reading fiction.

Encouraging learners to engage in the activities as a test-led exercise was the least effective way of engaging students in the activity; encouraging them to see its benefits as indirectly improving critical thinking influenced a few more so but this happened only after protracted debate.

Accelerated Reader proved to be an excellent tool to track progress but turned out to be challenging when used over a very short period of time. However, feedback can be used to encourage learners to see how their learning is growing: this can readily be seen in their response to quizzes which, when done regularly, brings out their competitive side.

More non-fiction texts and more graphic novels can be added to the stock in order to best engage learners. Furthermore, discussion of texts might be suggested for group-wide interaction and engagement.

7c. Creating a reading culture
Burton and South Derbyshire College
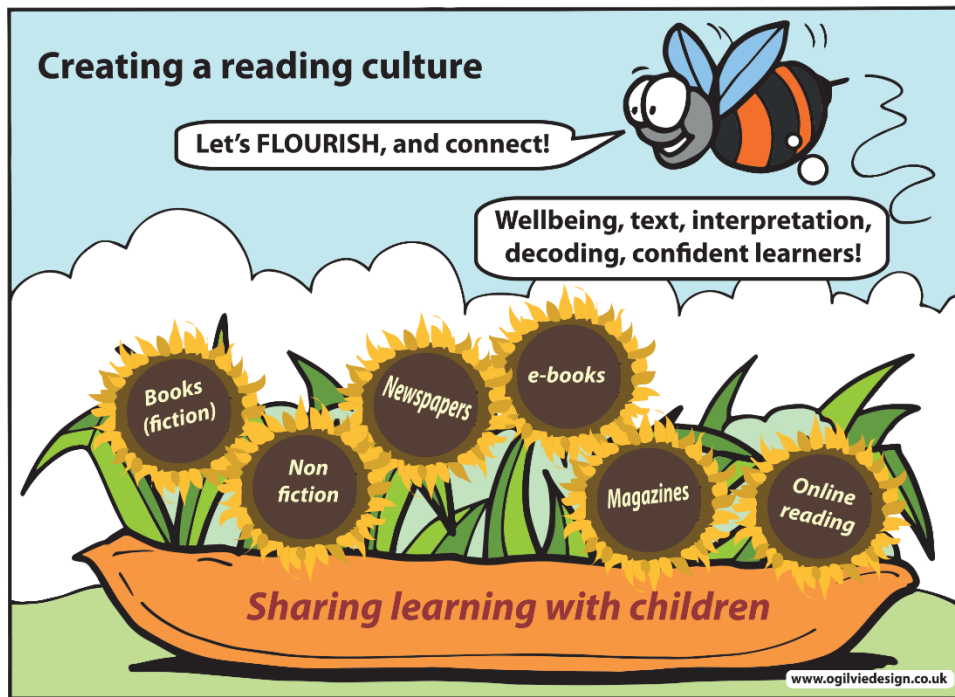
This project aimed to promote greater reading development and attainment for a group of ESOL learners based at a general FE College.

Summary

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) staff and the ESOL team decided to collaborate in order to develop a strategy for enhancing and prioritising learners' reading skills, thus promoting effective engagement in independent reading. The strategy used a reading challenge to encourage learners to access a wide variety of textual material and construct reflective comments, as well as reviewing the content of the material to clarify their personal perceptions. As the project progressed learners were able to share their insights with greater confidence; this helped them to consolidate their

reading skills and move on to the next stage of their learning with greater appreciation of their capacity for reading.

Rationale

The Reading Challenge, using the Reading Agency's 'Reading Ahead' scheme, has been delivered regularly at the college to learners on a small-scale basis, largely in the curriculum areas of Foundation Learning and ESOL provision. The focus for the research was to make decisions about the validity, relevance and impact of this approach, with a view to improving the reading ability and reading engagement of learners across college.

The project also sought to identify the areas we needed to develop further to enhance the depth and breadth of the programme within wider curriculum areas.

Approach

The project leader and the ESOL team collaboratively selected a group to take part in the research. An ESOL level 1 group was chosen, because the reading element that the group were currently completing offered an ideal opportunity to investigate their current practices. The project leader, together with the rest of the LRC team, conducted weekly sessions with the selected group to deliver the reading challenge.

The sessions focused on introducing a variety of reading materials and recording learners' experiences as they connected directly with their selected texts. This involved exposing them to different styles of text, including fiction, non-fiction, online reading, news items and magazines. Learners participated by deciding the reads themselves; this encouraged ownership of learning and a sense of autonomy. Regular meetings and conversations between the project leader, LRC team and the ESOL course tutor helped them to deliver, develop and monitor the progress of the research project.

Data obtained from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and diaries was used to record progress and come to provisional conclusions about whether such an approach increased learners' reading stamina and engagement with texts. Focus groups were held with learners to find out whether participants' confidence levels had improved. They also provided an opportunity to investigate whether the content and breadth of the programme had actually engaged learners' interests and encouraged them to read more widely.

Figure 7c-1: Posting to Padlet

Learners' views were captured online through a Padlet space, where they could contribute thoughts and post reviews about their reading. This innovative approach allowed learners to document their critical responses towards texts as well as share and celebrate their reading experiences with other learners.

Further, tutors reflected on learner progress and engagement; this collaborative process helped them to identify associated forms of inquiry and fostered relationships with curriculum staff and learners, all aimed at improving the quality of the learners' experience.

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

As the Reading Challenge progressed it became evident that learners were keen to engage in more online reading, frequently using their phones to translate difficult words or phrases. The project allowed learners the space to reflect on their online reading habits; many had not considered this to be part of the natural context for reading. As a result, the Padlet was established as a forum for recording learner reviews and testimonies, which made the process of evaluating practice with learners easier and helped them to assess its impact on learning more adequately. This in turn prompted changes to session plans. It became a sustainable tool in promoting the benefits of technology and supporting learners in using digital literacies.

The research process, especially the use of questionnaires and interviews, enabled a closer and more positive understanding of the diverse nature of learners' cultural backgrounds and their perceived level of confidence in relation to other languages. For some learners it was an opportunity to widen their reading to other languages in which they were fluent, such as French and Spanish, reflecting the physical journey they had taken before settling in the UK. As a result of this project, to highlight the value of reading, learners learned how to set appropriate challenging goals for themselves, while demonstrating greater awareness of reading as a skill which can be mastered, stretched and improved upon.

Using the Padlet, learners were able to identify and post new or tricky words, leading to whole group discussions, an active way to widen vocabulary and build exposure to new expressions. It demonstrated a collective means for overcoming individual barriers to learning and a safe way to identify personal learning needs with the group.

Learners reported improved confidence and self-efficacy through taking part; they felt much better equipped to address their English needs.

Learners recognised that building effective reading habits and mastering good reading skills were crucial for their success.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Supportive collaboration between curriculum and support staff has provided a basis for more effective communication and working practices. The exposure of learners to an additional team and spaces across the college has been shown to reinforce and aid learner autonomy. The recognition that others in the organisation can support the learner journey enriches both learners and teaching staff, and acts as a positive influence on the culture of the college by making learners feel they are part of a wider learning community.

This strengthening of curriculum collaboration has provided groups with opportunities to engage in meaningful research-informed sessions and approaches. The adoption of the Padlet as a tool of engagement has championed new practices, shared with the ESOL teaching team.

Although the strategy may prove challenging, ESOL Entry Levels 2 and 3 are scheduled to become parts of the planned ongoing collaborative process with selected GCSE English, Functional Skills and International groups.

Because the sessions are more interactive and structured, they can easily be adapted for focusing on different aspects of reading skills such as comprehension, inference, improving vocabulary and fluency.

The focus on reading has been celebrated and established through inductions and certificate award ceremonies, and locally and nationally through the college social media, highlighting the organisational commitment to celebrating learners' achievements in reading.

The certificate award ceremony was sponsored by an international e-textbook publishing company. As a result, new initiatives were discussed for developing provision to support more online reading.

These new and exciting innovations will be embedded into subsequent versions of the reading challenge to recognise the rapidly transforming models of accessing reading materials. These will allow our curriculum to adapt, assimilate and align to new digital literacies.

Figure 7c-2: Celebrating success

Further dissemination of the outcomes of the project is planned for sharing with other information professionals working in the Post-16 sector at the Council for Learning Resources in Colleges conference.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The structure of the reading challenge actively encouraged learners to engage with choosing and selecting items they wanted to explore to promote learner autonomy. The structured sessions introduced different types of text and the freedom to select reading material that explored matters of social and cultural diversity. During a session focused on exploring the connection between reading and wellbeing, learners actively selected issues related to their interests. They read magazine articles about home décor, psychology or children's behaviour. The project therefore allowed the foregrounding of personal interests and reaffirmed their identity.

Learners had the opportunity to discuss their opinions and perceptions with others and use deeper forms of questioning about the texts they had selected. For instance, two learners had chosen different books about Shakespeare; by the social activity of discussion, comparison and critical

inquiry they were able to check facts about his life, make sense of information, and develop their levels of literacy.

Learners were positive about the challenge, many reporting that it improved and boosted their levels of confidence in English. The emphasis on learning new vocabulary made them curious to discover and assimilate new words so they could, as acknowledged by one learner, "Enjoy imagining each situation."

Figure 7c-3: Reading session

The challenge encouraged many of these learners to explore the connection between reading and their own lives and values. Some wanted specific books to share and read with their families, while others wanted to enhance their learning, especially their writing capacity. By using the practices of decoding and engaging with different texts, many of the learners were able to liberate their thinking and explore what mattered deeply for them.

> *"I really love this challenge, because this challenge make (sic) me happy and it made me gain confidence. Thank you for giving me this chance."*
>
> **(ESOL Learner).**

Learning from this project

- Synergies were recognised that allowed learners to gain the most meaningful and productive interactions with the texts they had read. For example, magazines and online reading proved to be an impactful way to introduce non-fiction to learners. As learners selected material, they were consciously choosing connections with prior knowledge and personal identity, resulting in strong engagement with the chosen texts.
- Structured sessions provided a key focus on different types and formats of text, including online, print, fiction and non-fiction, Emphasis on different reading strategies assisted learners in text interpretation and decoding. Extensive reading complemented increased learner knowledge and context acquisition.
- Sessions were structured to address the challenges of independent reading and make learners accountable for their choices. Think, pair, share activities helped learners to verbalise their thoughts and critical assumptions before committing to paper or posting online.
- Emerging practices for digital reading were identified as a new way to develop reading skills and learner engagement. The development of the Padlet facilitated the effective online sharing of reviews.
- The active identification of new words and deployment of strategies to decide their meaning ensured that learners were less daunted at the prospect of skipping over words or phrases that appeared problematic. Many learners placed great importance on developing skills to achieve the reading exam and were prepared to commit to further independent reading and decoding to master their skills.
- It was recognised that some ESOL learners had limited time for additional reading activities outside the timetabled sessions because of familial and work responsibilities. Sourcing relevant accessible online reading may further supplement and improve the frequency of developing effective reading habits.
- There is an opportunity to explore how writing instruction can be built into the project, such as how writing requirements can be framed so that less confident learners can improve their critical analyses and rely less on descriptive writing. These practices would support lower level learners.

8a. Creating a vocationally relevant English assessment tool for learners with grade 4+
Lakes College
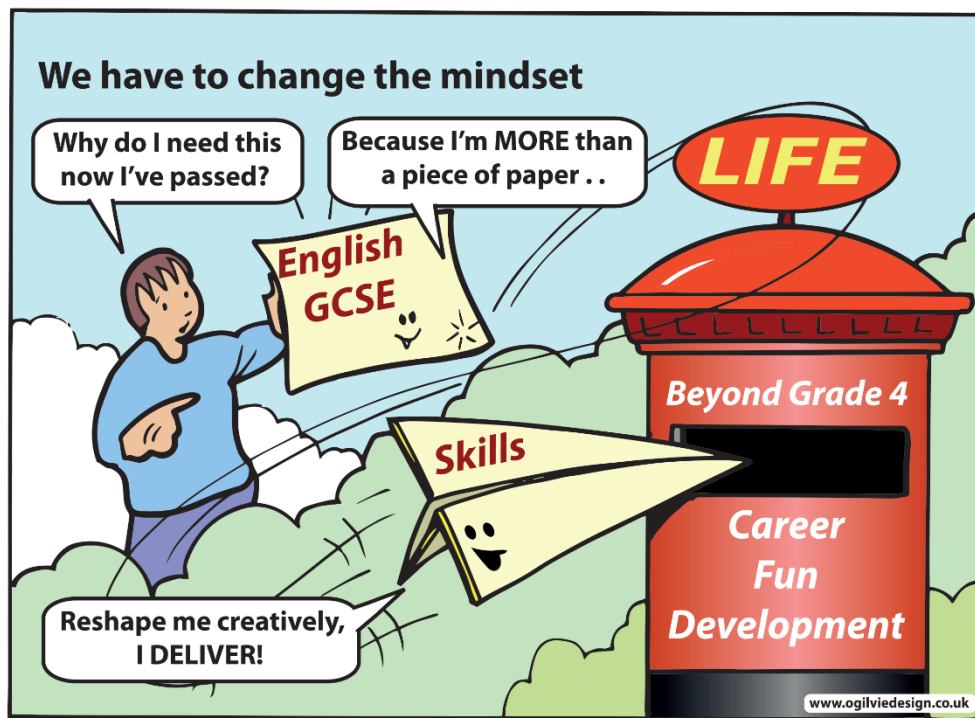
This project focused on learners who have already attained Level 2 in English (Functional Skills or GCSE 4/C+) and would benefit from further development of their English skills in a contextualised manner.

Summary

Our college is a General Further Education College in West Cumbria, offering a broad range of subjects from Level 1 to Foundation Degrees.

The project aimed to address the challenge faced by establishing an accurate starting point and skills gap information for learners. It also aimed to go beyond the general diagnostic information provided by popular systems currently available, as often these are generic and not subject-specific.

This current system was also resulting in a lack of engagement in English, post-GCSE or Functional Skills exams.

Rationale

The project was designed to have a much broader target audience. However, for the purposes of our research, we decided to target a cohort of learners on Level 3 Information Technology. This meant that we could create resources specifically for this career pathway, while being able to apply the underpinning English skills to other vocations in the future.

Although we were testing out resources on the whole class, we selected three learners as case studies, after consultation with the department. The whole cohort was a mixture of learners, with or working towards, a Level 2 English qualification, the majority of whom had achieved their English GCSE.

Approach

At the start of the project, we identified which department and students to work with. The IT department was chosen, specifically Level 3 students, as this provided a mixed cohort to trial the assessment resources. From this cohort, three learners were identified to be our case studies.
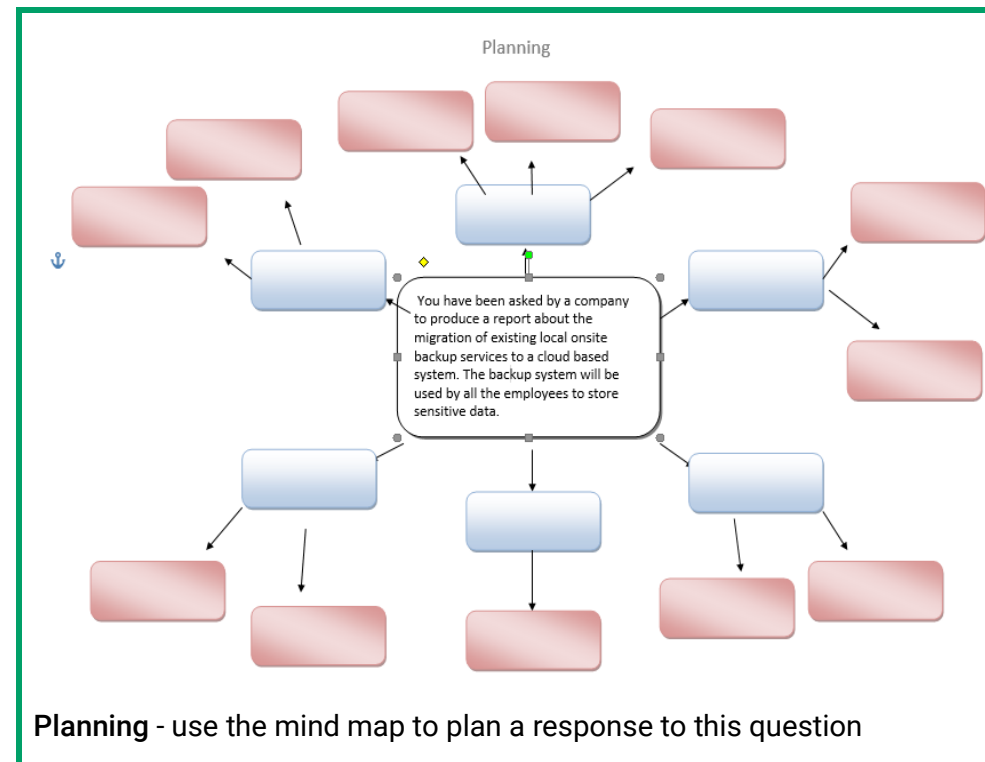
We then designed a self-assessment tool (Figure 8a-1) to establish a clear starting point and delivered our first 30-minute briefing session, during which we explained the project, met the group and established our next steps.

Over the next few months, we worked together to create resources targeting three identified areas from the initial assessment: planning, writing objectively rather than subjectively, and proof reading. We then tested these over three sessions, gathering feedback as we were going.

I.T. Initial Assessment	
Skill	**Score 1 to 5 –** **1 being 'I find this really difficult', to 5 'I'm confident with this skill'**
Proof reading	
Writing introductions and conclusions	
Planning	
Using punctuation	
Structuring writing	
Spelling	
Comparing information	
Using evidence	
Writing objectively rather than subjectively	
Now, complete the activities for your three lowest scoring categories	

Figure 8a-1: I.T. Initial Assessment

During the planning session, we did an introductory activity exploring the steps taken to make a cup of tea. This highlighted to the learners that plans can be beneficial to help avoid missing vital pieces of information. We then did a rotation activity of planning spider diagrams, which the learners used to plan exam responses in groups (Figure 8a-2).

Planning

You have been asked by a company to produce a report about the migration of existing local onsite backup services to a cloud based system. The backup system will be used by all the employees to store sensitive data.

Planning - use the mind map to plan a response to this question

Figure 8a-2: Planning activity

In the second session, we handed out an exam-style response, worded subjectively, and had the learners change it to a more objective form, before discussing why it is important to be objective in IT exams.

In the third session, we used a different exam-style response with various spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes. We asked the learners to find them, and then discussed proof reading strategies, focusing on where people make common errors, such as using the incorrect homophone.

In the final session, we repeated the self-assessment tool from the first session to compare learners' progress from their starting point. This, along with the resources trialled, forms our evidence base.

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

As an outcome of the project, we have created an initial assessment booklet, which the IT department can use, going forward, to assess the starting points of their future learners. This also has tasks attached that they can use throughout the year to help them develop their English skills.

We can say that our research has helped us to improve our personal teaching practice as English teachers, especially in terms of developing our confidence in linking specific English skills to vocational courses (I.T. or otherwise). In turn, we will be able to make our lessons more vocationally relevant, and engage our learners through highlighting when they will be using the skills they are learning in their course or in their future workplace. It has also enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of initial assessments, reflect on how best to analyse the starting points of our learners, and think about possible new strategies to develop these.

A strength of this project was involving the learners in every step of the research, and creating an environment that allows them to feel comfortable sharing what is working and what is not. This has taught us that in future initial and formative assessment we could allow the learners to discuss how best to structure the activities for their own benefit, thus making assessments a more collaborative exercise. This makes the learners feel they are valued, and may motivate them to complete it, seeing that they have been part of its creation.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Through undertaking this project, the researchers from both the English department and the IT department have had a chance to work together to develop a resource that is useful for both parties.

There has also been an opportunity, through both the project sessions and drop-ins, for the English department staff to observe IT lessons. This has enabled them to make the initial assessment vocationally relevant, as well as establishing relationships with the participants, and strengthening our relationships with those learners who are in our GCSE resit classes.

Further, by taking part in the Zoom meetings, we have been encouraged to focus our research and maintain its intended direction by our project leaders. A by-product of this was also learning how to use Zoom as a piece of collaborative software, which we could use in the future.

We were also able to access external training sessions, which provided useful guidance and next steps strategies, as well as the chance to network with other researchers and research leaders.

Further, we were given the opportunity to have a project lead visit. Sue provided useful advice which we implemented in the project, including getting feedback from each session, rather than having one large feedback session at the end of the project. This meant that the sessions were fresh in participants' minds, and they were able to provide more focused and useful feedback.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

One aspect where the project has had impact on the participants is that it is clearer to the learners involved who have a grade 4 (or above) in English that their learning journey in English does not stop after passing their GCSE. One learner said they "didn't realise how much English there was in IT" until they took part in the project, while another told us they were using strategies from the planning session in their coursework.

The IT department reported an increase in mock results compared to last year. While this research project is one of several strategies they have implemented this year, it has had a positive impact on how the learners are approaching the higher mark questions, with some using the planning strategies, or checking they are reading the questions properly.

Most of the learners who are still in GCSE classes also had improved mock exam results, with 100% achieving a grade 4 on at least 1 paper, and 40% on both. They have also given some positive feedback about the impact of the project, with one learner saying they felt "it was helping [them] see the link, and useful for [them] to get as much English practice as possible." Learner 3, in our case study, also said that they intend to progress to university, so need

to pass their English GCSE, as well as develop their English skills in order to cope with the academic demands of completing a degree such as essay writing and proof reading.

After the research project is complete, the researchers are going to compare the results of the participants' summative June exams, and reflect on the possible impact of the project.

Learning from this project

From this project, our knowledge claim is that a vocationally relevant initial assessment will provide a sound starting point for assessing a learner's English skills.

We have also learned the benefit of asking critical questions to guide our thinking. This has led to specific findings including the following:

What went well?

Learner engagement: our biggest success from the project was how engaged the learners were in it. All identified participants took part in the sessions without complaint, and gave useful and detailed feedback on what they liked, and what they would change, about the project.

Collaboration across departments: through working with the IT department, we now have a much stronger link in our college between English and IT. This has enabled us to monitor and motivate current GCSE English students on Level 2 and Level 3 IT much more effectively, as those students know our departments work closely together to ensure they are attending and working to the best of their ability.

Development of the initial assessment document: although it has been challenging to strike a balance between being IT-relevant and still testing English skills, we have developed an initial assessment tool which we can use in future IT and/or English lessons (with IT learners) to establish starting points, while avoiding discouraging the learners because of its heavily English content.

In one researcher's personal teaching practice, they are going to try to make formative assessment a more collaborative exercise with the learners. This project has shown them that learners want to be in control of their assessment, and respond well to assessment tasks when they have had some input into their creation. This could be put into practice through allowing learners to choose when the assessment will be done, if it will be done in one go or split into segments, or the topic of the assessment.

Even better if…

Starting earlier: on reflection, the project would have run more smoothly had we completed the initial assessment document before it started, so that it could have been trialled with the participants at the beginning and at the end of the project.

More sessions: there would be a richer amount of data if we had more than four sessions with the learners, especially if we had been able to trial all the activities in the initial assessment tool. This way, we would have feedback on all of them, and be able to use or adapt them accordingly. Two of the case study learners also provided feedback that they would have liked more sessions, and to be able to cover more topics from the initial self-assessment, rather than just the most frequently occurring three 'weak points' discovered in the first session.

In summary, going forward, we would ideally like to publish the initial assessment in an online format, so it could be available both paper-based and digitally, making it accessible to a larger group of people. A digital format could allow for different activities, such as embedding videos and submitting quizzes.

We also feel we can say that we have succeeded in achieving our aims of **helping learners to improve their English skills in a contextualised manner.**

8b. Does support for learners' planning improve achievement, retention and planning?

Wirral Lifelong Learning Service
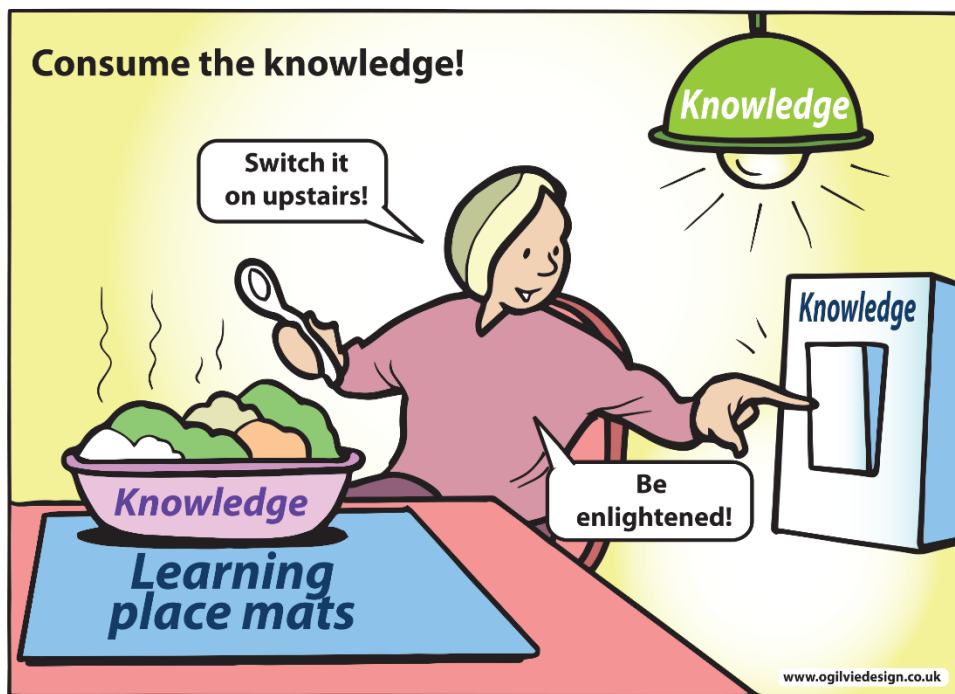
The original aim of this project was to encourage learners to be confident in planning and agreeing their own targets for learning. We gained greater professional insight into the key importance of supporting learners by creating an atmosphere where the cultivation of 'growth mindsets' and a 'can do' attitude is central to their learning.

Summary

Our area of practice is as a Community Learning provider, part of a local authority. The organisation's remit is to provide outreach programmes to the most deprived areas of the borough, with some of the most disadvantaged, diverse and excluded learners. Our area of practice is teaching pre-entry and entry level learners' essential English skills.

Habitually these learners would defer to a tutor and expect to be told how to plan and to perform a learning task. Our aim was to encourage learners to develop self-reliance and autonomy when approaching a learning task and to develop capacity, through greater self-belief and confidence, in employing self-regulatory skills (similar to a metacognitive cycle). In a coaching environment, learners would then develop strategies to manage their own behaviour by taking responsibility for their learning, and therefore become more confident in their abilities when challenged with new learning.

Rationale

The process for learners started by setting and re-setting targets for learning throughout all stages of the learner journey, from initial assessment to planning their own English objectives, and deciding to change their direction of travel as necessary (e.g. when they reached or changed their goals). We reasoned that this could also lead to the improved retention, motivation, attainment and progression of learners, through learner buy-in. Knowles (1988) suggests that adults have an acute insight about where they need to improve. They want to invest their energies in learning content which is relevant to their lives and is something they can build on. Collectively these supporting principles of adult learning could underpin what is already defined as a metacognitive activity.

The main aim was to encourage these learners to recognise, construct and develop their own strategies when approaching a learning task, with initial coaching sessions delivered to encourage them to develop this. It was clearly difficult for them to make connections and see similarities to previous work that had been covered. I had employed scaffolding techniques (Vygotsky 1962), intended to reduce negative emotions and self-perceptions that these learners experienced when they got frustrated, or were intimidated, when attempting a difficult task without support. Achieving improved differentiation techniques were mentioned on our last OFSTED report; and we

argue that learners participating in the project activities may be seen as true differentiation.

Approach

At the outset the core team involved three tutors of adults; but as time went on two of the tutors were deployed elsewhere, so were unable to contribute fully to the project. Firstly, therefore, we needed to assess learners appropriately; but what we really wanted was for learners to self-assess and be selective about which types of English topic they would tackle during the assessment. Previous research by Blakey and Spence (1990) has highlighted that learners are metacognitively aware of their deficits in subject areas, and may well chose to avoid questions that test these areas as they 'know they don't know it'. Our aim was to demonstrate this so, during an emerging readers group, we trialled segmented assessment documents rather than staying with the A4 booklet format. We used the 'Skills for Life' English assessment as an accepted form of organisational literacy assessment. There are 40 English questions to complete, which test: spelling, reading for detail, alphabetical ordering, punctuation, correctly sequencing of events and verb tense agreement. The results indicate which level the learner is working at from pre-entry to Level 2. I was also aware that most learners in this group were negative about completion of entries in a learning diary.

Nevertheless, learners were asked to complete a learning diary which we altered to include:

1. A roadmap to plan their short- and long-term learning goals
2. Highlight their English aims from a list of accepted curriculum outcomes
3. A page to list areas for improvement and to focus on (following initial assessment discussion with their tutor)
4. The diary page was altered to include a 'planning' column, so learners could document their strategies, proposals and ideas to achieve their learning outcome
5. Learner opinions were RAG rated pre and post completed outcome
6. There was a section for the tutor to complete individual developmental feedback about the session.
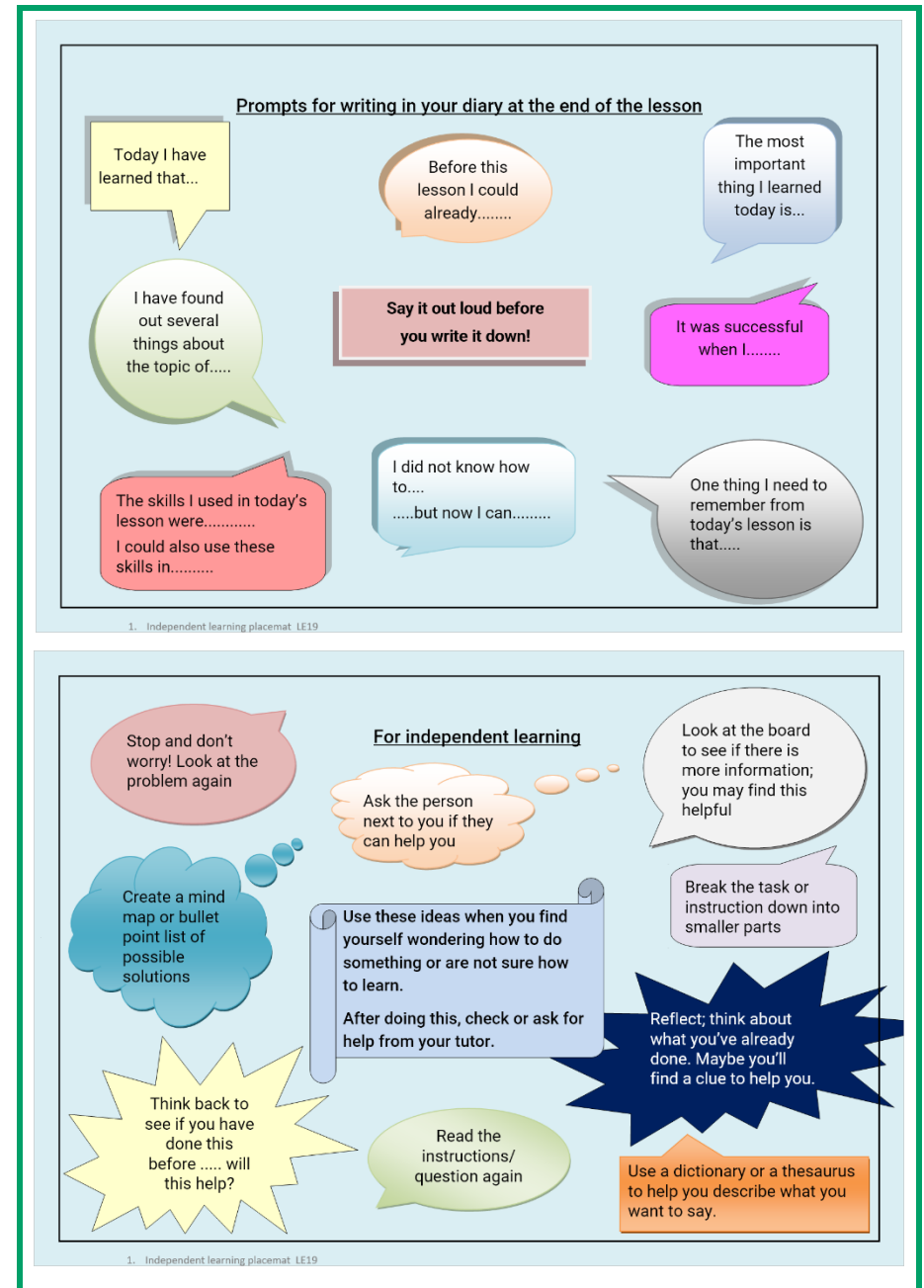

Figure 8b-1: Double-sided Placemat

We felt that this could provide evidence of learner thinking during the intervention. Learners were also informed of the project during a presentation and at a later session asked to complete a questionnaire, noting their thoughts about planning their learning.

A double-sided learning placemat (Figure 8b-1) was developed to aid a 'thinking and planning vocabulary' (Blakey and Spence, 1990) and on the other side a 'prompts for diary writing' for learners. These were placed on all tables, so learners could access these freely, thereby aiding independence when writing or planning strategies to approach a learning task. I used methodological triangulation to gather data. This consisted of the learners' entries in their learning diaries.

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

Initially we wanted learners to self-assess and I knew a maths colleague who routinely segmented their initial assessment for learners, resulting in learners not attempting maths questions about topics that they felt they could not complete. We tried segmenting the English IA document to see if the outcome was the similar, but learners behaved very differently. On the first morning of the new term English learners were given the segmented IA, but worked through it to the end, without differentiating between questions. Only 5 learners attended this first session.

Initially the turnout was low (so potentially this was an unrepresentative group, with any outcomes inconclusive as a sample group), so we needed to repeat with more learners. In light of previous analysis, we anticipated learners leaving some questions and simply moving through the assessment. When more learners attended the following week, the result was identical. So, to try and get a more thorough picture all learners then participated in a segmented diagnostic assessment as well.

Again, the results were not as expected; learners just worked their way through all the questions, rather than discriminated between those they perceived they would find easy and those they would find difficult.

After further discussion with the maths tutor we reasoned that maths may be 'visible' to learners. That is, when glancing at the topic if they could clearly see what the question was about – percentages, decimals, area etc.; and because the maths subjects were set out pictorially, learners could make a judgment about whether they attempted that question during the assessment, whereas the English assessment learners had to read the complete text to fully understand what the question required. Learners reported that after they had read the complete text, it was easier to keep going. This could suggest that learners had a dogged determination to continue regardless.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

With evidence from adult learners, we decided to test in another area and decided on Family Learning; because there is a priority to place learners at the centre of the learning quickly, especially as workshops can be brief (1-2 hours) and gathering evidence of learning taking place can be difficult, especially as children join their parents for part of the session. Using the premise of the main project, we devised an evaluation based on key questions that directly linked to the learning outcomes of the workshop; shifting the assessment for learning to the learner.

Obviously other tutor assessment was taking place, but in sessions where the learners may be primarily at the workshop for their children, the objective was that this would ensure that some learning was taking place and that the learner was aware of it and could self-assess what they have learned.

Key questions were developed to promote a more direct response to the learning outcomes by the learner. So far this has been positively received with encouraging responses from learners that will help develop the workshops further.

The previous evaluation we used was 2 sides of A4, which is more concise. The previous evaluation also required some time for the tutor to deliver it and guide the learners through it, a process not often possible with large groups of adults and young children who have just enjoyed games, play and craft.

However, this newly developed evaluation makes use of the research evidence and uses questioning techniques to support the assessment for learning. This is something we as a service will roll out for all family learning workshops.

So far what has been demonstrated is the need to develop strategies further and to apply the strategy within additional curriculum areas. The project was discussed at a team meeting at the end of term, because another tutor expressed concern about learners being autonomous and "taking ownership of their learning", but was resistant to helping learners develop their planning strategies, stating lack of time within the curriculum.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners documented their planning strategies in the 'planning' column, depending on the task. The entry level learners became more skilled at documenting their approaches than the pre-entry. One learner reported that "*it was the hardest thing I do*" during any lesson.

What I wanted to demonstrate by participating in this project was that learners who could develop a repertoire of thinking and planning processes which could be applied in their future studies to solve learning problems. With refinement and individual development, this would eventually foster the evolution of purposeful thinkers who could become adept problem-solvers and lifelong learners with transferable skills.

When planning their learning pre-task, learners became more confident and positive about the way they approached learning and some were happy to experiment with different approaches. For instance, the 'thinking' placemats had hints and tips which learners began to use when unsure how to proceed, and this added to their confidence and self-belief when attempting new learning.

These approaches also proved beneficial for learners new to the class who were unsure about how to proceed, but they were content to use the mats as a resource and a discussion tool. It is clear that learners are more adept at planning their learning with the help of prompts, discussion and interaction; they have benefitted from being able to experiment with various strategies including those which are appropriate and individual. This is non-prescriptive and differentiated practice in action, which ultimately facilitates learners and learning.

Learning from this project

- The initial aspirations of the project were ambitious, and had to be refined and reduced as the scope of the project became far bigger than initially intended, especially when fewer tutors were involved. This has equipped the project team with a clear sense of how to approach any similar action research projects in the future.
- The results would be more representative had more tutors been involved, and a more substantial cohort of learners' experiences to draw results from. There was also a degree of reluctance to engage in the project by a minority of our colleagues, to a large extent because of competing professional pressures. In terms of "pitching" any future action research project to colleagues and managers we now have a better insight into the importance of emphasising both:
  o ensuring such projects are scaffolded for reassuring participating tutors in relation to workload, and;
  o sharing with tutors at the outset the potential benefits of facilitating learners' planning of their development of wider cognitive skills for their ultimate attainment and success

To conclude, we have gained greater professional insight into the key importance of supporting learners by creating an atmosphere where the cultivation of 'growth mindsets' and a 'can do' attitude is central to their learning. Fostering motivation and resilience ensures that any future learning challenge is not regarded negatively, but embraced by learners' self-monitoring their learning processes and developing better understanding of how they have accomplished their task.

9a. English in Sport or Sport in English?: Developing Reading Skills Via Embedding and Contextualising

University College Birmingham
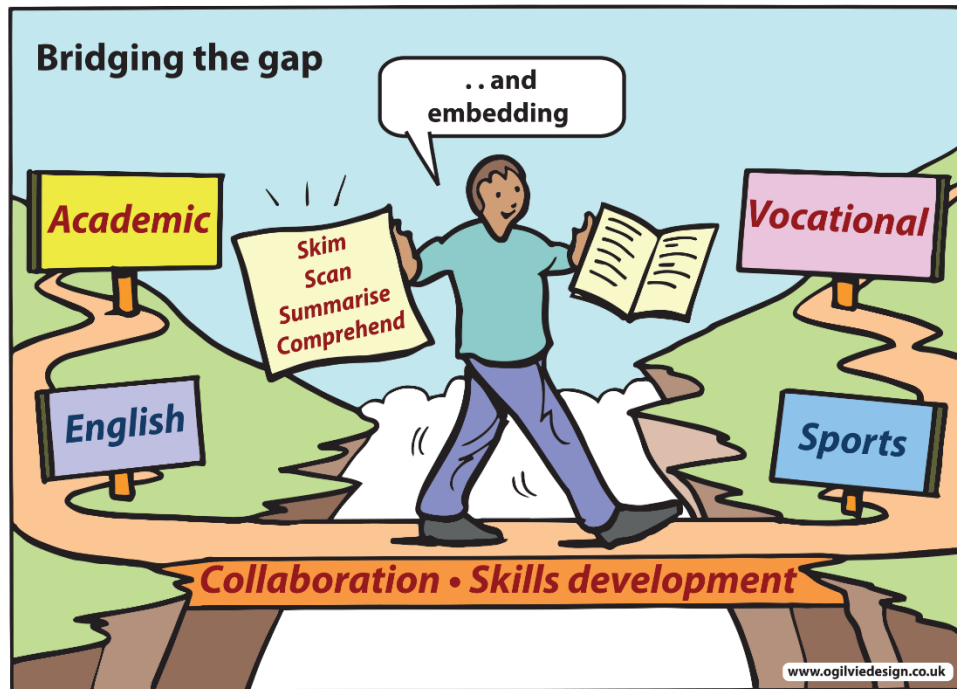
This project was designed to improve the reading skills of Post-16 Sports students who were resitting GCSE English by creating a community of shared practice comprising English and Sports lecturers.

Summary

The project created a collaborative way of sharing information about individuals' specific reading skills so that these could be targeted across their study programme. Learners engaged with vocationally relevant material in both English and Sports lessons, via contextualisation (in English) and embedding (in Sport). The main aim was to create (and evaluate) shared pedagogic DARTS approaches that English and Sports lecturers could use to help students transfer and apply skills in different contexts. A more extended aim was to investigate whether this might have a positive impact upon academic performance. In doing so, the project sought to create a strategy grounded in pedagogy that would address several challenges in the Post-16 sector (GCSE resits, the reformation of English qualifications, the EIF).

Rationale

A large number of GCSE resit students struggle with the increased rigour of the reading questions in the reformed qualifications. Further, the EIF places an emphasis upon the development of learners' literacy skills across a study programme. This project addresses the issue of how to help students to develop and apply specific transferable reading skills by examining strategies for embedding reading skills in vocational delivery and contextualising in English lessons.

Taken separately, both embedding and contextualising can lead to generalised approaches. Vocational lecturers may not know what specific reading skills a learner might need to work on. English lecturers' attempts to contextualise can be limited by a lack of vocational expertise. This project addresses the issue of how to accurately identify an individual learner's specific reading skills and how to share this with vocational colleagues to inform planning. Also, this project investigated how established pedagogic strategies might be shared across a programme of study to differentiate and target learners' specific needs as well as establish collaboration.

Overall, the project addressed how to move from 'promoting reading' (in relation to policy) to 'promoting reading skills and strategies' (in relation to pedagogy) in order to develop reading across a study programme and improve performance in GCSE examinations.

Approach

Assistant Directors/Deans from English and Sport identified a project team who would conduct the action research (two lecturers from each area). The project was small in scale and targeted November resitters across two/three lessons.

Reading Skills Baseline Results			
Student name: _____ Date: _____			
Skill:	RED	AMBER	GREEN
Scan for explicit information			
Correctly identify implied information			
Summarise			
Identify relevant evidence/evidence is short and embedded			
Read the question and identify what is required			
Include enough evidence and range to prove point			
Relate evidence to question			
Give own opinion and back it up with evidence			
Consider how a writer has used language, tone and structure to achieve certain effects			
Synthesise information from two sources			
Compare descriptions, ideas and viewpoints from two sources			

Figure 9a-1: Baseline Assessment

An English Skills Baseline Assessment (Figure 9a-1) was created to test students' discrete literacy skills rather than their performance in exam questions (which test multiple skills simultaneously). The Baseline Assessment resulted in a 'Skills Profile' logged on Academic Tracker (accessible by English and Sports lecturers). This evaluated each skill (e.g. scanning, summarising, identifying explicit/implicit information etc.) against a RAG-rated descriptor. It indicated which areas of reading a student needed to focus on. The baseline was used to identify which learners might participate in the study.

English and Sports lecturers collaborated to plan areas for development: skim/scam, select/retrieve and summarise. In English, scanning and summary activities were used to engender these skills. In order to contextualise, we established a vocational project on 'Doping in Sport,' drawing on the work of WADA. English lessons (after the November resit exams) were fully contextualised to see if students could transfer the skills and apply them to this vocational context. Activities included studying profiles of different sporting figures, applying scan and summary skills.

We then worked closely with vocational colleagues to embed the same strategies in tutorials (for UCAS). This gave the students the opportunity to use the same skills, in a different context, and with their vocational tutor delivering the content.

Progress was measured in lesson via AFL strategies and examination data to assess the impact of the teaching activities used in the learning episodes.

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

Overall, changes in staff practice were evident in how planning for learning foregrounded the development of GCSE reading skills across the programme. The Skills Tracker allowed for the effective sharing of information about learners' specific areas of literacy focus. Literacy skills were made explicit in the delivery of vocational material, which resulted in greater use of scanning/summarising activities. Staff and students valued the assessment of skills development across lessons.

With regard to contextualising, English lecturers valued the guidance about 'vocational literacy' skills that students needed in their Sports course. This provided a meaningful way of making links between practice on examination-style texts and vocationally-relevant materials. The English SOW was adapted to focus upon a Doping Project in order to keep November resitters engaged while they awaited the results of their exams.

Changes in practice were seen in the use of shared strategies to ensure a consistent approach across a programme and detailed discussions about what strategies worked with individual learners. Additionally, the change to planning increased the use of AFL to provide feedback on literacy development across a learner's programme.

The project addressed several elements of the Professional Standards. Lecturers undertook action research as part of their reflective practice. The sharing of data and strategies encouraged staff to evaluate methods in the context of detailed information about learners' skills. The project recognised staff as subject specialists as well as experts in teaching and learning. Collaboration was grounded in shared pedagogy, data and ownership, allowing for the 'gap' between subjects to be bridged.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The sharing of learners' individual skills-data established a context in which practitioners could work collaboratively to target student needs. English and Sports lecturers formed 'Action Learning Peer Pairs' to plan strategies to meet these needs. Participants enjoyed this research and data-informed practice and how this was firmly linked to teaching strategies.

Lecturers reflected that these partnerships helped them to move from general 'tokenistic' strategies for embedding and contextualising to an evidence-based approach based upon pedagogy. They reported an increased sense of individual personal and professional growth as they felt that their contributions, skills and knowledge were recognised and valued. As a result, staff felt empowered to assume responsibility for introducing strategies within a framework of shared ownership.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The focus of activities was scanning for evidence and summarising it accurately. Despite being lower-order skills, these can be a significant barrier to obtaining a grade 4. They are important skills, tested explicitly in the GCSE exams and also underpinning all reading questions.

Starting Points: Data from June Exams

Across the two exam papers, three questions explicitly test the ability to scan, retrieve and summarise. In the June 2019 exams, Student A had a 45% success rate in these questions, while Student B had a 73% success rate. They were flagged as Amber on their Academic Tracker for these skills.

Contextualisation Phase

Learners were given a series of biographies of athletes and asked to scan for specific information, highlight it and summarise it in a grid. This was then assessed using a progress assessment sheet using student-friendly versions of the Skills Tracker RAG-rated descriptors. Student A made significant progress from Amber to Green in scanning and interpreting explicit information. Student B significantly improved their scanning and summarising skills, moving into Green. It became apparent that both students did not always use a highlighter for identifying important information. This was flagged to each learner as an area of improvement.

Embedding Phase

In Sport lessons, students read an article on progression to university and scanned for specific information before summarizing it. Student A again demonstrated improved levels of skill (in the Green band). Student B retained Green performance. Both learners acted on feedback from the contextualisation phase to improve their use of a highlighter. The fact that they both implemented this in the embedding phase showed the transfer of skills across lessons. Lecturers noted a significant improvement in knowledge retention and recall.

Outcome: Data from November Exams

An analysis of the November GCSE showed the impact of the project. Student A showed a significantly improved success rate in the scan/select/summarise questions from 45% to 73% (a 28% increase). Indeed, in the second paper they scored 100% for those questions. Overall, performance had improved in both reading elements. The biggest gains were made in non-fiction. This might suggest that the use of vocationally-relevant non-fiction was effective for this learner.

Student B increased their success rate in the scan/summarise questions from 73% to 91% (an improvement of 18%), showing a clear progression in those questions on both papers (100% in the second paper). There was an improved performance in other reading questions, especially fiction texts.

Student reflection on the Project Activities

Learners' reflections on embedding and contextualising were interesting. In regards to contextualisation in English, student A stated that this task, linked to a Sports context, would help them when attempting a purely English-based piece of work. They said they would think back on this activity when doing English. They enjoyed the link being made between a sports topic and English skills. When asked about how they felt about the contextualisation phase of the project student B said: *"I'm not interested in the idea of vocational relevance – I just want to be taught well and taught the skills that are explicit to English in an English context only."* Both students said that they might have enjoyed the first phase more had they been asked what sporting topic they would like to cover.

Both student A and B said that they enjoyed the 'embedded' lesson with their vocational lecturer, and felt that it had much a stronger resonance with them. They were more motivated because the work was linked to an assignment and they could see its relevance. Despite one being more enthusiastic than the other, the perception of both was that the project has, on the whole, improved their confidence and their skills. They saw a marked improvement in the quality of the work they produced and this was reflected in the exam data.

Learning from this project

- The sharing of skills-based data was felt to be pivotal in driving collaborative change.
- Lecturers reported an increased awareness of individual literacy needs.
- Staff felt that skill-based data was central to discussing concepts of embedding and contextualising.
- Lecturers reported an increased sense of responsibility for designing tasks to promote those skills.

- Across the two teams, there was a sense of increased capacity to meet learners' individual needs.
- There was a sense of 'closing the gap' through taking shared ownership of learners' skills development and a feeling of involvement in each other's courses.
- Lecturers felt empowered to embed literacy because of clear links made between the skills, terminology and specific pedagogic strategies.
- Adopting a 'skills focus' rather than an Assessment Objective focus helped lecturers in planning for the development of skills.
- The 'skills focus' made it clear that scanning and summarising are key underpinning skills that need to be tackled explicitly using active reading strategies.
- For learners, the explicit use of terms such as 'scan' and 'summarise' and the identification of these things as 'skills' helped them to make links between different aspects of their provision.
- Combining RAG-rated skills descriptors and RAG-rated AFL progress assessment sheets helped students to see their progress in the acquisition/application of skills.
- For learners, undertaking activities based around skills in different lessons resulted in improved performance in class and in exams.
- Learners valued the consistent pedagogic approach and the tracking of skills development more than the concepts of 'embedding' or 'contextualising'.
- In the limited scope of this project, it seems that learners found the 'embedding' of literacy skills more valuable than 'contextualisation'.
- The perception of learners was that the project had improved their confidence, their retention of the skills, and that they saw a marked improvement in the quality of the work they produced.
- The project provides a model for introducing change and for creating a community of shared practice.
- The project team felt that this project provided a model for wider institutional approaches.

9b. Finding Spelling Strategies That Work with ESOL Learners

Sandwell College

Spelling for ESOL learners

Stand alone word . .

I study at Sandwell College

'Study'

Learning

I learn more with a sentence!

www.ogilviedesign.co.uk
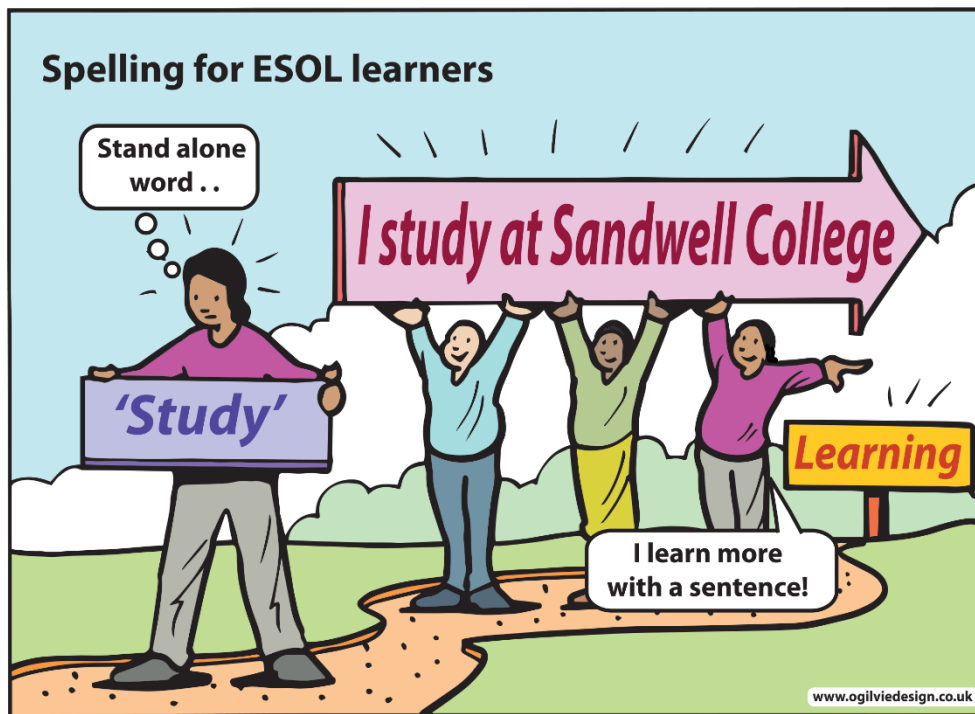
The ESOL teachers at Sandwell College shared a common concern about wanting to improve learner spelling across the 16-18 cohort. In this project teachers experimented with and evaluated a range of spelling strategies.

Summary

Three ESOL teachers implemented the use of a chosen spelling strategy with one of their teaching groups, to support the improvement of learners' spellings, word recognition and writing skills. Each lecturer chose their own approach and implemented their chosen strategy over a 9-week period. The teachers evaluated their strategy on a weekly basis to identify learner engagement, impact on progression, and progress made.

Rationale

In-house achievement data for ESOL Entry Level writing is high at 96%; however, ESOL learners frequently ask for spelling to be included in their individual learning targets. Students also frequently comment on spelling as an area they want to develop further. The majority of 16-18 ESOL learners at the college come from Iran, Iraq, Gambia, Eritrea and Albania, where most are not able to access an education which includes English, or have the opportunity to use a strategy to develop and improve their spelling, word recognition and writing skills. This action research project enabled the teachers to develop the use of a strategy to develop spellings, promote progression and to firmly embed the use of the strategy into their practice.

Approach

- The Project Lead used her role as the Quality & Standards Manager and ESOL teacher to select the ESOL 16-18 provision to implement a spelling strategy to aid learners' development in spellings, word recognition and writing skills.
- The Project Lead delivered a session to introduce the OTLA action research project to enable the ESOL team to identify the scope of the action research project. This enabled the ESOL team to reflect and collaboratively work together to identify a common theme of interest to themselves and their learners. Staff were set the task of deciding the ESOL group they were going to be working with and the spelling strategy they were going to implement. They would then share this with the rest of the team the following week.
- The following week the ESOL staff shared their chosen spelling strategy with the team and the Project Lead. This meeting was quite unproductive and at times negative, which led to an additional meeting being held with just the participants involved in the project. To review the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, learner engagement, progression and impact of the strategy, the project lead was going to carry out informal

and developmental lesson observations. Staff were concerned about being observed; therefore, this activity was replaced with learning walks.

- The five participants involved in the project then met. This meeting enabled the project lead to resolve misconceptions, confirm the process and clearly clarify the purpose of action research. An OTLA project guide was provided to the participants, which included the following:
  - Project start and end dates, participants involved, partner institutions
  - Aim of the project
  - Brief description of what action research is
  - Examples of project evidence
  - Steer on teacher reflections
  - What Reflective Model (adapted from: Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., Jasper, M. 2001) to guide staff with their reflections
  - Project schedule
  - Things to consider

Staff also received a notebook to use as a reflective journal to record their thoughts, student feedback and active notes to support their personal reflections.

The project participants implemented their spelling strategy from the week commencing 23 September to Friday 06 December. The approach each teacher used was:

Teacher 1 - Word cards used with a pre-entry group (Step Up) who are working towards their Entry Level 1 exams. The 'look, cover, write, check' method was used to practise spellings. This teacher targeted regularly used common words appropriate for pre-entry learners. The teacher provided learners with sentences to help create a narrative, rather than a standalone word that had no meaning for them. For example: 'I live in Birmingham'. The word 'live' alone does not really have any meaning to the learners. However, in a sentence it helps learners to see its importance. This approach from week 3 changed to using a word board which consisted of sentences instead of the word cards. Learners were provided with different sized cover cards to support them in using the strategy.

Teacher 2 – This teacher wanted a pre-entry group to learn the spellings of the 12 months. Learners were tasked to rearrange letters to spell out the

months. The teacher introduced a spelling bee competition where learners individually verbally spelled the months. A spelling test was introduced and learners gave feedback using thumbs up and thumbs down cards later on in the project. In the last few weeks of the project the teacher turned the focus to learners correctly writing and spelling their address using the same strategy.

Teacher 3 – Here the teacher gave Entry Level 1 learners 15 topic-based spellings per week. Learners used the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method to practise. The teacher introduced an outcome star to record learners' confidence and actual spelling test score. Learners worked in groups to test each other on their spellings before having a spelling test

- Teachers completed 2 project peer observations. This gave teachers an opportunity to showcase their project and share effective practice. Following the peer observation there was a professional dialogue, which promoted reflection and evaluation and an opportunity to receive constructive feedback on their approach.
- Each participant had 2 learning walks which were carried out by the Project Lead. The Head of Section for ESOL also carried out learning walks. The scope of the learning walk was to review the impact of the action research project on learning and the learners.
- The Project Lead formally met with each participant on 3 occasions, twice during the project and once following the project.

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

The approaches used in classroom sessions enabled learners to actively participate in learning their spellings and demonstrate their learning and progression: this was evident in learning walks. Teachers reflected on their practice and further developed and tweaked their spelling approach, enabling staff to focus their reflections on a specific aspect of their teaching, making it more relevant to their own personal development.

Teachers designated one classroom session (1 hour and 15 minutes) per week to enable learners to use their spelling approach to develop their

spelling skills. This one session per week promoted a routine for learners who knew which was their spelling-focused day and came to lessons prepared for this. In these lessons, teachers commented on how learners engaged with their spellings and took ownership of their learning from when they arrived in class, where normally they would await instruction from the teacher for details of the starter activity.

All the participating teachers found that even though time constraints were involved, being part of the action research project was extremely beneficial. It allowed them the opportunity to use evidence-based practice to trial TLA strategies in the classroom to accelerate the progress learners made. Most teachers said the project has re-ignited their passion and given them the confidence to take risks and try something different and new.

The ESOL department has supported the project and the teachers involved have said they will continue with the productive work carried out to date with the aim of involving the newer members of the team in the coming academic year. They will consider carrying out action research to develop other aspects of learners' English skills.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

All staff reported more effective relationships and collaboration. The completion of peer observations enabled staff to have more professional dialogue about teaching, learning and assessment practices.

A training session in January focused on post-16 phonics for second language learners, which provided staff with phonics-based approaches to support the development of learners' spelling, writing skills and progression.

Two teachers from the project presented their findings at the teach meet held at the college, **#TMSandwell**. Following the presentation there was interest from internal and external English practitioners at the OTLA Project stand. Internal staff were asking for more information regarding the project and the use of the word board. Other ESOL and Functional Skills practitioners were keen to implement the same, or a similar approach.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Most learners have been actively engaged and focused with learning their spellings and welcome the designated lesson time to practise them. A learner said *"Wednesday is spelling day. I like it."*

Learners who used the word board, where a sentence was practised rather than a standalone word, made the most progress. With this approach, learners had autonomy over the words in the sentence they needed to practise to enable them to write the full sentence correctly. These learners can now form personal sentences with more ease and proficiency. By the end of the project, learners had significantly better writing skills in December, compared to learners' writing skills from the previous academic year.

As the word board approach resulted in learners having to learn and write a full sentence, this enabled the teacher to quickly identify learners who potentially had learning difficulties. Learning difficulties are usually not assessed at the pre-entry level; however, the teacher was able to direct the LSA accordingly to provide more focused in-class support.

All learners who participated in the project have improved their handwriting, letter formation, pronunciation of words and the recall of letters and words. The word board group has seen the greatest results in the overall improvement of writing and spelling skills. Where the spelling bee was used, learners can more confidently recognise the letters G/J and I/E.

The learners who were learning the spellings of the months moved to learning the spelling and layout of their address. As learners were visually familiar with this, they were able to identify their address from a selection of addresses, and learnt the spelling and layout of their address more quickly than the spellings of the months. They could also verbally spell their address with more ease. The impact of this is that learners can now confidently complete the first part of the Entry Level 1 written assessment.

Learner confidence has increased and learners enjoyed the challenge of the project. The teachers involved at the start thought learners wouldn't enjoy practising their spellings as much as they did. The Project Lead got a round

of applause from one of the groups involved as a thank you for letting them participate.

Beginning the project at the start of the academic year has improved learner collaboration and peer support more quickly and positive learner relationships have been observed by teachers and the lead.

A number of learners involved in the project are looked after children and have Personal Education Plans. At review meetings learners have been talking about learning spellings and how they enjoy doing it. They can see the impact this has had on their writing skills and have mentioned this in their review meeting with the ESOL Head of Section and their social worker.

The teachers working with pre-entry learners have seen the impact of developing the spellings and writing skills of learners and the progress learners have made with their writing. The focus in term 1 is generally on speaking and listening skills to prepare learners for their exam. However, moving forward, staff will incorporate more reading and writing activities to develop these skills more effectively from the start of the academic year.

Learning from this project

Prior experiences of learning and assessing spellings would be via homework tasks and spelling tests; the approaches adopted in the project have enabled learners to be more active and responsible for their learning and progress.

The word board, consisting of sentences and varying sizes of cover cards, has been highly effective in enabling learners to learn spellings and improve the sentence structure and writing of learners. Learners can see and learn how the words are applied in a sentence, and this increases their spoken and written vocabulary.

Where some learners made progress with spelling and verbally spelling the months of the year, the majority of the months were too complex for pre-entry learners. This was similar to the group who on a weekly basis were given topic-based words to learn. There is less commonality compared to the learners' address and the words used in the word boards, which impacted the learners' overall progress and learning.

Generally, ESOL learners are given standalone words from topics, which are not effectively reinforced or recalled when the next topic is introduced. Level-appropriate sentences using the target vocabulary give learners a narrative and a purpose for the word, thus improving learners' understanding, recognition and commitment to long-term memory. The word board learners can independently transfer their personal details to the learnt sentences, which further reinforces their learning and confidence in writing.

The word board approach has reinforced the importance of repetition in language learning, especially at the lower levels. Because of time constraints, exam preparation and a need to achieve, or maintain high achievement rates, this is often overlooked or not effectively reinforced.

The learners involved in the project have enjoyed and fully engaged in the project. The learners had thought the only way to learn spellings was to write the word over and over again. We have seen how learners at the pre-entry level who can't spell their name or write the alphabet embrace the project and make progress from their starting point. Staff have seen increased learner engagement and motivation.

Management need to ensure that the benefits of using word boards with pre-entry and Entry Level 1 learners are fully embedded into the department's practice to promote the development of learners' writing skills and progression to the next stage of study.

The pre-entry teachers learned that even though they have high expectations of their learners, the learners themselves are capable of so much more. With the positive approach, execution and assessment of their approach most learners have made high levels of progress compared to their initial starting points.

Following the success of the word board, the two teachers who used the spelling bee method will incorporate this into their teaching, learning and assessment practices to support the development of learners' skills in preparing for their exams and their next steps.

9c. To P.E.E. or not to P.E.E.: using scaffolding to develop written responses
Moulton College

This project sought to answer the question: how can staff best support learners in structuring their responses to meet the requirements of a set task?

Summary

We set out to examine the usefulness of scaffolds such as 'evidence and zoom' (presented as paper resources) in supporting learners to respond to questions where there are very clear success criteria, as in, for example, a GCSE language analysis question. A range of such resources were offered to learners in GCSE English resit lessons. Similar resources were also offered to learners in theory lessons for level 3 courses in Animal Management and Sports Studies and the project involved tutors, learning support assistants

and students from these subject areas. Moulton College is a specialist land-based FE college in the East Midlands offering programmes including animal management, equine studies, construction, sport and agriculture.

Rationale

Our GCSE English learners experience many of the same challenges as other learners resitting the qualification nationally. Examples of these challenges include: their evidence not supporting the point they are making; implausible inferences being drawn from the evidence; moving from one point to another with little evidence given in support of the points; digressing from the question that is being asked and identifying language techniques but not commenting on their effects. Tutors identified a distinct mismatch between learners' spoken and written performance. Tutors in the Animal Management and Sport departments also reported similar findings. In particular, learners often digressed from the question being asked or they missed important discussion opportunities that the question required them to mention. Vocational tutors wanted to examine the role of scaffolds in supporting learners to overcome these challenges. The English project lead had attended training about cognitive learning theories and was starting to see implications for the way tutors support learners to structure their writing.

Approach

- In summer 2019, the project lead met with three Animal Management and three Sport tutors to identify some of the written tasks learners struggled with.
- English and vocational tutors then worked together collaboratively to create some resources to help. Each area produced two main resources. One was a scaffold which was quite prescriptive and formulaic. The other offered tips and guidance about what was required, but allowed more freedom in how the components of the paragraph should be arranged.

Four resources were produced for Sport courses, one of each type for two different courses.

- English tutors refined two types of resource that could be offered to learners for language analysis responses.
- Between September and December 2019, the tutors of GCSE English, Animal Management and Sport offered both types of resource to learners, in lessons where they could be helpful. Tutors allowed the learners to choose whether to use either one of the resources, both or neither. Collaborative working between the vocational and English tutors ensured that the vocational tutors understood how to introduce these to learners.
- Tutors from the three departments emailed one another and met regularly to discuss the learners' responses to the resources.
- Between November 2019 and January 2020, tutors gathered feedback from learners and learning support assistants around the usefulness of the resources and their preferences. Feedback was collected in the form of questionnaires and informal interviews. Meanwhile, learner work (both in-class work and assessments) was also scrutinised to look for progress, patterns and correlations.

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

Tutors report that this project has given them a renewed sense of the importance of reflective, responsive teaching practices. The project findings have some important implications for teaching. The English tutors involved now feel inspired to conduct further research into the usefulness of different approaches for other genres, such as persuasive writing.

Tutors in the Animal Management and Sport departments reported that they would like to apply the findings to other tasks within the courses they teach. The English tutors reported that they feel more confident in their knowledge of how best to support learners. Inspired by this project, the project lead has plans to carry out further action research in other areas.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This project has highlighted how beneficial collaboration between English teachers, vocational lecturers and learning support staff can be. Working together, all staff involved in the project felt they were able to support learners far more effectively. Future CPD is already being arranged so that staff can discuss further challenges they see their learners having, and share ideas for how to provide support to overcome these. The project lead has refreshed enthusiasm and has joined Twitter to keep current with educational research, while seeing huge advantages to sharing ideas with staff in other institutions. The college has recently facilitated CPD encouraging staff to 'bring and brag', recognising the importance of practitioners' findings in the classroom and the value it can bring to others. Teaching staff from all subject areas attended this CPD and many say they learned something, which has improved their practice, from a colleague in another area.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The majority of the learners across GCSE English, Animal Management and Sport said they preferred the more prescriptive, formulaic writing scaffolds. This finding had the strongest majority in Sport, followed by GCSE English and finally Animal Management (Figure 9c-1).

Subject area	Number of learners surveyed	Number who preferred 'formulaic' scaffold	Number who preferred 'tips and guidance' scaffold
GCSE English	64	49 (77%)	15 (23%)
Sport	33	31 (94%)	2 (6%)
Animal Management	28	20 (71%)	8 (29%)

Figure 9c-1: Learners' resource preference by subject area

There was evidence that many learners made progress and there appeared to be a clear correlation between learners using elements of the more formulaic scaffolds and their speed of progress. In GCSE English, the single element of the scaffolds that appeared to have the greatest positive impact on the learners' progress was the 'zoom'. When learners were using the 'zoom' element of the scaffold and focusing on individual words or phrases, tutors observed points and inferences being linked more consistently, fewer implausible inferences being drawn from the evidence and less digression from the question.

Some pieces of learner work demonstrated these findings. The majority of learners in GCSE English appeared to be using a scaffold of some sort, but it was usually not one that had been taught at Moulton College, rather a scaffold that had been learned or, more commonly, mis-learned at school or in their previous setting.

The use of a 'point, evidence, explain' scaffold (often referred to by teachers as P.E.E.) was evident in some of the learners' writing, but was rarely effective. Other scaffolds did sometimes appear to be supporting the learners to answer the questions well, but in many cases, if the learners were not focusing on individual words or phrases, they were less successful.

Learning from this project

Learners took to using a new scaffold far more quickly in vocational subjects than in GCSE English. When asked, learners suggested this was because they were already used to using a different scaffold/ formula for GCSE English (taught in their previous setting) and, therefore, the new scaffold would be replacing something they were already used to. In vocational subjects, however, it was new learning and therefore not replacing any learned behaviours.

This is further supported by the finding that learners in GCSE English lessons needed a scaffold to be positively promoted, rather than simply offered, if they were to adopt it. In exam conditions, many learners reverted to using a scaffold they had been taught previously, in a former setting, rather than the new one. Learners who were most receptive to the new tools were learners who had not previously been taught to use a writing scaffold and this was, therefore, a new concept.

Encouraging learners to explore the effect of certain words or phrases through the use of a 'zoom' component in a scaffold can be particularly helpful to learners resitting GCSE English language. This often helps learners to analyse more effectively, stay focused on the requirements of the question and draw more plausible inferences from direct quotations.

Encouraging learners to begin analytical paragraphs with a direct quotation from the text, rather than by making a point first, can be very useful for learners resitting GCSE English language. Learners often report that they find responding to analysis questions easier and more enjoyable when they use this approach.

Tutors have also seen better progress from many learners when using this approach. In other words, evidence and zoom (or E.Z., see Figure 9c-2) which simply encourages students to find a direct quotation from the text and then comment on the effect of an individual key word from within the same quotation seems more beneficial than P.E.E.

Writing scaffolds are most useful when they are designed in response to the needs of the learners. Many patterns of individual differences have been observed.

Patterns could be observed in the work of learners who achieved a lower grade in their GCSE maths than in English. Many digressed from the question regularly and made points that could not be supported with evidence, rather they seemed to be drawing on their own life experience.

These learners often said they preferred not to use writing scaffolds when they were given the option and when the scaffold was simply presented to them. They appeared to struggle more with understanding formulaic scaffolds. However, if elements of a scaffold were offered to these learners as a verbal explanation, rather than simply as a paper resource, much faster progress was observed.

Steps to take when answering an analysis question

Read the **question** carefully and underline key words to help you understand what or who it is asking about

Read the **text** and then **re-read** the relevant part of the text (if the question is only asking about a particular section)

Now underline **key bits of the text** (of no more than 10 words at a time) which will be **your evidence (quotes)** for answering the question. Identify your **zoom** words (words within your quotes which really help to answer the question).

Write up your 'EZ' paragraphs ('EZ' means evidence and zoom). Remember that one 'EZ' paragraph usually gets you around 2 marks (if it's a good one!)

Evidence= '......' (copy a quote of no more than 10 words)

Zoom= The **word/s** '......' suggests WHO or WHAT was **other words or a phrase to sum up what your zoom word or phrase suggests.**

Here is an example:
Question- What impressions are given of the weather in these lines of Jamaica Inn?

Evidence: 'a backing wind brought a granite sky'

Zoom: The **words 'granite sky'** suggest that the weather was **extremely dark and gloomy, almost spooky.**

Figure 9c-2: GCSE English 'formulaic' resource - 'Evidence and Zoom'

For example, learners who regularly began their analytical paragraphs with a direct quotation, and adopted the use of the 'zoom' feature, could often be seen to improve quite rapidly.

On the other hand, learners who achieved the same grade in their GCSE maths and English (grade 3 in both subjects) responded much more positively to the formulaic scaffolds and usually understood it straight away. Improvements could be seen in their writing as a result.

Finally, learners who were more confident in analysis often found a formulaic scaffold to be restrictive and preferred to write more freely, usually with success. Some of these learners said they were using elements of a pre-learned scaffold, but it was more detailed and they felt confident enough to write in a freer and more flexible way. Many stated, when interviewed, that they preferred the 'tips and guidance' type of resource and found it useful.

Many learners find a scaffold useful to support them in responding to questions where there are very clear success criteria. This is also the case in vocational subjects. In vocational subjects, more prescriptive scaffolds are favoured by learners who achieved a grade 3 or below in GCSE English language.

Excellent progress can be seen when a carefully tailored scaffold is designed and learners are actively encouraged and shown how to use it. As learners become more confident writing about the subject, the need for a prescriptive scaffold reduces.

Vocational tutors were more engaged with this project than with previous English CPD, because the scaffolds responded to a need within their own subjects. They could see the benefit to their learners and so English development became a natural and meaningful part of their lessons, not a forced additional (tick box) activity that they struggled to integrate. This gave vocational tutors a clear method for supporting learners with their writing in a structured and effective way, especially when English wasn't necessarily their own strongest subject. They now report feeling more confident in embedding and developing English.

Spelling with Post-16 Phonics

Tricia Millar (Strand Lead for projects 10, 11 and 12, That Reading Thing)
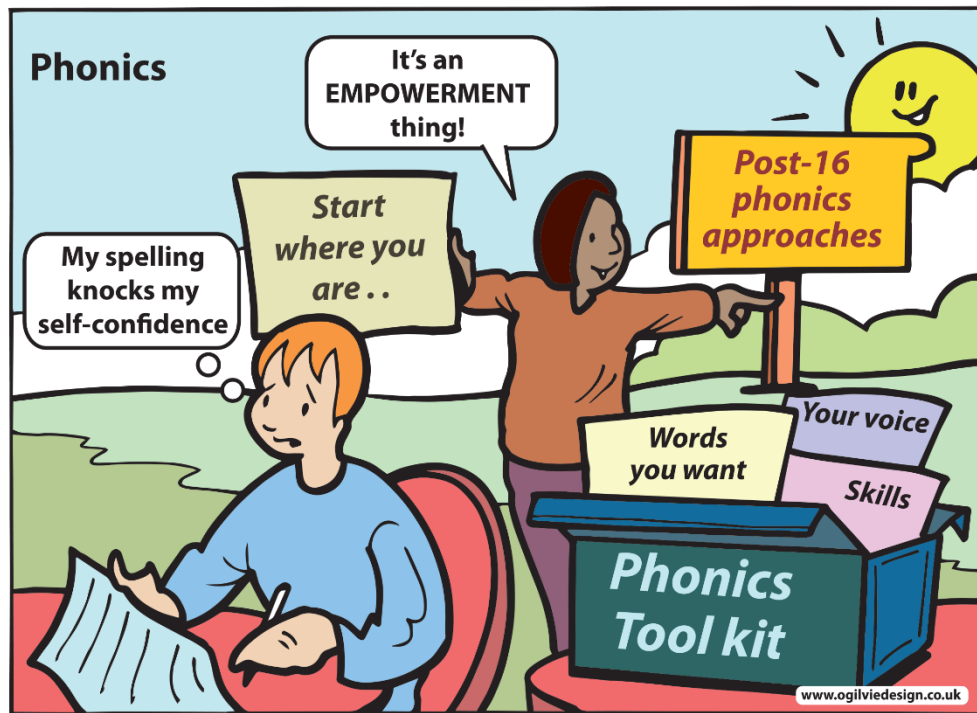
I started on the OTLA English project as a newcomer to Further Education and immediately embarked on a crash course in a whole new language including acronyms I may not yet have mastered.

Early days in the project also meant learning the concerns of the sector: targets, GCSE resits, changing roles and expectations of staff and generally doing more with less for thousands of learners. Learners were variously described as disengaged, vulnerable and standing on the wrong side of an educational gap or barrier.

Many commented that learners perceived themselves as failures and in need of motivation. Sometimes the barriers discussed were those of vocational

tutors and support staff, experts in their own areas but with no experience of teaching English.

Across the projects, the response was a desire to build bridges, tear down barriers, equip staff, listen to learners and offer them tools to change their perception of themselves in education. As a teacher who has spent more time in youth work than the classroom, I was heartened by these person-centred approaches. Whether they were looking at a commercial tech solution or a teacher-created resource, the question was not *"Does it work?"* but *"For whom does it work and how can it be even better?"*

Practitioner-led research was equally new to me and the CPD built into the project was as fulfilling as it was necessary. Jean McNiff helped me to see that my own literacy work had the appearance of a 20-year-long action research project that is still ongoing and, when reflecting on my work, to consider influence rather than impact.

Andy Convery taught me, amongst many other things, to *"make the important measurable and not the measurable important"* (Yankelovich, 1972). I'm still working on weaving this newfound learning into my own professional practice.

In addition to all the unfamiliarity, this OTLA project has also allowed me to work with organisations on the speciality I bring to the sector, which is linguistic phonics approaches for older struggling readers and spellers.

Having worked with the teams who created the Post-16 Phonics Approaches toolkit (ETF, 2019) and training, this has been a great opportunity to see how both the ethos and content stand up in a range of contexts.

Fidelity and autonomy

Many years ago, in an otherwise empty indoor play area, a woman with a clipboard was watching my children and writing notes. Curious and protective, I asked what she was doing. *"I'm researching how children misuse*

playground equipment." Misuse? In the absence of other children, they'd been running up the tiny slide and jumping from the top, not misusing but using the equipment in a way that was just right for the situation.

In phonics programmes for children who are just learning to read, "fidelity" is a key term which means that programmes should be delivered in every classroom in the order prescribed by the publisher. However, by necessity, phonics approaches for post-16 learners stress autonomy over fidelity. Every learner comes with their own voice, their own prior knowledge and their own response to certain styles of teaching, and teachers respond to this using their own preferred models of practice.

In response, the toolkit approach offers principles, information and activities for using phonics with post-16 learners but leaves the exact resources and lessons up to the teachers. With that in mind, I came to the OTLA phonics projects not looking for 'misuse' but curious to see how teachers would use and adapt the approaches for their own situations.

Walking up to the starting line

Most of the participants (English teachers, functional skills tutors, vocational tutors, volunteers and frontline staff) came to the project with little experience of using Post-16 Phonics approaches. All had access to the toolkit and some had had a day or two of training during the phonics pilot phase.

The vocational tutors and other non-specialists felt they needed extra support as they had never taught spelling before; so, they were offered a hands-on spelling workshop which uses the same principles as the toolkit but incorporates some extra elements as discussed below.

Surprises & adaptations

The principles and practices of this approach to literacy are inseparable. Starting with a learner's voice is both a tool for improving literacy and a foundational principle that puts the learner at the centre of the method. We can see from the projects' final reports how teachers adapted the principles and practices of the toolkit for their diverse learners in classrooms, vocational workshops and an extracurricular spelling club.

We also learned and discussed the importance of some key principles, including the following:

Start with learner voice

"For post-16 learners, it is often particularly useful to start from oral language (using their own regional accent). Ask them to:
- say whole meaningful words that are in the learner's vocabulary
- identify the sounds
- and then attach written symbols to those sounds."

(ETF, 2019, p41)

This activity connects speech to writing for learners who have often struggled to memorise words visually. When I suggest this to tutors in the sector, there is sometimes a "not likely" response. One vocational tutor felt it was setting learners up to fail because they didn't speak clearly. However, the projects showed how most learners, even when it was challenging, were willing to try this approach.

One success was a learner in a prison workshop who created a syllable matching activity based on his own syllabification of vocational terms. They may not be not exactly what I would say but they reflect the learner's own best way of remembering how to spell the words and that's the beauty of giving learners the power to start with their own voices (see Novus report).

Words as Puzzles

If it's a complex word, treat it like a puzzle. Write the graphemes on a board or on sticky notes and have learners assemble the sounds into syllables. Then have them write the whole word and decide which part they need to work on remembering.

(ETF, 2019, p68)

If learners need more support with syllables and graphemes, the puzzle approach is a safe way to learn complex words. Limiting the graphemes takes away the likelihood of making a mistake.

A maths teacher used puzzles for teaching how to spell the names of shapes and found that students not only learnt to spell the terms but could also recall the names and identify the shapes more accurately than before the puzzle approach (see Education and Training Collective report).
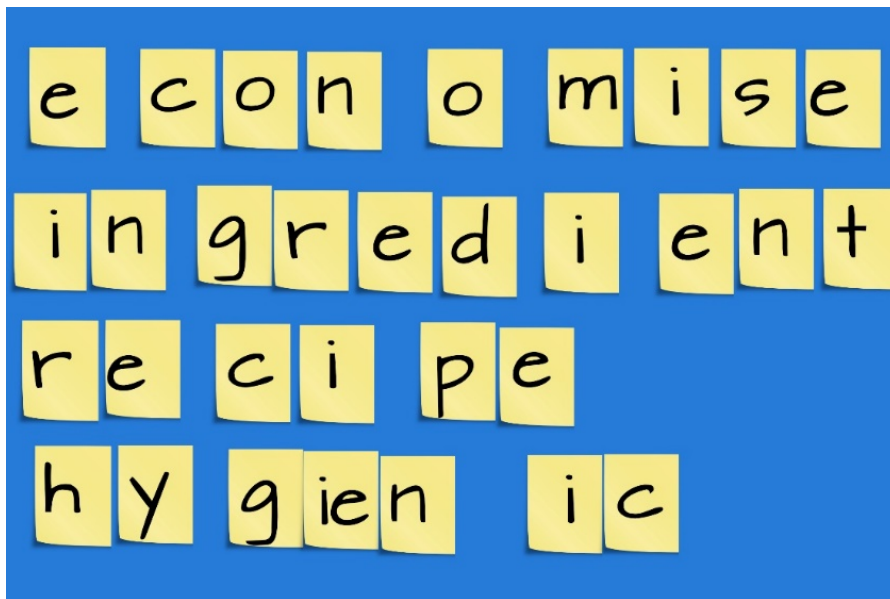
Puzzle pieces (ETF, 2019, p73)

Others found that learners could make gains by focusing only on the syllables without worrying about the individual sounds. This was a surprise and I'd like to see further research into how this compares with grapheme puzzles for learning complex vocational vocabulary (see Novus report).

Sequence

[Basic Code Plus provides] an idea of what a simple to complex and explicit to incidental sequence could look like. The order is important at the very beginning because it's carefully scaffolded to build confidence in your least confident learners. As they progress, the need for structure is less.

(ETF, 2019, p46)

The toolkit suggests using this approach for learners working at Entry Level 1 or below and I was sure we had paced it just right so that people would be neither bored nor overwhelmed. However, the Haringey spelling club found they could accelerate that process when there was a low tutor-to-learner ratio. They could start with a cvc (consonant, vowel, consonant) word like 'fun' and get the learners to spelling 'misunderstanding' within the hour, a process I had envisioned would take several weeks.

They also devised their own lesson structure of starting with a text and moving towards the word level work, whereas I would have travelled in the other direction. This was a great example of how professionals can take the principles of the toolkit and create something that works both for them and for their learners (see Haringey Adult Learning Services report.)

Resources – built in and added on

I thought you might be interested in how I got on with my non-reader today, armed with my post-it notes and a whiteboard! It was extremely empowering for him.

(ETF, 2019, p.116)

During the rollout of phonics training across the sector, we have made the promise that teachers don't need more than dry erase boards and sticky notes. They are representative of the Post-16 Phonics principle of allowing learners to try things out without fear of failure, as errors are easily rubbed out or switched around. Myerscough College noted that SEND/LDD learners who had previously refused to try to spell were willing to have a go on the dry erase boards. Haringey Adult Learning Service referred to whiteboards as a "safe place" and an Education Training Collective teacher stopped using dictionaries in favour of working through words on a whiteboard. These are such simple ways to influence both learners and teachers positively.

Of course, OTLA teachers wanted to do more than work at word level. They wrote texts, created maths lessons, and revived plant identification cards amongst many other activities. The sound stories written by Haringey were especially time-consuming. I hope that, beyond the project, we will find a

place to collect stories that tutors could adapt for their learners. These don't replace authentic text but can be used as a jumping off point for exploring a phoneme or a grapheme.

I also added three additional resources which share the linguistic phonics principles of Post-16 Phonics but are not included in the toolkit.

Strength-based spelling

This involves showing learners what they already know by being a bit more explicit than in the word puzzle exercise from the toolkit as described above. It was a new way of looking at spelling and appealing to those teaching spelling for the first time.

When I asked vocational tutors for a specialist word that everyone finds difficult, an electrician offered "diaphragm". If a learner could spell di/a/fram, then the tutor could show them that they had got 5 of the 7 graphemes correct and could then focus on remembering the <ph> spelling of /f/ as in 'photo' and the very unusual <gm> spelling of the /m/ sound. It was especially empowering for tutors to see that I had to search for the word in the dictionary myself, and pay close attention to the <gm> grapheme too.

However, a few learners didn't like this approach so it would be interesting to find out if there are shared traits amongst those who find it helpful and those who don't.

Coded vocabulary

The project was too short for most vocational tutors to gain this key skill so they were offered their words already split into syllables and graphemes (see Novus report).

Spelling Options Chart (see Haringey report)

This contains the same information as the grapheme chart in chapter 7 of the toolkit but in a format that is easier to copy. It's also my favourite surprise adaptation because hundreds of teachers have accessed this resource but no one has mentioned using it the way the Haringey spelling club did.

Rather than using it to look up spelling possibilities, the learners used it to check off various phonemes and graphemes they had encountered in a session. It gave learners a sense of progress and proved their understanding of general concepts about how English works as a code.

Beyond the starting line

"Make the important measurable and not the measurable important."

We haven't yet seen Post-16 Phonics approaches tested in exam situations but we've seen reluctant learners having a go at spelling words they thought were beyond them, vocational tutors teaching spelling for the first time and experienced teachers trying out new and sometimes challenging ideas.

Confidence is hard to measure but it was mentioned 29 times in the four Project 10 reports, almost always in the sense of how using phonics as a tool for spelling can increase confidence in both teachers and learners.

The project participants have taken a methodology that is very new to the sector and made it their own without vast resources or experience. I hope they will carry on testing, reflecting, improving, creating and sharing as they lead the way for their learners and colleagues.

10a. Using Post-16 Phonics Approaches with English, Maths & Vocational Learners

The Education Training Collective

Embedding phonics in maths . .

.. this helps SHAPE my thinking!

I have 4 equal sides and 4 right angles . . what am I?

Reading skills
Spelling skills
Maths knowledge

www.ogilviedesign.co.uk
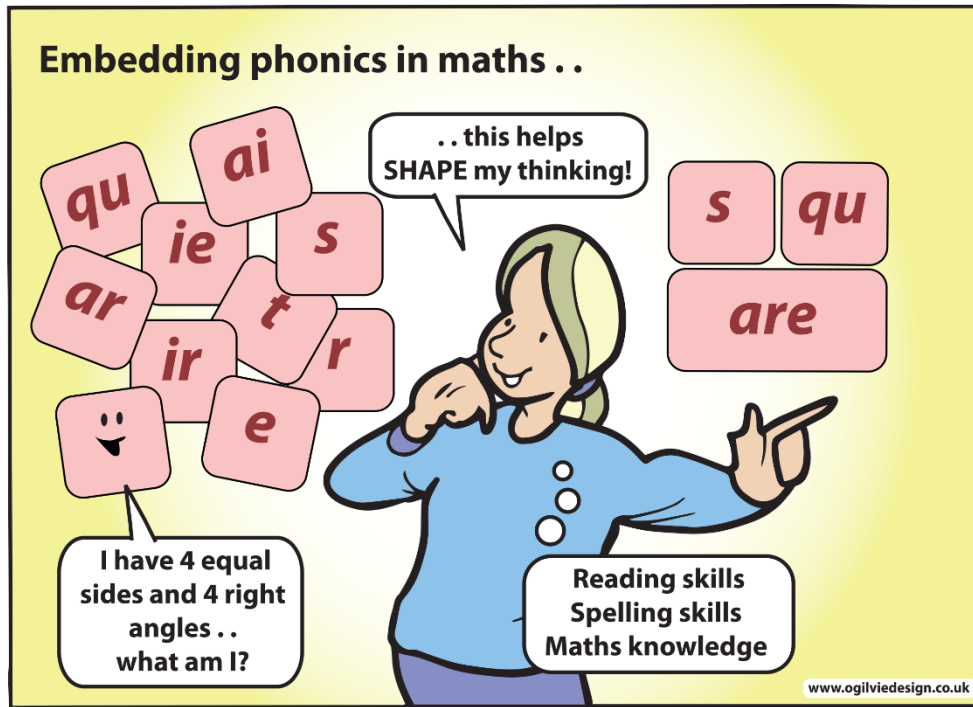
The college's 2017 Ofsted Report (Ofsted, 2017b) stated *"too many learners fail to gain qualifications ...the achievement of apprentices remains too low"*. **A more recent Ofsted monitoring visit of June 2018 reported improvements in Maths and English, but that there was** *"still significant room for further improvement to ensure that learners do make sufficient progress"* **(Ofsted, 2018).**

This project enabled the college to continue to build on the progress already made and additionally meet the requirements of the revised Functional Skills English Curriculum (DfE, 2018) which specifies using phonics to teach learners at Entry level.

Summary

The project had dual aims of meeting the requirements of the revised Functional Skills English Curriculum (DfE, 2018) in supporting project members as they implemented curriculum changes and of enhancing learners' literacy skills. These were to be achieved through:
1. Introducing phonics-based activities into teaching sessions;
2. Monitoring and reviewing the impact of the phonics-based activities on learning;
3. Promoting the strategies through creating a virtual learning platform.

Professional development sessions enabled us to gain knowledge and understanding of phonics-based approaches. Following these we worked with learners, using the activities from the *Post -16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit* (ETF, 2019), introducing and monitoring their effectiveness. As a team we reflected on the activities undertaken, gathered learner feedback and met regularly to review progress and plan future actions.

As a result of the project we have grown in confidence and feel better able to support learners through a phonics-based approach. A significant number of learners have improved their spelling skills and enhanced their reading and writing practices.

Rationale

The organisation was involved in the Phonics Pilot (2018-19) and it, therefore, seemed appropriate to continue work in this area to further develop staff skills, knowledge and understanding and enhance the opportunities for our learners. The project enabled us to work with a wider range of staff, including Learning Support Assistants, as a recent merger meant working with teaching staff and learners in different venues. The benefit of this was that resources and expertise could be further shared and disseminated.

Approach

The project followed an Action Research model (McNiff, 2017) as we reviewed the situation at the beginning of the project, deciding that further improvements needed to be made in both supporting learners' spelling skills and our own practice in use of phonics-based approaches. Following this further training was put into place for the English teaching team and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), as we saw LSA contribution as essential to the success of the project. This built on an earlier project which had encouraged collaborative working between teaching staff and LSAs (McPartland, 2019).

Phonics-based activities were gradually introduced into teaching sessions, with participants reflecting on their impact through completing reflective Action Research Diaries, discussing the impact of the changes in regularly held team meetings and gaining learner feedback though discussion and the use of 'exit tickets'. Additionally, learners' work was monitored for evidence of improvement.

The activities included working with learners to break words down into syllables through saying words aloud. Although staff were initially apprehensive learners would resist this, they generally engaged well and found it useful to break down difficult words into smaller chunks. The next task was to spell the word on mini whiteboards to enable learners to identify which parts of the words they could spell. This increased their confidence and motivation as they became aware that they did have skills and work only needed to be done on a limited area. Learners would previously have given up before this approach was adopted. Using mini white boards meant that they could quickly address errors without 'spoiling' their workbooks, which many hated.

Sequencing strategies using Basic Code and Basic Code Plus enabled learners to match graphemes and sounds in word building which proved very popular and beneficial, as did the use of sticky note grapheme tiles which further supported word building.

Lastly we evaluated the impact of the project through a whole team meeting and action planned for the next stages to ensure the good work continued.

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

One teacher described being on a "learning journey, where I want to know more…". This sums up the crux of the project in reinvigorating teaching staff, providing them with opportunities to explore and develop their practice and consider their work with learners, and each other, in introducing and developing creative approaches. The project also provided opportunities to reflect on practice which are often limited in everyday practice.

A final evaluation event brought the team together to consider the impact of their work on both learners' progress and their own practice. Amongst the key findings was that staff confidence in use of phonics-based approaches had grown and the team, though initially a little sceptical of approaches were, in the main, enthusiastic about their use, believing they have been beneficial for their learners. Several reported changing their teaching approaches, using new methods to support learners to improve spelling and working more collaboratively with peers and learners.
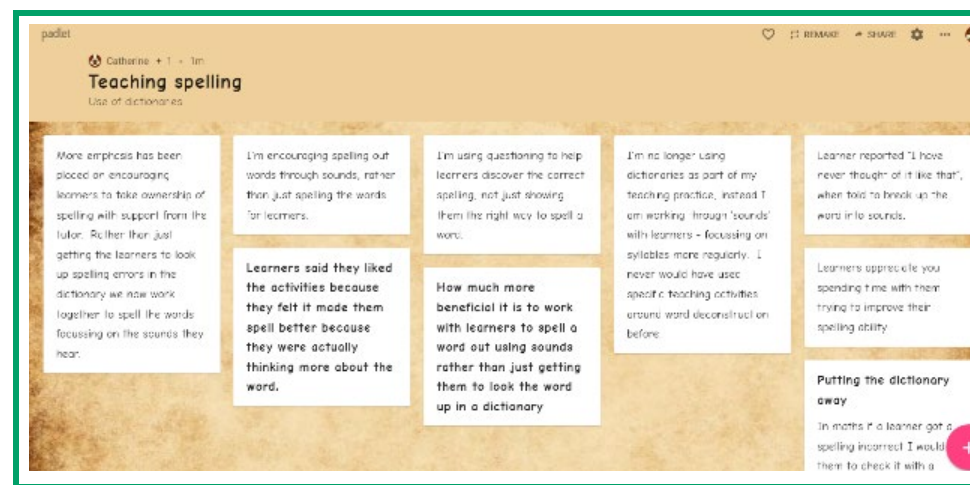
Figure 10a-1: Teaching Spelling Padlet

Amongst these changes were less reliance on using dictionaries to support spelling, but rather encouraging and supporting learners to figure out a spelling by supporting them in deconstructing words into syllables and sounds. This, teaching staff felt, aided retention and encouraged learners to develop their thinking skills, increase their concentration and move towards becoming more independent and confident learners as the comments in the Padlet indicate (Figure 10a-1).

The team used more interactive ways of teaching spelling such as the sticky note tiles to work with learners to identify spelling patterns. They readily identified these activities can be built into sessions as either a starter, plenary or intervention activity if required and that this was of far more benefit than whole sessions being devoted to teaching spelling.

In some ways the project changed perceptions of learners and their abilities. "I have noticed with what I would previously called 'lazy learners', they are more willing to try and spell a word-improved motivation/confidence". This seems to indicate changes in both the teacher concerned and the learner.
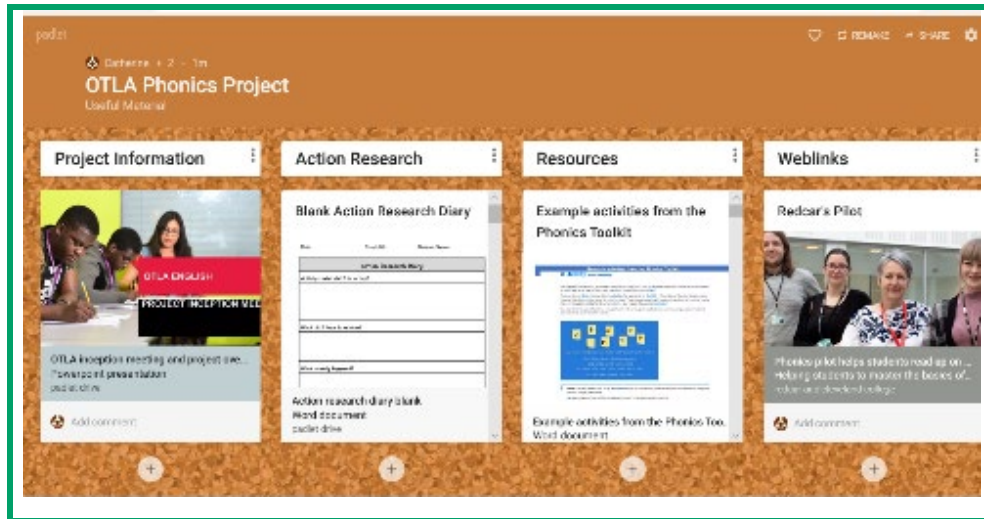
Figure 10a-2: OTLA Phonics Project Padlet

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

As the organisation operates on a number of venues it was critical to bring staff together to develop ownership of the project and create a sense of identity leading to more collaborative working and improved practice. This was facilitated through joint training and meetings.

It was difficult to find time and space for shared meetings as frequently as we would have liked due to timetabling and distance issues, but teams on different sites communicated via email and a shared Padlet (Figure 10a-2) where resources, reflective diaries, project updates, meeting minutes etc were stored and shared.

Teams within centres began to work more collaboratively, sharing resources and teaching ideas with project progress being a regular item on meeting agendas. Two members of the team in particular, one teaching English and the other both maths and English, worked closely together to ensure learning was transferred between the subject areas.

As a result of the project the organisation invited the project mentor to lead a CPD session for vocational tutors whose learners were struggling with spelling complex terminology. This was extremely successful and vocational staff have begun to use the approaches with their learners. They have been supported in this by the project's LSAs who work with both English and vocational staff.

Team members who work on teacher and LSA training courses have introduced their learners to the principles of phonics-based approaches, enriching their experience and introducing them to a new field of learning.

Further work, however, is needed to ensure effective collaboration; joint planning, meetings and resource sharing are frequently difficult to manage in the frenetic working environment team members are engaged in. Nevertheless, the team have made progress with channels of communication being more overt than previously.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Initially there was some staff apprehension about how learners would react to the activities, but they have generally responded well to the changed practices and engaged in the activities used. Staff have reported an increase in learners' confidence and engagement in teaching sessions.

Although it is too early to measure impact accurately in terms of achievement, there have been some early successes with two staff members reporting improvements in pass rates for the 'reading exam' with one learner gaining 96%. Significant improvements have also been evidenced in Functional Skills maths learners' spelling of mathematical terms.

Many activities used were new to learners and amongst the comments received were: *"I never would have thought of it like that"* as one learner stated when asked to break up a word into sounds. Other learners liked the activities because they felt they made them able to 'spell better' as they were thinking more about the word and gaining confidence from spelling most of the word correctly. They were able to apply their learning in English sessions to other subjects. An excellent example of this is Dale who had learned the basic principles in English sessions then used them in his maths classes.

Not all learners readily engaged, however, and there were sometimes mixed responses as indicated in feedback from a vocational group. Overall, though project members have reported improvements in their learners' work with the main benefit being growth in confidence and willingness to 'have a go' at spelling words they would previously have avoided. Even parents have commented on their children's growth in confidence which has been very pleasing.

Learning from this project

Teaching staff and LSAs have reported a number of significant changes to their practice which include:

- Standing back and allowing learners time to try and work out spellings by sounding out the word and discussing the spelling. Previously learners would have been given the answer or instructed to look the word up in a dictionary.
- Being adaptable by using naturally occurring opportunities to use phonics-based activities to meet learners' needs as they arise.
- Embedding phonics activities into sessions as starter or plenary activities. The team agreed it was vital to carry out the activities regularly in small chunks to reinforce learning, rather than have whole sessions devoted to phonics.
- That phonics-based approaches can be used across the curriculum. An example of this is using phonics to enable learners to spell mathematical terms. Project members have also supported vocational staff encouraging the use of word breakdown for spelling complicated vocational terminology.
- It takes time, but it is time worth spending, to support students to use the phonics-based approaches. For some it helped to demystify spelling and gave them vital tools to improve their work.

Project participants are keen to continue with the work begun and freely admit that the work needs to be on-going to firmly embed it into practice and rigorously evaluate its impact. Staff should be given further opportunities to develop their practice in the use of phonics-based approaches.

Many of the learners we work with have met with difficulties in their educational lives and lack confidence in their abilities. They, therefore, are often demotivated and have a fear of making 'mistakes' which makes them reluctant to commit to learning. Although the number of learners involved in the project is relatively small, it is possible to see significant changes in their work and approach to learning now.

10b. Deepening understanding of Post-16 phonics approaches

Haringey Adult Learning Service
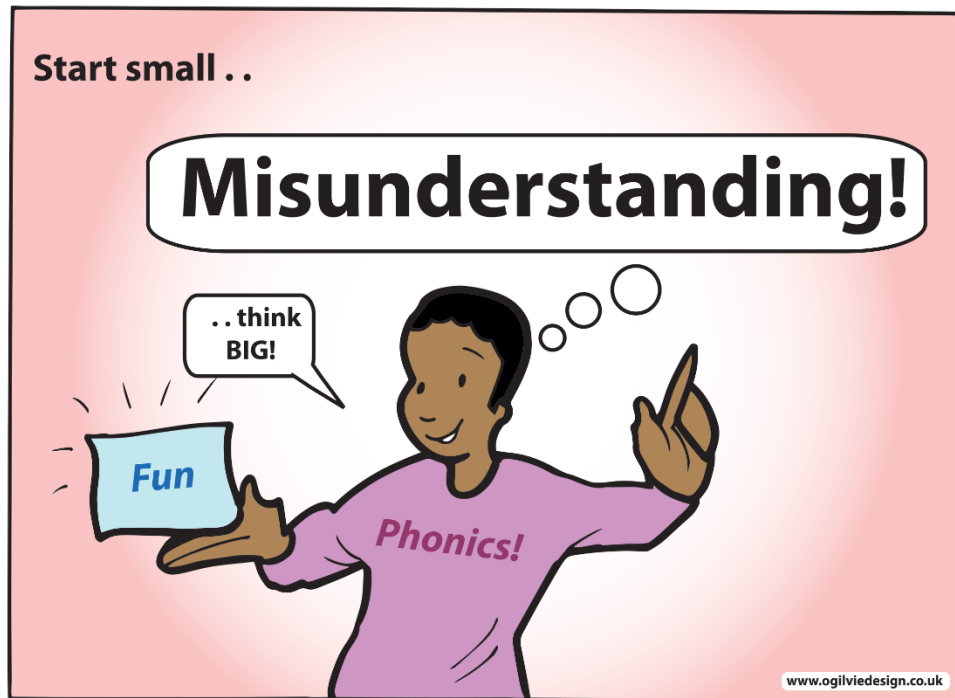
This project's approach was twofold: facilitating use of Post-16 Phonics approaches generally across the service and specifically through instituting a phonics- based spelling club. The project fostered meaningful collaboration between tutors, volunteers, support staff and learners.

Summary

Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) is a local authority provider for learners aged 19 plus. The service provides courses through 5 programme areas (Functional Skills, ESOL, Wellbeing, Career Development and Family Learning), aligned to council strategic priorities in economic development and health.

The reformed Functional Skills emphasis on underpinning skills led HALS to seek a whole-service approach to improvement that gave tutors new tools to support learner confidence through improved spelling and reading, identified as challenging for a large proportion of the learner cohort.

Rationale

Analysis of initial assessments in the service identified spelling as an underdeveloped skill area. Learners reported that spelling issues held them back in career or study and contributed to feelings of low self-esteem and self-confidence.

A further identified need across the service was in reading both study texts and for pleasure. Learners and assessment staff reported challenges in decoding which affected both achievement and retention.

The service has a goal to improve how volunteers and frontline staff are used to support teaching, learning and assessment.

Approach

Training & Support for Staff and Volunteers

We delivered a series of CPD and support sessions for frontline staff and volunteers as well as tutors and curriculum leads. These included:
- Post-16 Phonics for spelling workshops delivered by our mentor for 28 staff and representatives from 4 other London Borough ACLS;
- project visits to classrooms;
- weekly cross curricular discussions, including learner support staff, supporting the rationale and aims of the project;
- staff-led training equipping colleagues with 5-minute Try Out activities.

Teaching

Two drop-in spelling clubs were delivered on Friday mornings. They were divided into Pre-Entry to Entry Level 1 literacy skills and a group with skills working at Entry Level 2 plus. Over the 8 focused weeks of the club, 20 learners attended and actively took part.

Learners were encouraged to explore how spelling had impacted on their lives and study, and to take a proactive role in understanding the phonics approach and evaluating the lesson activities in continuous feedback. As the lessons continued, tutor diary reflections describe how the initial 'design' was adapted, and a pattern developed, that involved starting sessions with a text, underlining and sorting activities focusing on key sounds and culminating with work on word stretching on mini whiteboards. Learners were also encouraged to explore the frequency of graphemes and reported that this helped reduce the stress of the spelling 'mountain'. The use of personal whiteboards created a safe space shown by the more reluctant writers who very quickly moved to put ideas in writing.

Try-out activities

Tutors and support staff were given activities from the Post-16 Phonics toolkit or those adapted in the Spelling Club to trial in classes or in other learner support contexts. Activities were tried in 6 different classes across ESOL, ICT, English and maths.
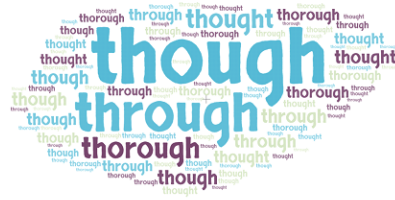
Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project encouraged regular reflection on the part of participants in the form of an email 'diary'. The key participants used their reflections to feed back into the project proposal on a weekly basis and were empowered to make their own adjustments through evaluation and discussion.
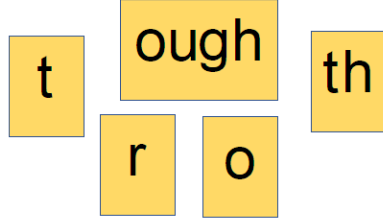
Assumptions which were made in the initial framework of the project plan – for example that the phonics approach would be more valuable to Functional Skills classes than ESOL – were re-evaluated and adjusted. Some of the clearest evidence of success was drawn from the ESOL team both in terms of tutor feedback and engagement and learner progress. Learner referrals

from ESOL increased in the first few weeks of the project as ESOL learners reported back to the classes the benefits of being in the club. These were limited to maintain a balance of ESOL and first language speakers in the club, and a separate 'phonics for ESOL' club was proposed along with specific training in phonics for ESOL.

The Post-16 phonics toolkit formed a core resource underpinning the activities base of the spelling club; however, learner responses to the piloted activities were used as guides to implement, adapt or reject activities as the club progressed and evolved. Activities from the toolkit recommended and trialled in the club have been embedded within Functional Skills Entry Level classes to support achievement.

Figure 10b-1: Post-16 phonics toolkit activity

Participation in CPD activities designed to give the project as wide a reach as possible was high. From the beginning of the project, a range of CPD sessions took place and resulted in a series of formal and informal professional discussions cascading into team meetings and, of course, beside the photocopier! CPD sessions on the project and the approach were opened out to colleagues from other London Boroughs and information and progress from the project was shared in network groups.

A CPD session co-presented by the volunteer lead included staff from all curriculum areas, support staff and curriculum managers. 5-minute 'Try-out' materials and activities were disseminated to all CPD participants to encourage whole service support for the project and to broaden understanding of the approach and raise interest and awareness across the service. Reflection and evaluation were encouraged particularly from non-specialists and those outside the main focus of project activity. Feedback from staff demonstrated an interest in learning more about the phonics-based approach and its impact on learners as well as their own understanding of spelling.

> *"I enjoyed delivering the task, but it will take time some for me to grow in confidence with teaching phonics."*
>
> *"Through research and practice, I am finding it easier to embed a phonic based approach in my classes. My initial fears have gone and now I am quite enthusiastic about finding ways to teach phonics to my learners and making the sessions fun and beneficial to them as well."*
>
> *"I combined the phonics activity with columns and tables in my ECDL class – it was easy and fun to embed."*

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Three volunteers took key roles in this research in designing, trialling and evaluating the activities in the club and classroom, writing reflections of project, supporting offshoots of the project (a weekly reading club), and co-delivering CPD. This has raised the profile of volunteers in the organisation and led to an award nomination for one volunteer.

The priority given to involvement of all service staff in CPD containing educational theory and practice was well received. Staff with key responsibilities for Learning Difficulties or Disabilities, marketing and team administration reported positively on their experience:

> *"it was great to be involved"*
>
> *"phonics seems like a revolution"*
>
> *"it gives a new way of looking at supporting our learners to not feel like failures."*

Links and professional discussions between Functional Skills tutors and Pre/Entry Level 1 ESOL tutors and support staff around literacy issues have increased through sharing learners, tracking progress and email dialogue about the Spelling Club. Referrals from ESOL to literacy, whilst already in place at Level 1 and Level 2, have now started to develop at Pre-Entry level.

The paper-based initial assessment for literacy has been revised to make it more accessible for learners with Pre-Entry needs. Changes were influenced by feedback from spelling club members. One learner went from being emotional when faced with an enrolment form to 'achieving' an initial assessment and involvement in a discussion around his literacy strengths.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

> *"I break down the word into sounds and that is helpful."*
>
> *"I feel these lessons are very good and would like them to continue."*
>
> *"That went so fast – can we have longer!"*

Although retention on Functional Skills courses was a key aim, it soon became apparent that there would be further impact in creating access to literacy sessions for learners who otherwise would not have been able to access learning at HALS because of their Pre-Entry assessments. For these learners like R, a Jamaican-born male, the activity of moving from 'cat' and

'bed' to 'mattress', 'battery' and 'bedroom' in his first session was such an achievement that he took these words home on sticky notes to post around his shared flat.

Uptake from Functional Skills classes directly to the Spelling Club was low because of timetabling restraints; however, tutors reported that learner confidence in spelling has improved dramatically through the introduction of the phonics based 'slot' in lessons. Retention on Entry Level FS classes has increased from 74.25% in December 2018 to 94.7% in December 2019.

Most referrals were from ESOL classes, and tutor feedback reported progress in class to have increased rapidly in conjunction with attendance on the Spelling Club. Tutor comments included:

> "*S is demonstrating really rapid progress now in class. Her confidence has grown and she now reads longer words where previously she would hesitate or even stop*"
>
> "*T really wants to continue with Spelling Club, even if it means she has to drop out of ESOL as she can't juggle both. It is clearly meeting her needs far more than her original class.*"

Learning from this project

A key success of the Spelling Club was learner feedback on how the approach helped towards rapid, 'adult' achievements. Sessions ended with a plenary conversation with learners about 'what we liked and what worked.'

Most of the learners arrived with very low self-confidence. For some, it was the first time they had attended a literacy session since childhood and for others it was as an alternative or alongside a course of study where negative experiences were still lingering. All learners had an initial conversation with a tutor during their first club session, which explored feelings towards literacy and specifically what role 'spelling' played in this.

Vocabulary chosen by learners indicated the extent and impact of the barriers with words like 'scared', 'stressed', 'depressed' being frequently linked to the word 'spelling'. Although not all learners continued to attend, those who did gave positive feedback about the following contributory factors to their ongoing involvement:

- Moving rapidly in one session from a single sound or CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant) word to a range of relevant multisyllabic words e.g. fun to misunderstanding
- Use of concepts which recognised and valued learners' prior knowledge such as the learners having a 'database of sounds'
- A set routine of activities developed over the first weeks of the course enabled learners to feel confident about their own spelling and also empowered to support new learners and introduce them to the concepts as 'knowledge experts'
- Small group size with one tutor and a volunteer meant that no-one was left to struggle or feel lost.
- Focusing on the phonics-based approach, rather than a series of rules, meant that key issues could be highlighted, addressed and then implemented within the rapid extension activities giving more 'success points'.

Other points of learning observed by the project participants were that:

- Learners took to the sound-based approaches at different rates. As the majority of learners needed rapid improvement, this would affect being able to use this approach with a larger group.
- Session preparation was labour intensive because of the lack of available and relevant resources.
- The 'Club' approach where the project was on a separate day to most accredited courses was helpful in encouraging a safe and inclusive atmosphere but also limited the reach of the project.
- The profile of the volunteer on this project was raised and she was appreciated across the service as 'non-specialist expert'.
- Professional discussions included and valued the input of non-teaching staff leading to an improved atmosphere of collaboration and pedagogical understanding across the service.
- Non-teaching staff began using newly acquired knowledge to support learners in completing forms and in the initial assessment process.

10c. Post-16 Phonics Approaches and Neuro Diverse/LDD learners: Building an appetite for spelling

Myerscough College

This project aimed to implement a Post-16 Phonics approach for a cohort of post-16 learners with Neuro diverse or LDD needs, by building a positive learning environment in order to increase appetite for spelling. A 5-week spelling challenge was devised focusing on improving mindset and appetite for spelling.

Summary

Myerscough College and University Centre is one of the leading land-based and sports-specialist institutions in the UK. It also has a flourishing Foundation Learning area with over 180 students with Neuro Diverse, Learning Difficulty or Disability (LDD) needs and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

From an initial analysis and observation of the learners that would be involved, it was clear that there were gaps in phonics knowledge. It was decided therefore that the approach taken would need to include tasks that enabled the gaps to be visible and identified and the sessions to have sufficient flexibility to attempt to fill those gaps, ensuring a solid foundation for post-16+ activities to be trialled.

A 5-week spelling challenge was devised focusing on improving mindset and appetite for spelling with a potential aim to improve capability. Each session would use an initial task to help drive out gaps in phoneme/grapheme correspondences and enable knowledge build, if required before post-16+ tasks would be introduced. An initial data gather identified capability and mindset towards spelling, which was then re-taken at the end.

The key stakeholders in the project were Shelley Nicholson (Foundation Learning English teacher) and four support staff, who were supporting students in the classes included in the project cohort.

Rationale

Post-16 Phonics was designed for older learners who come to spelling with knowledge of life and prior experience of language. However, learners with Neuro Diverse and LDD issues have not always had this prior knowledge and understanding or have gaps in their basic code as a result. These gaps can range from single letter phoneme knowledge and simple phoneme/grapheme correspondences to basic code plus and complex phoneme/grapheme correspondences. However, the emphasis needed to be based on the Post-16 Phonics premise that where possible, we focus on the learners' oral knowledge and work with graphemes in the context of the whole word and not through isolated phonic sounds.

With this in mind, the project aimed to test the success of a Post-16 Phonics approach with neuro-diverse learners and identify the best way to take this forward for optimum learning and the potential for increased capability for

this type of learner. This would include phonics knowledge-building activities when required, and post-16 activities identified from the Post-16 Phonics toolkit.

The project also looked at ways to promote a more positive mindset towards spelling and whether this would create a greater appetite and confidence in attempting to spell and thus aid and improve capability.

Approach

As the project focused on both developing capability and mindset it was important to set up a positive learning environment, where attempts to spell were praised and staff used positive language and reinforcement, encouraging students to do the same.

A total of four classes and 50 students took part.

Key assumptions about the approach included:
- Repetition of tasks/processes each week taking place to support both memory retention and ensure learners identified the link in the tasks they were doing, as it built on their prior learning week on week.
- Differentiated tasks would be available for differing learner levels and stretch and challenge.
- Learners would reflect each week and note down their thoughts and mindset in relation to the session and/or spelling.

The project approach was a five-week reflective learning programme that focused on spelling ability and the use of words in context, utilising Post-16 Phonics tasks.

Each week consisted of:
- Letter or digraph of the week
- An activity from the Post-16 Phonics toolkit (Figure 10c-1)
- Reflection on the lesson

In addition:
- Week 1 included an initial data gather (capability and mindset) – see Figure 10c-2, whilst
- Week 5 included an end data capture (as above).
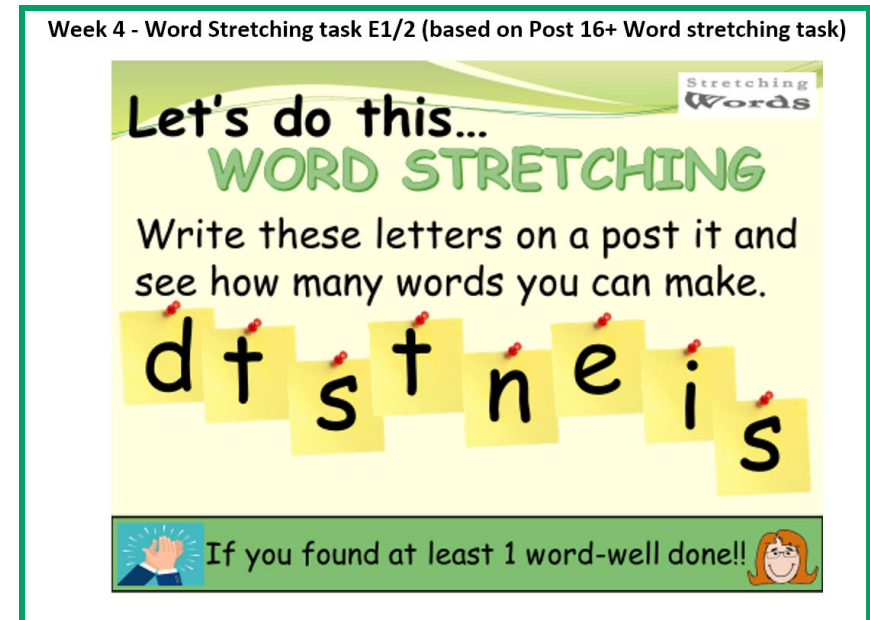
Figure 10c-1: Example session resource
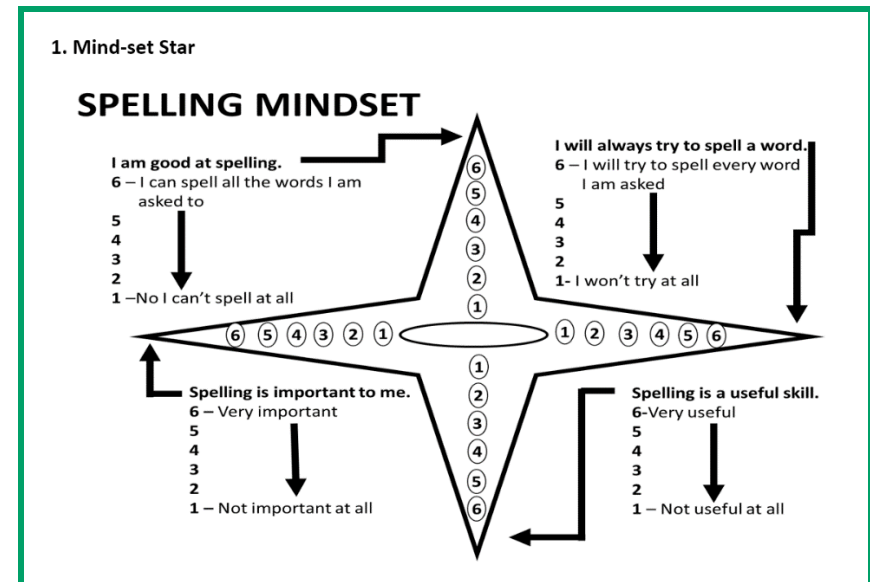
Figure 10c-2: Example Data gather / assessment resource

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

Professional values and attributes

The key professional learning outcome was the greater need for a flexible approach to phonics, ensuring learner need was met to ensure progression. This requires increased confidence from teacher and support staff to adapt their approach if current practice isn't achieving the required outcome whilst maintaining the positive learning environment and an atmosphere where it is acceptable to make mistakes.

Professional knowledge and understanding

Working collaboratively with support colleagues emphasised the need for up-to-date knowledge and practice of the phonics arena and the appetite to share the knowledge in a 360-degree approach with the sharing knowledge with support and vice versa. Obtaining up-to-date phonics knowledge of both initial (Department of Education & Skills, 2007) and Post-16 Phonics approaches (UCL IoE and ccConsultancy for the Education & Training Foundation, 2019) ensured understanding of how phonics knowledge is built in the primary sector and how that differs from the Post-16 Phonics toolkit. The Project drew on these sources to help fill any learner gaps in phonics knowledge with appropriate practices for the cohort. Whilst the premise of teaching the words and not isolated graphemes was the preferred method, isolated phonic sounds had to be used to ensure understanding.

Professional skills

Developing the combination of a positive learning environment and a reflective approach established an action research set. This was successful as thoughts and data gathered on a weekly basis from all sources (teacher/support/student) informed the following week's plan and highlighted any adapted practices (teaching/learning/assessment) required.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The increased collaboration between teacher and support staff enabled a positive environment to be built that helped students to progress or improve their mindset towards spelling. The consistency of support allowed clearer relationships to be built and increased value in all staff views and purpose in sessions. Improved confidence about the role of support staff in the session had a positive impact on the attitude and appetite of the students.

As a result, the following key factors will be implemented:

4. Scheme of work will be updated for the area cohort to include:
   o Initial assessment of spelling ability, to ascertain phonic gaps, with adaptability in the teaching/support styles
   o Reflective approach to learning and assessment embedded in the process, with a view to gathering:
     ▪ Views from students, support staff and teachers on the learning approach to ensure expectations are met and all are valued as having a contribution towards the practice in the classroom.
     ▪ Both student and staff mindset towards assessment that allow innovative approaches to be identified.

   NB: This practice would work best with consistency of support in the class to ensure relationship build and confidence in all parties.

5. Mindset shift to a natural positive learning environment to ensure this is the baseline expected at all times. This is to include sharing thinking on positive language and approach, to ensure inclusivity of all in the classroom environment and a positive learner environment by building an attitude that it is ok to make mistakes, as we can learn from them.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Teacher perspective

The teacher perceived a large improvement in appetite towards spelling. The learners became keener, as the weeks progressed, to attempt to spell words. They actively prepared to participate by asking what the letter of the week

was, or for wipe-boards and pens, so they were ready. Learners who initially refused to try became more readily involved and started writing words on the wipe-boards. This was because of the positive learning environment and attitude of all staff involved, as the emphasis was on trying rather than spelling a word correctly first time. Also, repetition of spelling practice improved students' confidence and aided retention though required flexibility of approach and phonics knowledge, from staff, to ensure understanding. So improved spelling, however minimal, was a by-product.

Support staff perspective

All four support staff who were involved supported the teacher view and noted observation of an improvement of the students' confidence, mindset and appetite towards spelling.

In addition, support staff felt that they were able to allow these students more independence to complete the work themselves as the weeks progressed, as prior knowledge was being retained and used.

Student perspective

Overall reflective feedback from students who participated was very positive and all responded that they felt more confident about trying to spell. For a closer inspection of improvement three students were selected as case studies.

Findings

Findings showed that students with prior knowledge of basic phonics were better able to take on board Post-16 Phonics and progress. The project identified those with gaps in basic phonics code and allowed practices and approaches to be amended to allow all students to have the option for progression.

In addition, using a reflective approach encompassing all involved (students, support staff, teacher) enabled a greater buy-in from all parties as it increased value in the learning environment and an improved mindset towards spelling.

Learning from this project

- There is benefit to allocating time to really focus on improving spelling ability with Neuro Diverse LDD learners. Given time constraints in lessons, these learners often end up copying the words spelt for them so this allowed the freedom to spell for themselves. Support staff reiterated the value as they saw the improvement, in both confidence and ability, outside the English classroom.
- Implementing a reflective practice was beneficial in the classroom by enabling greater buy-in to the tasks and activities of all involved, as they felt they were influencing what happened next. As all parties were invited to reflect and give feedback, the way forward was developed with a clearer idea of what is required to meet learner needs. Post project, a clearer idea of the reflective focus is understood and some areas of reflection would change to ensure that.
- Place more value on the knowledge and experience of support staff and give them a greater say in the classroom environment. This helps with reflection of what went well as support staff are working more closely with the learners and get a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the tasks and activities. Their participation also ensured a positive and effective learning environment.
- The letter of the week activity showed repetition of tasks does have a positive impact. It ensured that learners knew what to expect and enabled any initial apprehension about spelling to be overcome through task familiarity. It also made learners think about vocabulary and prompted them to try to spell the words. This drew on their knowledge of phoneme/grapheme correspondences and helped to identify any gaps. As we analysed the board as a class, no learner felt singled out, and as the positive environment was embedded over time, learners were increasingly happy to talk through spelling mistakes. This allowed for flexible teaching to fill gaps in phoneme and/or grapheme knowledge. It also enabled peer learning because of the differences in verbal vocabulary of learners, so it stretched and challenged other learners to spell words they weren't able to verbalise themselves. It also opened up other opportunities for English teaching, such as use of capital letters and using words in context.

10d. Empowering vocational tutors to develop a phonics-based approach to functional English
NOVUS
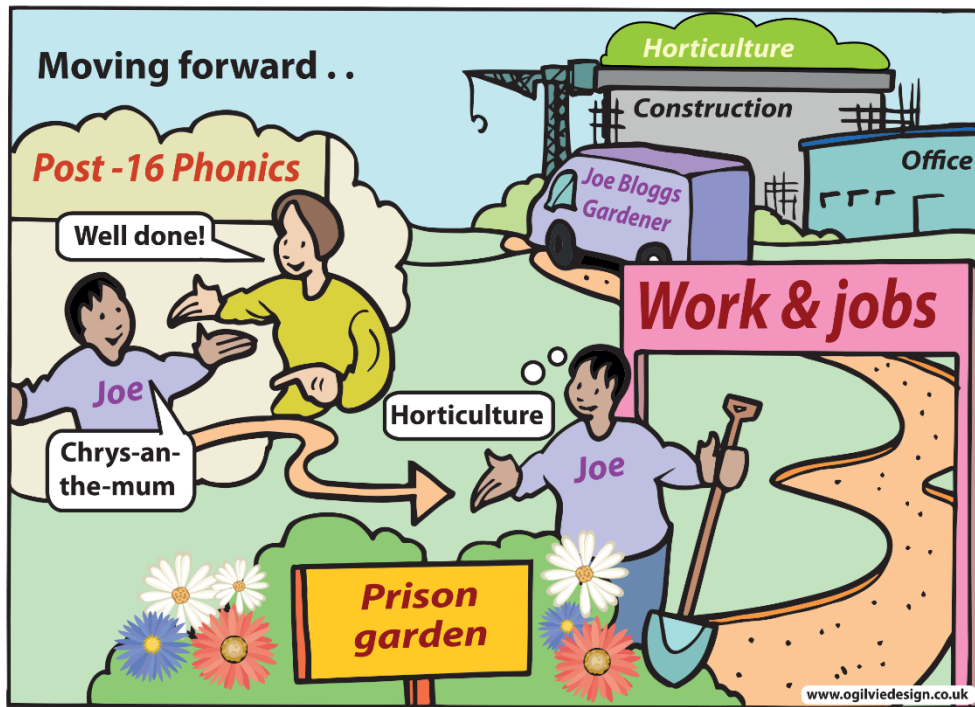
Working with Governors, HMPPS colleagues and partner agencies, NOVUS embeds English and maths into a wide range of chosen vocational pathways within our provision. This enables learners to gain functional skills qualifications alongside prison work.

This project aimed to enhance the collaboration between Novus colleagues and vocational instructors to ensure that embedded English provision complemented the vocational activities undertaken.

Summary

We introduced vocational staff to light touch phonics-based strategies for spelling which they could easily embed in their sessions.

It also aimed to develop spelling resources for teaching the reading and spelling of standard and vocational words in line with the reforms to functional skills qualifications standards which can be used in the context of a vocational training environment.

Three Prisons took part: two Category C prisons from Cumbria and Lancashire and one Reception Prison from Tees and Wear. As the main education provider within the Prison Education Framework at the participating establishments, NOVUS led on the initiative and HMPPS /NOVUS vocational trainers were invited to take part in relevant, joint training events organised in two of the three participating establishments. The spelling with phonics training was delivered by the OTLA project mentor and built on previous Post-16 Phonics training delivered by the ETF.

Rationale

The spelling focus of this project stemmed from site-level teaching and learning observation reports in which tutors identified frequently misspelt vocational words that were problematic for learners. We were keen to make use of the ETF's Post-16 Phonics approaches but recognised a lack of resources created specifically for prison workshops.

Prison workshops share some characteristics with college vocational courses:
- Learners often prefer to focus on practical skills rather than "school-type" activities like spelling.
- Learners may lack confidence in their ability to read and write and don't want that weakness to be exposed to other learners.
- Tutors, experts in their own vocational fields, have often not had training in teaching spelling but are nonetheless responsible for correct spelling on their courses.

Prison workshops are also different from traditional vocational settings:

- There is no access to the internet so we are limited to paper-based resources.
- Behaviour needs to be monitored closely especially where tools are involved
- Workshop sessions are between two hours and forty-five minutes and three hours fifteen minutes long, which is longer than most college sessions
- Learners' level of ability within prison workshops varies from Pre-Entry to Level 2. Within a college setting, there is usually a requirement for learners to have at least Entry Level 3 in maths and English to join a vocational programme
- There can be 10-18 learners within a prison workshop which could be fewer than in a college environment, but with a more intense security risk.

We wanted to increase knowledge and access to Post-16 phonics strategies for non-English specialists by supporting vocational teachers to develop the skills and knowledge needed to support learners to read and write subject specific vocational words and to use an associated phonics metalanguage.

Our intended outcome was that learners would have access to teaching and resources that best meet their specific learning needs relevant to their vocational aspirations.

Approach

- Key project personnel met to discuss spelling needs at different establishments. HMP Lancaster Farms focused on Catering, HMP Durham, Construction and HMP Wymott, Joinery. A set of commonly misspelt words were agreed in collaboration with vocational tutors. From this a resource was created that supported vocational trainers in breaking down technical words into syllables, so that they were confident in supporting learners with this technique.

- After initial development of these vocational glossaries, vocational and functional skills staff across a range of establishments received intensive bespoke training delivered by the project mentor. This training gave staff a grounding and deeper understanding of the post-16 phonics approach. Staff who did not attend training were briefed by those who did.
- Following the training, staff were encouraged to use the glossary resource and use Post-16 phonics approaches with relevant, identified learners and reflect on their progress through a reflective diary/comments and case studies. The capture of other supportive evidence from learner ILPs, work produced, and verbal/written feedback was encouraged.
- Methodologies included one-to-one, starter activities and mini tutorials.
- It is still the aim of this project to take the phonics strategies used to develop the original approach and mirror them in other areas of vocational provision across both Cumbria and Lancashire and the Tees and Wear regions, thus developing high-quality evidence-based learning resources for different curriculum areas.

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

Historically, vocational instructors have sometimes lacked the confidence and underpinning knowledge in terms of the pedagogy of embedding Functional Skills English within their vocational area. However, following the phonics training they worked hard to develop their teaching, learning and assessment practices and their approaches were well received by learners. They were given autonomy to run with the project and trial new ideas.

They created bespoke strength-based starter activities using words from their own vocational lexicon. This motivated learners to engage with activities that had been specifically designed to address a spelling gap yet were not viewed by learners as punitive. As a result, learners fully engaged from the outset making little objection to the introduction of a non-vocational activity within a vocational setting.

Staff who attended the training and engaged in the trial said:

> "*I was really interested in the way you can split a word into elements and mark each bit separately, this gives a more positive outlook rather than a big X!*"

> "*I like the fact we are not just throwing more worksheets at the men…*"

> "*Loved the idea of the desktop wipe boards to 'try out' different strategies… it was simple and great for use in a secure environment!*"

> "*The phonics trial has given me the opportunity to explore the use of language with the learners and support them in areas in which they struggle. We have achieved this through speaking and writing, by having one-to-one conversations with learners around pronunciation and developing resources to support spelling and identify how words are broken down into syllables. This has also allowed me to identify when a learner misspells a word, which syllable they are making mistakes with and then work towards individual goals with the learners. This has also enabled me to develop my own understanding of how people struggle with the English language in different ways and embed English more effectively in my lessons.*"

> "*It was good for me as a dyslexic person, as how you say things and spell them can be very different. It highlighted what I struggle with and how to help others. I have never used this approach before, it was different.*"

This was a huge leap within the tutors' practical teaching practice and inspired one learner to create a holding activity which is now used in class. The resource supports learners by splitting into syllables commonly misspelt terms on tool requisition sheets (see Figure 10d-1).

Figure 10d-1: Learner created activity

A horticulture tutor used the approach for commonly misspelt horticultural words creating plant identification cards which he showed learners who spelt out the words together and broke them into syllables. This engaged learners who were excited and wanted more plant identification cards to be created to be used at the beginning of their session (see Figure 10d-2). This has had an impact on planning for learning with this approach now embedded into schemes of work and lesson plans.

Figure 10d-2: Sample of two laminated cards used in horticulture

The staff member commented:

> *"Yes, the trial had the effect I had hoped for. The learners were excited and wanted me to produce plant identification cards to improve their knowledge."*

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Working around a Prison regime can be challenging when it comes to delivering training, although good partnership working in this instance ensured that staff participation in instructional and training events was high. It was complex within the North East Region to arrange for vocational tutors to attend training. However, a Vocational Hub Manager from HMP Durham was able to attend. Other staff were mainly Functional Skills staff and were tasked with briefing others back at their own establishment, with three prisons in the region committing to do so.

At HMP Durham, five vocational tutors were briefed, four from construction and one from horticulture. At Lancaster Farms 12 members of staff attended the initial 3 hour training session and represented a range of vocational and academic subject areas including catering, groundworks, joinery, art and IT. Evaluative comments following these organised events/briefings were wholly positive and demonstrated a clear willingness and enthusiasm to embrace new and innovative approaches to improving both reading and spelling in a vocational setting.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

One learner worked on his spellings daily and reflected upon this on his PLP, where you can see an improvement in some spellings, including, for example, the word "finish, speaking and paint". This focus on improvement wasn't consistent, but progress was still demonstrated through his PLP and workbook. Early indications suggest that those involved with the phonics activities made good progress and were successful in terms of absorbing new reading and spelling strategies.

Another prisoner who benefitted from the resources was a young offender from a different construction workshop, who had not attended school, struggled with spelling and had dyslexia and ADHD (see Figure 10d-3).

Figure 10d-3: Tutor reflection

The learner reflected:

> *"No-one has ever taught me how to break down words into syllables. I used to try and rush spelling to get it over with. Now that I take my time, it is coming along great."*

Case Study 1

A learner from the main construction department at HMP Durham, who is a challenging learner, made the following progress:

- completed a construction course at HMP Durham with some behavioural issues along the way
- engaged daily with vocational tutor to work on his spellings
- kept a record of work/progress within his workbook /PLP
- went on to a more academic course, Think Family, where he praised the previous vocational tutor's support.
- He is now on a Changing Lives Programme working alongside the Shannon Trust daily to improve his spelling and reading.

Case Study 2

A learner within our catering workshop engaged in a series of 1:1 sessions with the instructor who used a phonics-based approach to spelling.

The learner identified spelling as a weakness and wanted to be able to correctly spell culinary terms, specifically some French words. He was very particular about his work and didn't like spelling errors being corrected.

The learner:

- agreed to implement a spelling log at the front of his portfolio
- enjoyed using a strength-based approach, marking either letters or graphemes within the word individually to encourage and motivate.
- responded well to the adaptation as it fitted with his individual needs and he was able to demonstrate improvement in the spelling of vocationally specific words.

As a result, the learner was much happier and he even began asking for correct spellings rather than guessing. The tutor would then employ the phonics-based approach to encourage him to identify the graphemes involved rather than simply 'telling him', evidencing a change in practice.

The training also had a positive impact on the tutor, empowering her to *'think outside the box'* as she felt more confident in approaching English within her vocational setting. She also gained the confidence to repeat the process with other learners, adapting for individual need and linking into ILP and class profiles to further document the support and progress of the learners.

Learning from this project

Encouraging staff to try a different approach within their delivery, coupled with the introduction of a new concept, has led to their improved confidence and autonomy in terms of adapting their new-found knowledge to a variety of approaches using phonics. The teaching and training staff involved in the project have gone on to embed this approach within the pedagogy and culture of their workshops and it has become an accepted part of the session expectations. Some have grown in confidence and report feeling more equipped to adapt their strategies to best support the specific and individual needs of the learners.

Moving forward we are committed to share what we have learned as part of this project via future training events with NOVUS, HMPPS and partner colleagues, to positively affect learner outcomes in both the short and long term. By equipping learners with a sound methodology they can use to enhance their word attack and spellings skills, one which they can apply at every opportunity within their work and daily lives. We are also developing a lifelong skill, which we hope will serve them well in their future studies, employment and on release.

11a. Developing writing with entry level ESOL learners

Newcastle College
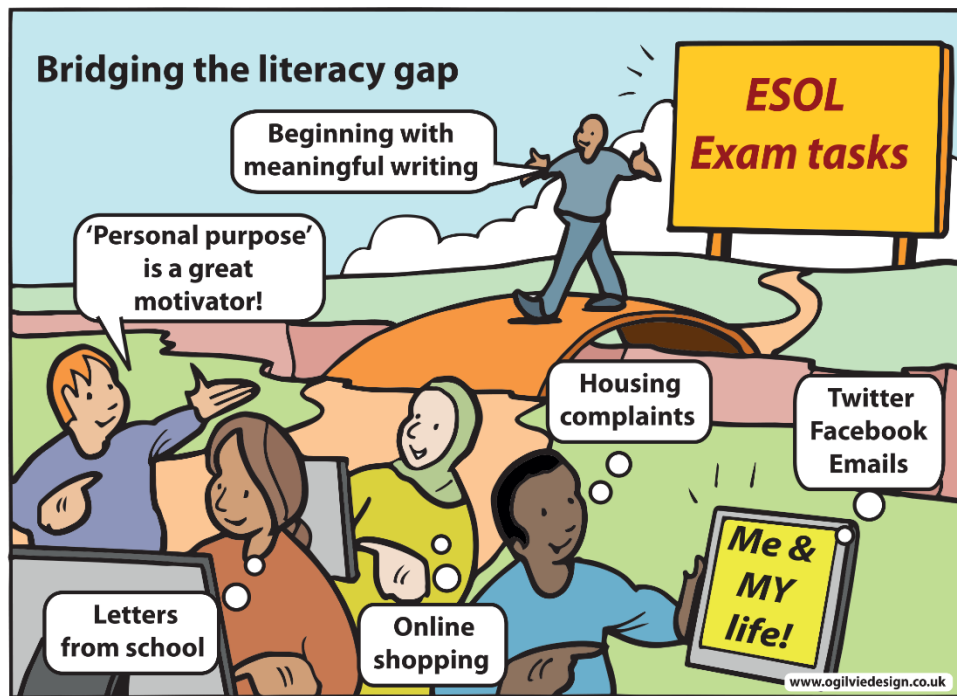
In this project we worked collaboratively with ESOL learners and staff to trial and evaluate strategies to improve writing. We wanted to engage learners in purposeful writing tasks that drew on their wealth of existing literacy practices outside the classroom, including digital practices.

Summary

We trialled a series of email exchanges between learners and the use of **Padlet** with Entry Level 1 students. With large ESOL provision and experienced staff, we were also keen to involve more staff and develop "a community of practice". Staff roles in the ESOL Department include tutors who deliver taught classes, and instructors who deliver and prepare workshops and computer lab sessions.

These less formal lessons enabled instructors to gain a more detailed understanding of learners' written skills and of the barriers students faced in accessing material. The instructors acted as "go-betweens" bridging the gap between the more formal setting of taught classes and the everyday experiences of each learner. The instructors increasingly played a key role in evaluating and in some cases re-working materials in this project.

Rationale

Our ESOL learners have varying levels of literacy, spoken English, and a wide diversity in previous level and experience of education. A significant number have 'spiky profiles' regarding reading, writing and speaking. This gap between skills, often between spoken and written language, can widen as learners move through levels, culminating in lower achievement in writing exams at higher levels. In a climate where funding is increasingly dependent on exam success, with restricted opportunities to resit, it is essential to build written skills at an early stage. Beyond exam success, difficulties with writing impact learners as they progress onto Functional Skills, GCSE, vocational courses and higher education.

ESOL staff at the College often develop their own approaches, for example: personalised spellings, use of writing booklets, weekly dictations, or the whole text approach of Language Experience. Practitioners are creative and responsive in the ESOL classroom but there is little sharing and dissemination of strategies on a wider scale between colleagues. We wanted to use this project to share the practices we were developing

A final issue to explore was the gap between learners' existing literacy practices and assigned classroom tasks often dictated by exam content. We wanted to experiment by starting with learners' everyday literacy practices.

A significant number of our learners use social media to contact friends and family abroad, navigate job websites and use language apps. We wanted to

explore how tutors could balance exam requirements with learners' existing literacy practices and needs.

Approach

Focus groups

Figure 11a-1: Focus group with ESOL learners and supporting materials

Background

We held a tutor focus group in the initial stages of the project to capture existing practice. Tutors' comments ranged from the specific, such as work on 'upgrading' sentences from *'I went to Leeds'* to *'I went to Leeds last Saturday to...'*, to broader approaches such as a topic-based local approach:

> *"learners ask for language when they can see the purpose...I couldn't stop them when I asked them to complain about the No. 10 bus!"*

There were varied views on the use of technology to improve writing and to motivate learners:

> *"...students need to improve their handwriting...IT skills become a separate issue for some of our students...it's difficult to predict their level of IT."*

Tutors also acknowledged that the use of technology 'mirrors a lot of real-life use'.

We then held three focus groups with ESOL learners: one with entry level 1, two with entry level 2 and one with level 1 learners. Entry level learners echoed tutors' views on the need to improve handwriting and the value of having time to copy in class. The depth of learners' analysis of the sub-skills of writing was evident with learners identifying specific phoneme/grapheme relationships they found difficult. The common themes were 'more time', 'more practice' and 'more use of models to support their writing'.

> *"to write a text in a short time doesn't help because it makes us stressed, so lots of mistakes! ... we want two hours on writing"* **(Level 1 learner)**, echoed by a tutor, *"I wished I had started on writing earlier"*.

Learners at all levels identified emails and forms as text types they need, whilst existing literacy practices ranged from social media use, text message and emails to helping children with homework. Several entry level learners valued *"computer writing ... I want this more over paper writing"*. We therefore decided to focus on email but to support this with paper-based work to

include a focus on punctuation, use of clear models and opportunities to copy words and improve handwriting.

Classroom activities: September - January

- Three email exchanges between two entry level 1 groups
- Follow-up workshops on how to structure an email and how to read and respond to an email
- Review and tweaking of email support materials by instructors
- Evaluation of email activities by learners
- Trial **Padlet** with an entry level 1 group to encourage learners to post opinions of their house/flat and respond to others' comments (Figure 11a-2)
- Use of a writing booklet task pre-computer lab to provide a structured approach to writing an absence email to a tutor. This was marked by instructors.
- A final email session in the computer lab with students emailing the tutor to say why they cannot attend class (Figure 11a-3).
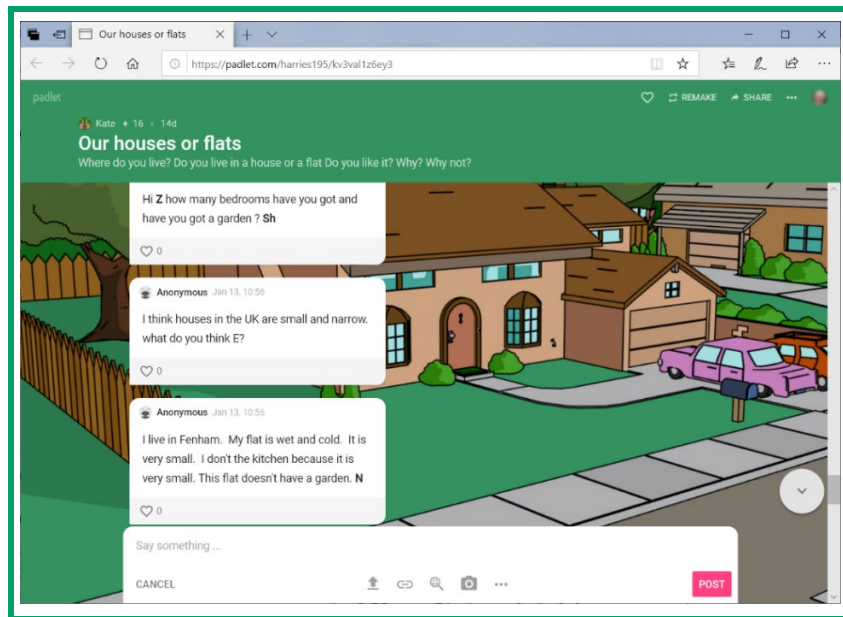
Figure 11a-2: Padlet for Entry Level 1 group
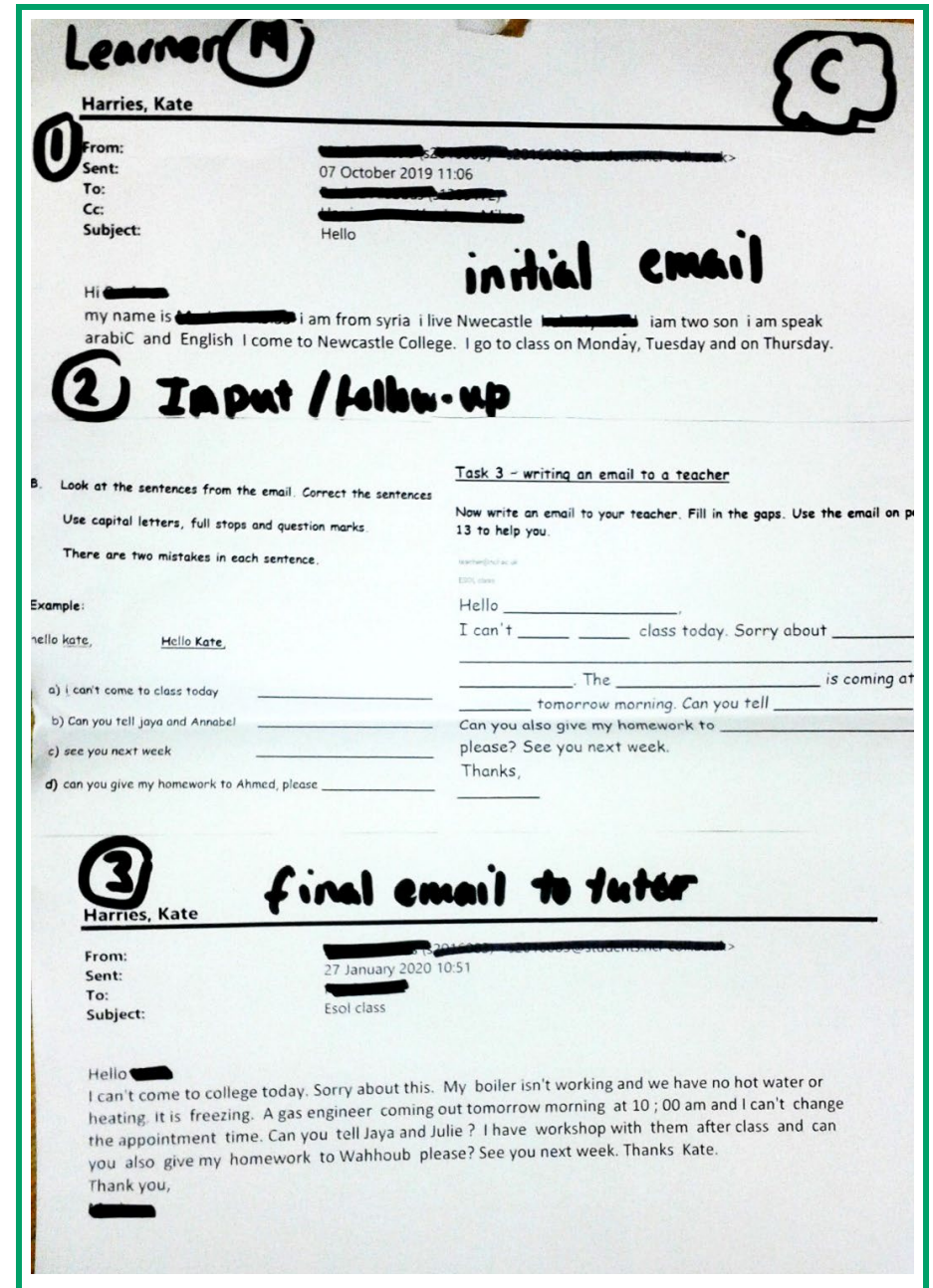
Figure 11a-3: Absence email to tutor (Learner M)

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

Meaningful changes from this small-scale action research project include a greater recognition of staff's expertise and having space and time to discuss and develop professional practice. This did not always happen in the more formal, focused space of a meeting, but in snatched conversations before and after class. These increased as new strategies were trialled and evaluated, leading to a richer working environment.

A second change related to this was risk-taking, going beyond what we normally do in entry level 1 classes. Written communication between two entry level groups using email was something we had not trialled before. The logistics of setting this up, the use of the college email system and the need to emphasise to learners the importance of not sharing any personal information with another student presented challenges.

Learners' difficulties in reading and responding to content were also brought to the fore in this activity. However, learners with varying levels of IT skills and written English gained in confidence and wrote communicative texts; they used the activity to express what they wanted to say; see student N for example in the Padlet post, 'my flat is dangerous' (Figure 11a-4). This led to a classroom discussion on high rises and cladding.

Finally, the value of learner feedback and evaluation of classroom activities were key to this project. We experienced the challenge of having to grade language in focus groups to ensure learners could answer questions whilst not leading them to a certain answer. Learners began to really reflect on how they learn and develop the language they need to express this.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Increased collaboration between tutors and instructors was the most significant change. Email exchanges happened in computer lab sessions run by instructors; we discussed activities with instructors who had input into tweaking and improving resources and approaches. Instructors also run and plan workshop sessions with learners; these involve consolidating work done in class. Instructor J fed back on some of the project materials, adapted

them and used them in workshops. An honest dialogue developed between staff. In the final lab sessions, a tutor covered an instructor's role and fed back on and responded to challenges that arose in the session.

Figure 11a-4: Exchange between learners on Padlet

Communication between ESOL groups was also something new; classes tend to be self-contained with little sharing of information. For learner D, it was a chance to *"talk to somebody [from] a different culture I don't know"* and practise questions she had learnt in class; *"email helps me with speaking."* This enthusiasm also came across in an email she wrote to a tutor, *"I send an email to M. It was nice. I was happy."*

Learners' writing had a clear communicative purpose and audience and language practised in class was put to immediate use. This is not something we are always able to manage in an ESOL classroom with some learners seeing a disconnect between the classroom and real-life language needs.
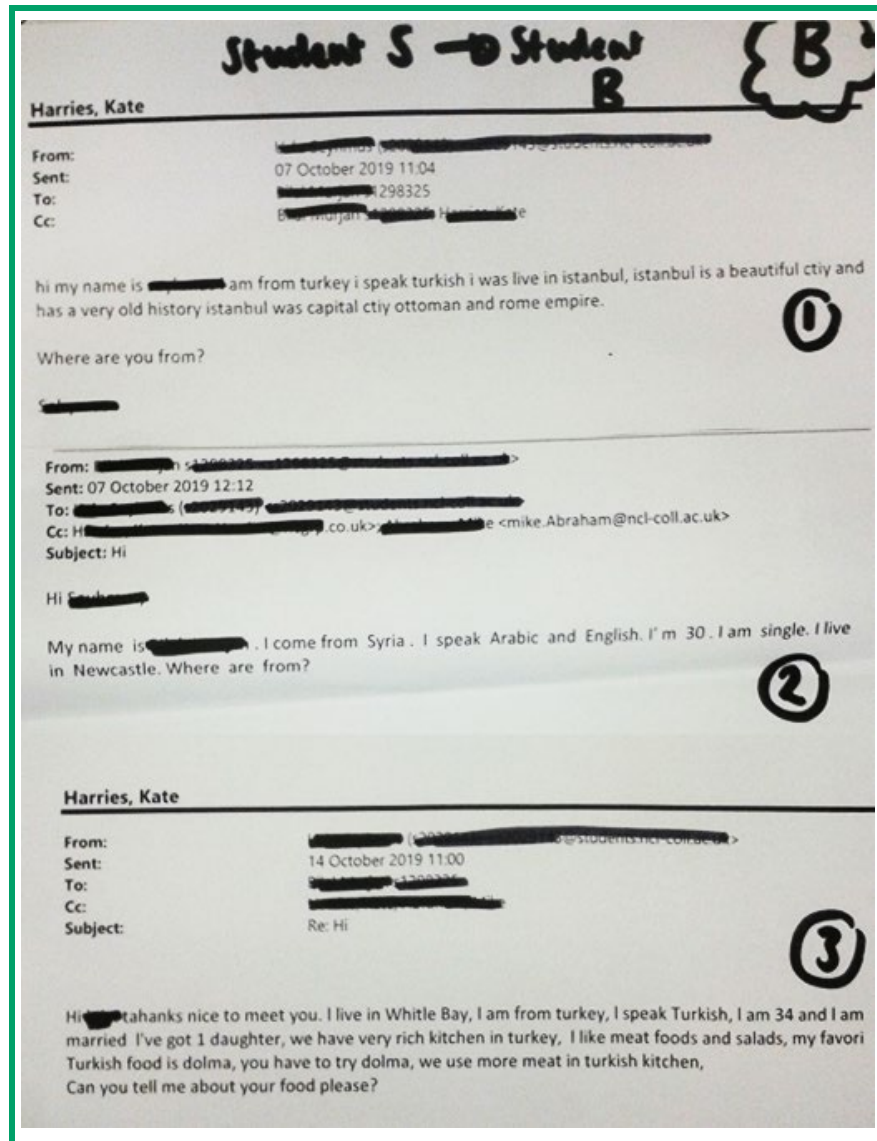

Figure 11a-5: email exchange (Learner S)

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

A final change was the involvement of learners in evaluating classroom practices and in reflecting on how they learn. Students had a voice and became active participants in the research process. In focus groups, entry level 1 students explained which spellings they found difficult and told tutors and instructors that more time was needed to copy and write in classes. This was echoed in their evaluation of the email exchange in early December when they ask for more time to prepare for emailing.

Written language and personalisation

Learners increasingly began to use the email exchange to say what they wanted to say and to push themselves beyond simple sentences required at entry level 1. The task did not limit their language and seemed to motivate learners to challenge themselves. This can be seen from learner S's exchange (Figure 11a-5) where he manages to use the natural and persuasive, *"you have to try dolma"* to encourage and convince his email partner of the merits of Turkish food. In his first email he writes about the *"ottoman and rome empire"*; learners are not restricted to writing about 'simple' topics.

Accuracy and length of emails

As can be seen from learner M's three emails (Figure 11a-3), learners began both to write more and improve in accuracy. Language accuracy here is linked to IT skills, for example knowing how to capitalise letters on the keyboard. In the first email, there is sporadic capitalisation of *I* but the final email to a tutor, after work on punctuation and paper-based tasks, is accurate. Focusing on typing seemed to focus students more on punctuation; in the final computer lab sessions, learners were asking specific questions about punctuation before connectives, for example.

IT skills and format of emails

Learners with emerging IT skills became confident in logging on and familiar with the structure and format of an email. Learner M was unable to remember her log-in and struggled initially with the concept of receiving an

email from someone else. By the third session, she had logged on independently and written an accurate email to a tutor.

Learning from this project

What went well

- Learners engaged in purposeful written communication and wrote texts above the constraints of their level (exam tasks and the curriculum can limit learners) to a real audience.
- Increased collaboration between tutors and instructors and closer links between content of lab/workshop sessions and class work. Instructors played a key role in developing materials and making the activities accessible to learners and developed a greater voice.
- Learners developed keyboard skills to support them with accurate punctuation. Learners 'noticed' punctuation more and ask more questions about this during computer work.
- Learners were able to structure an email accurately and use appropriate language after structured input in class and workshop sessions.
- Learners developed the ability to read and respond to messages. This was a key challenge but was evidenced in the posts on Padlet.
- There was greater engagement with writing, particularly during the Padlet task.

Even better if...

- Begin with written messages or paper-based email exchange in class to introduce the concept of reading and responding to an email.
- Spend longer on the set up / concept of an email exchange. Some students new to email struggled both to understand the immediacy of an email and the fact they had to read and respond. Live emailing between a tutor and an instructor in the first session would help with this. Introducing an email exchange with another class was too much too soon.
- Students should have emailed the tutor to start with; student email addresses are complicated to type, unlike staff addresses. This would also have ensured that everyone received an answer immediately.

- Students should have set up their own Gmail accounts for College; the student email interface is not user friendly and addresses are difficult to type.
- More practice and teaching during the initial stages on the format of an email, for example the function of the subject line and the importance of an opening and closing greeting. Several learners were still writing the whole content of the email in the subject line.

Future areas of research and recommendations

- Greater alignment between exam/class content and communicative writing tasks that reflect learners' current needs and existing literacy practices. With certain exam boards, a focus on an audience and a clear purposeful task is often the content of higher level ESOL exams and not lower levels.
- Digital literacy built into an ESOL curriculum. Learners need to be able to write online. ESOL learners, particularly those with literacy needs, need to practise handwriting and letter formation and to develop the sub-skills of spelling and punctuation on paper, but they also need to be able to use a keyboard and a mouse, or increasingly, a touch screen.
- Greater liaison between IT, employability tutors and ESOL staff. Tutors and instructors could develop a bank of resources to support learners to develop both their literacy and their digital literacy
- Exploiting communicative opportunities in the ESOL classroom with a focus on writing and online writing. The ESOL classroom is a very rich space for sharing opinions and experiences, and staff and students are used to exploiting this to develop language learning and build relationships. We think that widening this to share experiences between classes and perhaps between institutes in an online space would increase language learning opportunities as well as helping to create an online ESOL community.

11b. Developing responsive teaching strategies in supporting learners to develop confidence with English in a training provider

Springboard Sunderland Trust
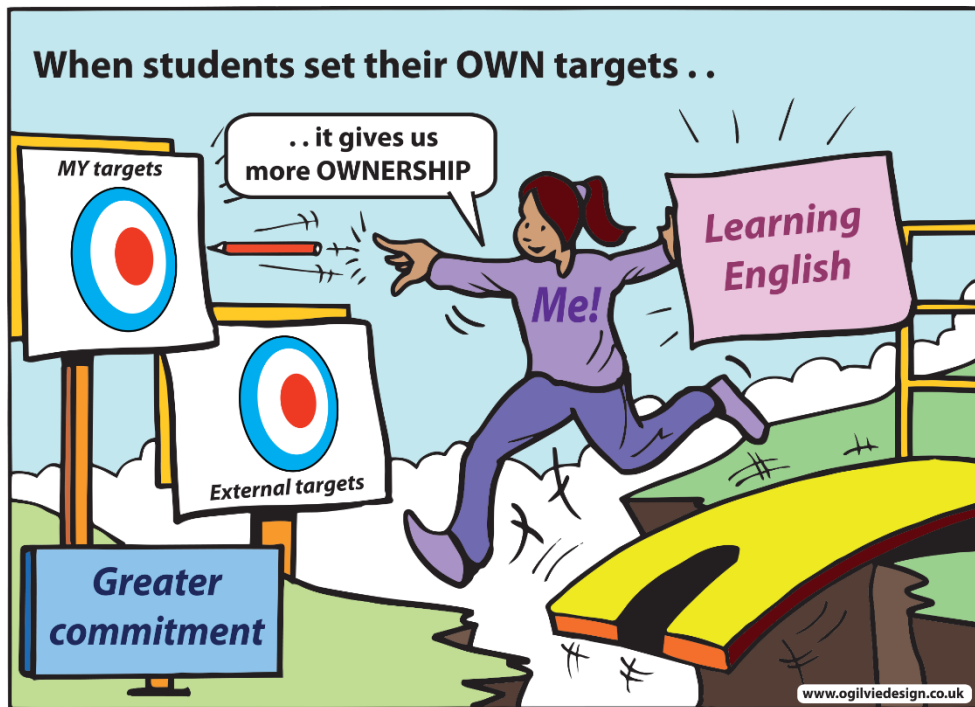
This project has focused on how tutors used formative assessment strategies to support English learners in both the Study and Adult programmes, following their journeys and tracking their progression.

Summary

We are a regional training provider delivering vocational qualifications alongside maths and English Functional Skills and GCSEs. We needed better information about how learners were progressing and how well they were achieving. We also needed to support learners through the self-assessment

process, where they were encouraged to identify specific areas of weakness based on their progress in a lesson.

The Basic Skills team has worked with the help of vocational tutors where possible. All research has been carried out with the added aim of linking lessons to topical content addressing equality and diversity.

Rationale

We wanted the learners to take greater ownership of their own progression and unlock their ability to reflect on what went well and how they could get even better.

Alongside this, we wanted the learners to see the links between their vocational qualifications and maths and English as we believed this would improve their achievement in both areas and make basic skills – sometimes seen to be unnecessary to hard-to-reach learners – more achievable and enjoyable. We also set out to demonstrate to learners that these skills would help them in everyday life, and it was hoped that learners would be more motivated to retain a place on the programme.

Approach

Two maths and English tutors decided to trial new approaches with their groups. The intention was to begin at the start of the learners' journeys and reassess them when the project was finished. As we offer roll-on, roll-off programmes, we expected learners to be at varying stages in the process.

Tutors initially began implementing a WWW (what went well) and EBI (even better if) self and peer assessment at the end of lessons. This was to encourage the learners to reflect on their own progress after a taught session. Tutors reflected on their teaching practice and we regularly

discussed how our lessons unfolded; providing and listening to advice from our peers where possible.

Some of the approaches were:

- Addressing controversial topical issues such as homelessness and poverty and making a biased statement (GCSE English)
- Providing learners with dedicated criteria for marking their own work dependent on the task (GCSE English)
- Using a target sheet at the beginning of the lesson with a main aim and space to write their own individual aims (adult probation).

By choosing to follow the above ideas, it was hoped learners would:

- Become more confident in voicing their own opinion and increase their personal development
- Think about wider social issues, listen to arguments they would not normally consider, and improve their social development
- Improve their study skills through applying specific marking criteria which address the needs of the question and thus evaluate their performance and identify their areas for improvement.

At the end of the project, we were satisfied that achievement had been made in these areas.

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

From the discussions that took place between the Basic Skills team, it is clear that teaching, learning and assessment practices have been changed for the better.

In one class, following the GCSE English exams, the emphasis on exam-style questions was replaced by a learner-led, research debate-focused sessions which the learners appeared to enjoy. The effects of this inquiry approach can be seen in the learners' workbooks – all previous exam-style questions are replaced with learners' research carried out independently or in pairs and there is significantly less rote writing, as it has now been replaced with debates.

Teaching questions were addressed to learners which required a more detailed response. In discussions, tutors focused on the question "why", prompting the response "because" from the learners, which opened up opportunities for them to give reasons in their verbal communication (and, hopefully in time, in their written work). Tutors have commented how the learners are very aware of this added emphasis on explaining their reasoning and are becoming more familiar with explaining with and without prompts from the tutor. In class, tutors comment that the difference is also noticeable in overall contributions to the session.

Learners who were previously very shy have become increasingly more confident in their abilities to contribute their opinions and take part in the lessons. Tutors are putting additional focus on the ability to justify word choices, phrases and other features of English. It was evident that the quality of the writing improved for tasks which required research and learners used facts and statistics more frequently in their own written work in order to be more persuasive.

Andrea noticed it can be easier to begin a lesson when learners are encouraged to set their own aims and objectives. Since setting their own targets, the adult probation English class have been able to achieve their aims more comprehensively with no evident negative effects to their learning. The tutor noted increased motivation reinforced by prior success when learners took ownership of their own progression. Andrea's class chose their own aims, decided which work to attempt and marked each other's work according to specific criteria to improve their own understanding of the subject.

It was occasionally quite difficult to prepare a lesson for such a potentially large number of varying aims, but it was worth the initial effort. Learners who could make choices displayed much more enthusiasm. It was noticeable that when learners were not given a choice, the reluctance to attempt the work was more apparent. However, in a following lesson, the same work could be among a number of tasks from which the learner would choose. When making their own selection, the learners became committed.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This project encouraged an increased focus on vocational tutors and English tutors working collaboratively. The managers for maths and English and Study Programme assigned a maths and English champion to every delivery site. These champions were to be the direct port of call whenever there was a maths and English query e.g. how to differentiate feedback to an Entry Level 3 or a GCSE learner. While the idea of champions was not a direct response to the project when it was first conceived, by the end of the project, it had become a key factor in its success. The increased efforts to work directly with vocational staff meant that the three tutors in the maths and English team were joined in the project by another four vocational staff.

There has been increased communication between the vocational and English tutors through email, face-to-face contact and over the phone. In meetings of all staff, vocational tutors have been quick to praise the initial success they had making use of them and have highlighted instances of how this collaboration was successfully implemented.

Since the beginning of the project, collaboration between the two teams has also resulted in an increase in the bank of resources to enhance vocational tutors' sessions (Figure 11b-1). Tutors also worked in collaborative team-teach sessions to improve the learners' understanding of topical issues such as homelessness, poverty and the idea of supporting charities. Tutors from vocational subjects commented on how they could take ideas and resources from these lessons and apply them to their own subjects confident in the knowledge it will aid the learners' understanding of their own subject.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Throughout the entirety of the project, two learners were observed closely to monitor their progress. AB was preparing to sit the GCSE English exam for the fifth time and had been with Springboard for two years. She had additional one-to-one support in the past but still struggled to pass.

Figure 11b-1: Vocational resource

As previously stated, AB struggled to achieve grade 4 in the GCSE English exams and Jamie believed this was largely down to the writing section having seen her results. Her writing displayed a lot of potential for improvement, both in content (AO5) and technical accuracy (AO6) so this is what was focused on. Towards the exams, AB was still making avoidable mistakes in both and this was evident in her piece on the lighthouse (Figure 11b-2).

The fence is acting like a barrier protecting the land from the raging sea so that it doesn't get damaged. It also helps so that no one falls over and get snached up by the sea or breaks the rocky rocks at the bottom. The waves are crashing against the barrier and soon there will be no barrier there to save the land.

The trees are a good basic nature reserve for animals that just want to chill out and get away from the soaring sea. The owls are hooting on a night time like lions on a day time hunting for there prey. The trees make the other objects stand out because they are just so pretty and a glamorous green, and yelling yellow.

The house is like no other house, its pretty with it's appealing bright colours, the bricks don't look like bricks — they look like stones. It has lots of windows to look out of. I mean who wouldn't want to look at that amacing sceanary? Even the shed looks delightful with it's bright blue doors and discoloured bricks as if its been there since the 19th century about to collapse.

Annotations: by the waves?; rough; snached; soon; personification; basic; link with advanced punct; appealing; delightful; much more vivid here

The lighthouse has got a wall around it so that no unwanted guests can get in and mess with it and destroy it, because that wouldn't just be dangerous for us it would be dangerous for other people as if there was no lighthouse the people on boats would propably crash right into the land, it's like a car in the dark with no headlights or street lighting there is just no way they will still be going in a straight line or even know where they are going.

Ending seems more like a profile of what a lighthouse is! Remember: your aim is to describe!

bright, colourful
red/white
candy cane

tall, large
Lighthouse
strawberries and cream
isolated / lonely

Describe!!!

C - L2↑ 11/24
Spag - L2↓ 8/16
12/40

Figure 11b-2: AB's piece on the lighthouse

On reviewing her work, it was clear it did not meet the intended purpose of being descriptive throughout and was lacking in more advanced uses of language. These issues were more prominent in the following piece on the forest where the problems appeared to be embedding themselves in her

written work. Following this, a meeting was held with AB and actions put in place. She was instructed to focus on cyclical structure, a form of structure which reverts to the topic discussed in the beginning of the text. To make this easier, it was actioned that she practices describing the weather and circling key things in images from the internet. Her subsequent text, the lighthouse revisited, is consequently far superior in terms of content and accuracy.

CD progressed into GCSE English having completed Level 1 Functional Skills English. He had always found it difficult communicating verbally because of a stammer and his confidence fluctuated throughout education. His tutor recognised that he had difficulty communicating his thoughts verbally as well as in written form. However, on coming into the GCSE classes with the greater emphasis on inquiry and discussion, CD demonstrated great confidence – perhaps due to being in with some of his friends and feeling at home in the group – in speaking out and even commented on his own performance and confidence in his verbal communication. He has produced a written report from his own point of view to corroborate this increasingly positive mindset.

Learning from this project

The project gave tutors the chance to reflect on their strategies and make decisions that could have a positive effect in their future practice.

What went well:
- Increased motivation from learners and contribution in individual lessons
- Staff motivation increased as learner interaction improved
- Increased ownership of individual progress in lessons
- Easier for vocational tutors to find answers to maths and English queries with a designated champion to go to
- Stronger activity and engagement between tutors across teams
- Vocational tutors have a greater understanding of how to mark a variety of levels of work in regard to the English content
- Inclusion of more topical issues encouraged and improved learners' debating skills and confidence
- Opportunities to select tasks made it easier to engage reluctant learners

- Joint marking of work between English and a vocational tutor helped the vocational tutor to raise other vocational tutors' awareness of the English requirements

Even better if:
- Not all classes were capable of setting and working to their own aims and objectives without support. (To combat this, tutors provided learners with options.)
- It is harder to plan for classes where learners choose their own aims and objectives. The unpredictability of the outcome is always a problem in teaching and, while it can be difficult to work like this, tutors learned how to adapt through trial and error)
- Vocational tutors were more aware of the individual requirements of each level of English from Entry Level 1 to GCSE.

Learners appeared to enjoy the lessons more when they were given something topical to debate. The more controversial or thought-provoking the topic was, the more involved the majority of the learners became. However, some still chose to stay less involved, indicating that, no matter the subject, it is still largely in the hands of the individual to choose just how much they contribute. The added focus of "why" questioning combatted this fairly well when directed at those less involved.

Adult learners were particularly committed to setting and delivering on their own aims and objectives and this inspired healthy competition throughout the course. However, not all learners became more motivated by setting their own targets, with some abusing this ownership a little bit.

Vocational tutors were more able to easily find answers to questions linked to English because of the availability of the champions, and the collaborative efforts of both teams ensured they had a greater understanding of the differences in marking the work of a lower-level English learner compared to that of a higher-level learner. If more time had been available to each tutor, it would have been useful to work on an individual basis with each vocational tutor so tutors knew exactly what they should embed into their own lessons.

11c. The Power of Language: Exploring behaviours and attitudes towards GCSE English through learning conversations

Sunderland College
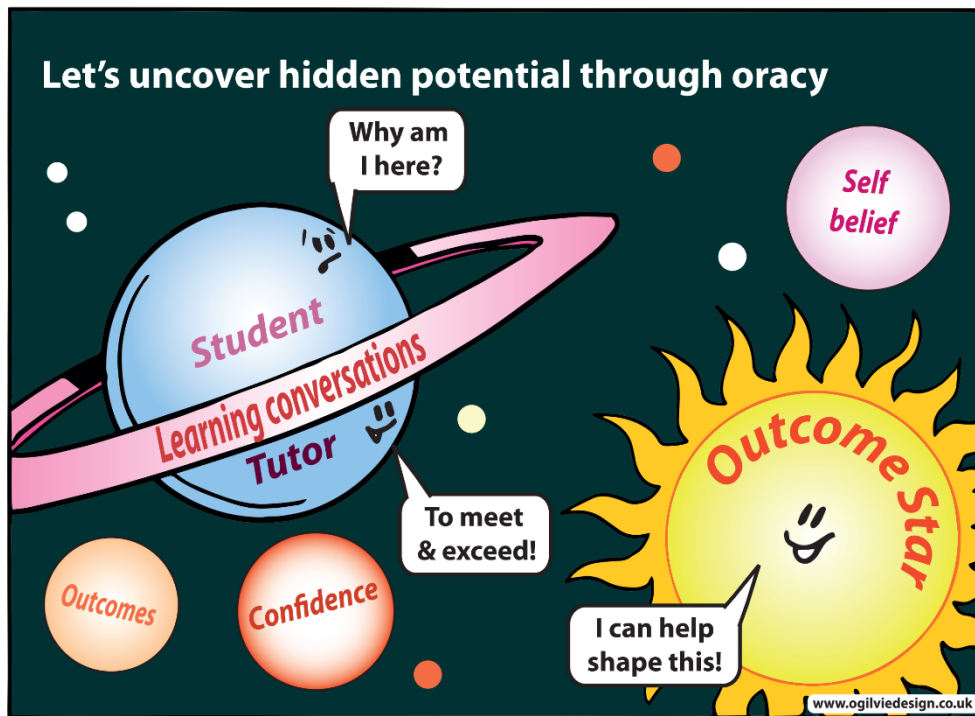
This small-scale research project explored how formative assessment could be used to bring about positive behaviours and attitudes towards learning within GCSE resit in a Further Education college in the North East of England.

Summary

For most post-16 resit GCSE English students, re-taking a subject in which you have already been labelled a 'failure' is a diminishing experience. It can result in a loss of confidence, not to mention a disengagement and lack of interest in the activity in which you are regarded as being simply 'not good enough'.

GCSE English teachers worked with students and implemented the 'Outcome Star' to evaluate, through learning conversations, levels of learner confidence in their approach to their GCSE English studies.

Rationale

In the past vast amounts of teachers' time has been used to prepare written feedback to learners on their progress against target grade. However, this has not had the desired impact of improving learner autonomy and confidence.

Therefore, the English team developed the 'Outcome Star' (Figure 11c-1) as a vehicle for focusing formative feedback. This self-regulating tool was developed and inspired by the Inception Meeting and was designed in collaboration with the Literacy Lead in attendance. The 'Outcome Star' was used as a vehicle for a learning conversation between teacher and learner in order to build learner confidence and halt their perceptions of being a failure. This feedback tool was designed to mitigate the negative feelings of failure that learners begin their college experience with.

Approach and Methodology

The tool was piloted with 2 selected English practitioners both delivering GCSE resit English to Study Programme learners. These teachers worked at 2 different centres, each with cohorts of learners who presented different behavioural needs and academic abilities. Both teachers were committed to the use of the 'Outcome Star' and agreed upon the 10 key expressions linked to attitudes and behaviours which were appropriate for both cohorts of learners.

Figure 11c-1: Outcome Star

The following expressions were used:

- I enjoy reading
- Reading out-loud
- Comfortable with my writing skills
- Accurate spelling for my age
- English is important to me
- I take English lessons seriously
- I get involved in English lessons
- I am always prepared for English lessons
- Use English skills away from college
- I enjoy creative writing

In the first instance and as part of the students' initial assessment for GCSE English, the students were asked to carry out a self-assessment using the 'Outcome Star' to grade themselves for levels of confidence, 10 being very confident and 1 being low confidence, on each key expression within the 'Outcome Star'.

Following this, the teacher graded the same key expressions within the 'Outcome Star'. Both teacher and student ratings then prompted more fruitful and challenging discussions that attempted to identify and break down misconceptions and overcome self-imposed barriers to learning.

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

The 'Outcome Star' was deployed during the initial assessment period and this generated rich information. The classroom teacher used this information in their interactions with their learners in order to build learner confidence and generate positive perceptions of themselves and their abilities.

This resource encouraged learners to express more fully and analyse their behaviours and attitudes towards GCSE English and afforded the teacher the opportunity to discuss and challenge negative perceptions with learners. When reflecting upon the use of this resource the teachers enjoyed the opportunity to engage in more meaningful learning conversation which helped break down the barriers much earlier than in previous years. In practice the teachers were able to challenge and have more meaningful conversations in relation to students' experience of education and not just focus on progress against target grade.

Towards the end of the research study the teachers evaluated this form of student/teacher collaborative feedback and shared their views in case-studies. Some of the key points from the case studies include:

- Opportunity to engage in more meaningful conversations
- I am able to plan more effectively and understand my students' needs more
- Students grow in confidence and engage in more 'reading out-loud' activities which previously would have been a real challenge
- Lesson planning now includes more time for oracy skills

The 'Outcome Star' is now part of future curriculum planning for GCSE English.

Overall students have engaged positively in the process and they can see how their perceptions can impact on their approach to GCSE English.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This study was originally piloted with two members of GCSE English teaching staff and it has been agreed that this approach has been adopted as part of the initial assessment for GCSE English across Sunderland College.

In addition to this, the 'Outcome Star' was identified as best practice as part of a college Internal Review of initial assessment and has been shared with all other curriculum areas. At the request of the college's CEO and Chair of the college's Quality Improvement Committee, the resource developed as part of this study was recognised as best practice by the committee.

One of the teachers involved in the project has commented on changes in their practices:

> "I have found that the outcome star is a great way to capture the learners' attitudes to English. What is proving interesting is the propensity for learners to "undersell" themselves, particularly around how seriously they take the subject and their confidence. This has led to some very interesting learning conversations whereby we have the opportunity to unpick the story behind the attitude".

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The evidence of improvement is based on teachers' observations of changes in student behaviour and attitudes towards GCSE English. The evidence is qualitative in nature and outlined in the case studies. One teacher involved commented improvements to current practice:

> "I can challenge and address not only academic progress but also attitudes and behaviours towards English which supports a more holistic approach to student development."

It can be seen in the teachers' case studies that learners are responding well to the teachers' improved planning for oracy, with learners in both studies being observed to respond more enthusiastically to the new opportunities that teachers are creating

Learning from this project

Key learning from this project is the importance of considering the holistic progress of learners that is not over-reliant on progress against target grade. Progress in the softer skills, including behaviours and attitudes, are equally important and are invaluable in supporting planning and formative assessment.

The deployment of the 'Outcome Star' as part of the initial assessment of GCSE English students has assisted in addressing some of the negative perceptions and behaviours towards English. This has given the teachers the opportunity to have learning conversations that focus both on academic progress and student resilience and confidence towards their subject.

One teacher commented that:

> "I implemented a number of changes in my sessions, foremost amongst the changes was (and is) the greater focus on trying to develop learner confidence, trying to get the learner to read aloud, write on the board and develop their oracy skills by allowing opportunities for them to have a voice in discussions. I now include oracy within my planning and look at opportunities to generate more discussion and talk about English more."

Overall, the 'Outcome Star' has huge potential to inform pedagogical approaches in a more timely manner prompted by the rich and broad dialogue that generates valuable information of the students' learning journey to date.

The 'Outcome Star' has the potential to be adapted to include the measurement of learners' employability traits which can be used by Personal Development tutors and curriculum staff.

This particular piece of research worked well on a smaller scale with two teachers and would require inter-disciplinary co-ordination when deployed on a college-wide scale.

12a. Getting FE students HE ready: A collaborative action research project between LRC staff, vocational tutors & students

Kirklees College
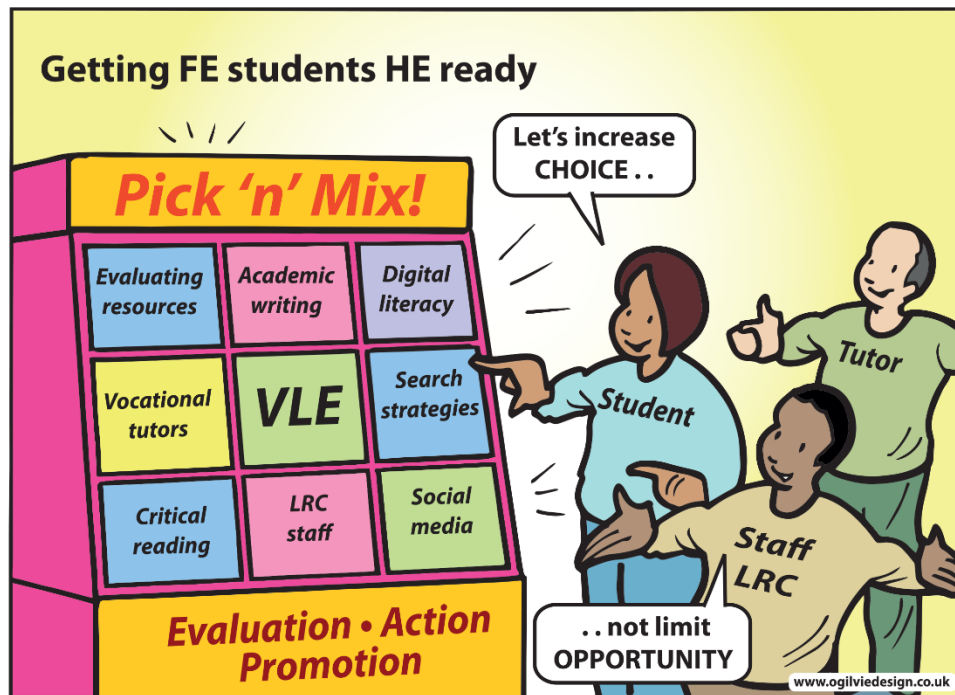
The project had dual aims:
- **to develop collaborative relationships between the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) staff, vocational tutors & students and**
- **to support tutors to enable students' independent study skills.**

Summary

Central to this project is a re-branded cross-college study skills VLE page, developed by the LRC staff, as a resource for staff and students whilst also being used as a springboard to promote the services offered by the LRC team.

The key stakeholders in the project are the LRC staff, an Advanced Teaching and Learning Coach (ATLC) with a remit for supporting the use of digital learning technologies, and the newly appointed Curriculum Area Manager (CAM) for the LRC and ATLC teams.

Rationale

The rationale for this project comes from a combination of issues, identified independently by project members, with the recognition of a need to bring these perspectives together to develop and promote support for vocational tutors and students.

The LRC staff highlighted a need for a project team in relation to study skills provision because of several factors:
- low usage statistics of the existing VLE study skills resource
- software was no longer supported
- restructure of LRC resulted in fewer staff and loss of focus relating to the maintenance of the resources
- changes to LRC systems/processes meaning some information was outdated
- growing importance of transferable digital skills, to meet student needs and maintain alignment with college vision.

The ATLC and CAM were aware there were a variety of study skills resources to support students' academic reading and writing skills development; however, there was no cross-department collaboration to support the development of these skills. There was awareness that resources were outdated and needed to reflect the changing nature of academic study, including use of digital resources and development of digital literacy skills.

The project team agreed that the focus of study skills support should be aimed at Level 3 students or above as we believed that, at level 3 and above,

students should have a clear understanding of the importance of study skills and be able to access relevant resources independently to achieve that understanding.

Approach

We took an action research (AR) approach to the project using the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle.

Plan

Updating and re-branding the cross college VLE study skills page was central to this AR project. The VLE page was to serve multiple purposes. Firstly, to ensure this updated VLE page was fit for purpose; so it was vital to get, and act, on feedback from both tutors and students. Secondly, the VLE page would be used as a springboard in order to promote the wider support available from the LRC staff for both staff and students.

Act

1. Promote the VLE page through formal channels:
   - Daily communications
   - Email to managers to forward to their teaching staff
   - Email to ATLCs asking them to liaise with teachers within their link team
2. Attend curriculum team meetings to promote the VLE page and request feedback from students.
3. Approach tutors directly to request attending their sessions to promote the VLE page & ask for student feedback, as in:
   - Animal care
   - Childhood studies
   - Teacher education
4. Deliver the 'designing a search strategy' session to the LRC team and discuss how these skills can be supported within the LRCs when students come for assignment support.

5. Competition to re-name the VLE page.
   - LRC Advisor approaching students using the LRC floor one
   - Social media promotion

   - Email promotion to tutors

While this report represents an overview of activity within this project, it does not fully reflect the messiness of engaging with AR and the multiple cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect undertaken. The project team had regular team meetings; through this we were able to report our observations, and suggest ways to respond to issues as they arose so that at each meeting we had a clear action plan for the next cycle of activity.

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

The project team recognised the need for continuous, consistent, and coherent communication in relation to the production and promotion of online VLE resources. A key finding is that the production of these VLE resources can be interpreted as a replacement for face to face support whereas the intention is they are complementary resources. In response to this a classroom session titled 'developing a search strategy' was developed. This served the same dual purposes as the VLE page: firstly it would be used to engage with tutors to promote the wider services of the LRC staff and secondly provide a resource for tutors to use with students.

Two versions were planned. The first was delivered to the LRC team during a staff conference day. Much of the LRC's role involves staffing the LRCs where students approach staff with questions regarding assignments. This session provided an opportunity for LRC staff to consider how they can support students with their academic skills in one-to-one situations. The session resources included a PowerPoint presentation, a handout and a 'Curriculum Support' document. The Support document was evaluated during the session, providing valuable contributions from the wider LRC team. This feedback informed the final document available as part of the study skills VLE page. This is a valuable resource to ensure tutors and LRC staff have a shared understanding of how they can support their students' academic skills.

The second version of this session was to be delivered to tutors. Unfortunately, despite the best attempts of the team, this has yet to happen.

Not to be deterred, we have a new plan for approaching CAMs directly to deliver the session directly to curriculum teams.

However, this session, 'developing a search strategy', has had a positive impact on the professional learning of the Advanced Teaching and Learning Coach on the team. She adapted and delivered to session for a new course she was delivering, the L5 in Observation of Teaching and Learning. This provides an excellent case study for how useful this session is, as the tutor reflects on how central it has been to support students' understanding of the requirements of a level 5 assignment and set expectations to engage with relevant wider reading.

Through the promotion of the VLE page, it was discovered that a change in the way LRC inductions took place at the beginning of term was misinterpreted. Online inductions had been created with the intention of ensuring all learners received induction. Previously, face to face inductions focused on full time students, so the online resource was developed to make the inductions more accessible. In addition, it was thought that freeing up the LRC staff from delivering repetitive inductions to small groups would provide more time for specific support to curriculum teams.

However, the project team discovered that tutors thought they were now unable to access the LRC subject librarians for face to face classroom contact for students. There are two examples of the impact of the project in response to this. Firstly, a 'Supporting Curriculum' document was developed and secondly, an LRC subject librarian met with a science tutor to discuss a specific upcoming assignment requiring the students to engage with journal articles.

This is an excellent example of how the project team, made up of a tutor and LRC staff, enabled a change in TLA. It also highlights the theme of communication which has become evident throughout the project.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Official channels of communication, such as the 'Daily Communications' bulletins, emails to CAMs, and the offer of training sessions had limited success in promoting the new study skills resource or in getting feedback from staff and students.

Approaching tutors directly either individually or through team meetings proved more successful. The LRC staff attended classes where they introduced the study skills VLE page asking for feedback from the tutor and students. The ATLC met with tutors in team meetings or individually and in this instance, it was the tutors who introduced the resource in class and forwarded the student feedback to the project team. Positive feedback on the resource included: easy to navigate; well structured; and a variety of resources including step by step instructions for technologies & useful videos.

What is interesting reviewing this feedback is the *variety* of the comments from students. Common themes related to the sections on referencing, academic writing and critical reading; however, there was also a large amount of individualised feedback. This suggests that the 'pick & mix' approach to the design of the resource was appropriate. There was also a variety of suggestions for areas of improvement. For example, a section on Office 365 with support resources for both tutors and students was added and an 'introduction' added to provide an overview of each section.

What has been most surprising has been the impact of informal communication. For example, the section on 'getting HE ready' was added including resources on 'thinking of studying a HE course'; 'preparing and creating your application'; and 'preparing for your interview'.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

The VLE resource developed has provided a 'pick and mix' support package for tutors and students. It provides staff with a resource to direct their students to encourage the development of independent study skills. The 'pick and mix' approach allows students to use the resource as needs arise. This is evident in the feedback from some HE students.

Predictably the most useful sections relate to research skills and referencing (see figure 12a-1) and the statistics from the VLE page indicate these are the most frequently used areas (see figure 12a-2).
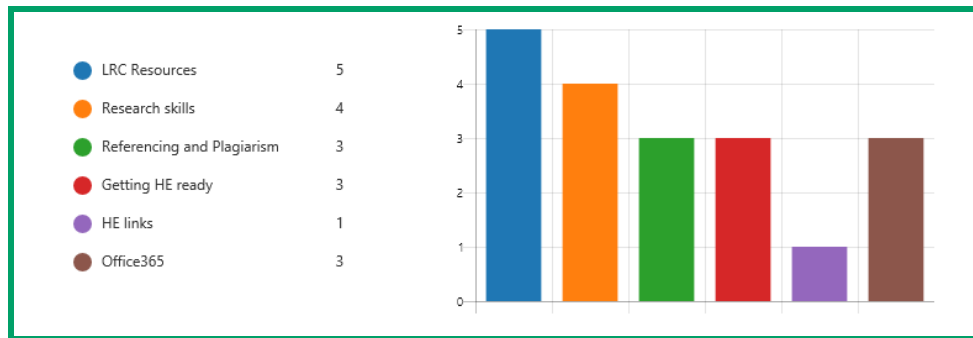

Figure 12a-1: Most useful sections of resource

Figure 12a-2: Most frequently used areas on the VLE

Tutors report a better understanding of the role of the LRC and how the LRC team can support their students. The development of the 'Supporting Curriculum' document has been included in the corporate induction for new members of staff and feedback is positive.

The development of the search strategies session was adapted successfully into a level 5 course. The tutor and the LRC subject librarian worked collaboratively to ensure students understood the level and commitment of study required. Assignments are of a very high standard with a variety of academic sources, including accurate use of APA referencing. The tutor reported this level of collaboration was key to students' achievement.

Learning from this project

There have been three key things learnt from this project.

1. The use of formal methods of written communication needs to be reviewed. Many formal written channels of communication are available within college, including the LRC staff sending email updates to curriculum teams. We discovered that the tutors are aware of the emails but acknowledge there is limited time to read and consider the implication of the resources shared in these emails. Written communications can also lead to misunderstandings, e.g. the replacement of face to face inductions with online inductions. Finding out about this issue led to a string of actions: the development of the 'Supporting Curriculum' document – sharing this with new staff on induction days – circulating to current staff – available on the VLE – delivering to CAM/HOD level to reaffirm/communicate what services are delivered. This project highlights the need for consistent messages across different platforms to avoid misinterpretations. Through informal conversations, planned or unplanned, team members have acted upon the feedback, leading to significant changes in practice.

2. Having a range of roles within the project team created opportunities for sharing practice across the team and college and facilitated many of the outcomes of this project.

3. The 'pick and mix' approach to the new VLE page has been well received by staff, students and managers as well as by the LRC team who manage it. There is acceptance this is an on-going job. The VLE page and the LRC support for tutors and students is fluid and ever changing and a large part of the LRC role is to manage and contribute to that change.

12b. Overcoming Barriers to Develop Presentation Skills

Craven College

Often undervalued, overlooked and seen as the 'easy bit' of a Functional Skills or GCSE English qualification, spoken language took centre stage in this project which focused around the development of presentation and communication skills of both adult and 16-18 year old learners.

Summary

Vocational and English GCSE tutors collaborated to establish a holistic approach to overcoming learners' barriers to spoken language assessments. Part time adult learners benefited from carefully structured scaffolding activities to prepare them for assessed Functional Skills presentations.

Rationale

Rather than requesting spoken language assessments from feeder schools, all GCSE students at Craven College complete their GCSE spoken language presentations in vocational sessions with the intention of supporting links between vocational and English teachers and to encourage a holistic approach to developing learners' English language, vocational and personal and employability skills. However, staff and students' lack of confidence has meant that previous GCSE spoken language assessments have often represented missed opportunities; side-lined, rushed and scripted.

Similarly, patterns of dipping attendance and increasing disengagement from adult GCSE and Functional Skills English courses during the spring terms when tutors have previously introduced assessed presentations has indicated significant barriers for adult learners, which then required addressing. In 2018/19, three out of a group of ten GCSE adult learners left the course during the period of spoken language assessment because of their lack of confidence and perceived lack of ability in this skill.

This project sought to identify some of the barriers to presentations, to experiment with different approaches and identify good practice in tackling this issue.

Two other factors behind the rationale for this project are the introduction of short 'talks' at Level 1 in the new Functional Skills standards and the Education Inspection Framework's (EIF) increased emphasis on developing learners' wider skills, confidence and behaviours, both of which also indicate a welcome recognition by policy-makers of the importance of spoken language development for young people and adults.

Approach

Three tutors were directly involved in this project to explore different approaches across two groups of learners. A GCSE English and vocational business tutor worked with a group of 10 students aged between 16 and 18 studying business management at Level 2, five of whom were studying GCSE English having achieved a grade 3 in their exams in school.

The English and Business tutors jointly planned a programme of intent for the first term which embedded opportunities to develop presentation skills, covering both the spoken language assessment and relevant Level 2 NCFE Business Unit criteria. Over an 8-week period, learners then carried out 4 mini presentations about themselves to their peers. Starting with 30 second presentations, the tutors gave specific feedback for improvement such as having less reliance on notes and improving eye contact.

Every other week, the learners repeated the presentation with the aim of demonstrating progress, having acted on their feedback. Learners were also required to speak for longer each time, building up to 3 minutes and to increase their use of visual resources and prompts from one picture to two and then a series of slides or prompt cards or images. A simple tracker, shared with students, captured learners' progress (Figure 12b-1).

Following this cycle of targeted feedback and improvement, tutors and learners jointly planned their next steps in which learners began to prepare for their GCSE presentations, spending time doing so during their vocational sessions with support from both tutors. The learners acted on previous feedback to prepare 5-minute presentations in which they reviewed a book.

The Business tutor allowed time during vocational sessions for learners to read their novels and prepare presentations and then jointly filmed and assessed their final presentations during GCSE English lessons, celebrating this achievement collectively with learners. Both tutors used the presentation structures to support learners' writing skills, with the GCSE tutor linking book review presentations to the non-fiction writing task, using the presentation skills as a springboard for further skills development.

The project leader and Head of English and maths worked with a group of 9 Functional Skills English Level 2 adult learners in an evening class, the majority of whom intended to progress onto Access to HE to pursue new careers such as in midwifery and nursing. All these learners had a Grade D or below at GCSE and required Level 2 Functional Skills in order to progress.

Figure 12b-1: Presentation Tracker - Business Students

Figure 12b-2: Presentation Self-assessment

The approach taken with adult learners was to introduce presentation skills in the first week in September and to scaffold support to develop their skills incrementally ahead of the final level 2 presentations before Christmas. Learners discussed their previous experiences of presentations and completed a self-assessment (Figure 12b-2) after each presentation as an attempt to support them to identify areas to develop.

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

Assessment of presentation skills was ongoing and included the un-learning of bad habits such as over-reliance on notes and PowerPoints. This has also been adopted by other SSAs where spoken language assessments had previously often been conducted without meaningful practice, feedback and improvement. The tutor for Business Studies described feeling supported in developing the presentation skills of Business students and had developed an increased awareness of language techniques for presentations which, in turn, could help her to support students with GCSE English language more generally.

Introducing presentations early as an intrinsic part of diagnostic assessment and completing them by Christmas, students agreed, helped them to 'gel' as a group and to feel that they had invested in the course as well as completing the hardest part first.

Structuring lessons so that presentations were done in the first 20-25 minutes improved punctuality as students felt a sense of responsibility to be each other's audience members.

Conducting 1-1 conversations with all students before they start to prepare their presentations to help them to clarify their topic ensured that students do not prepare in their free time, only then to have their confidence affected if it is suggested that they alter their focus.

These 1-1s and planning of weekly assessments meant that presentations could then be incorporated into the programme of study and the topics used to develop reading and writing skills. This allows one student to be the resident 'expert' and to have roles such as chairing the discussion in preparation for writing.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

This project encouraged increased team working between Business and GCSE English tutors. The English tutor described improved attitudes towards English being a result of her being present in the learners' vocational sessions, showing them that their tutors work together and allowing them to feel invested in. The English tutor also felt that seeing the GCSE English students more regularly, and in their chosen vocational setting, allowed her to develop better relationships with them and an improved understanding of their strengths, abilities and personalities. In light of the benefits for staff and students of this collaborative approach, timetabling for the next academic year will aim to provide opportunities for staff to work together on a course-by-course basis, ideally with vocational tutors paired with an English tutor to support further collaboration and a holistic approach to developing presentation skills relevant to learners' starting points and aspirations.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

- Improved attendance and punctuality for part time adults because of structuring lessons so that presentations were done in the first 20-25 minutes. Students felt a sense of duty to be each other's audience members and were genuinely interested in their peers' presentations.
- Improved retention for part time adults in Functional Skills to 100% after week 3 because learners felt they had invested in the course and come together as a group through their preparation and delivery of presentations.
- Improved attendance, behaviour and engagement with English for Business students. Behavioural issues linked with low levels of engagement with the equivalent cohort in English GSCE in 2018/19 led to the withdrawal of one student from the GSCE class and four further stage 1 disciplinaries. Attendance of Business students in GCSE English rose from 82% in 2018/19 to 88% in 2019/20.

- Improvement in overall length and standard of presentations for GCSE and Level 2 Functional Skills.
- For Business students, who completed book review presentations, there were improved attitudes to reading and evidence of reading outside of classes. The English tutor stated that these students were unique amongst her groups in that after a few weeks of reading in class and preparing reviews as presentations, they were fighting over the opportunity to read aloud in class and were more expressive than their peers in other groups, using pauses, emphasis and voicing dialogue effectively and confidently to engage the listener.
- Business students taking part in the project all achieved a grade 4 in their mock GCSE assessments.
- All Level 2 Functional Skills (new specification) adult learners achieved Level 2 writing on their first attempt.

Learning from this project

What went well:
- Starting talking about and preparing for presentations early on was beneficial, particularly for adult students, many of whom admitted to having left English courses early in the past when they found out about the presentation requirement.
- Giving students a clear topic on which to present. Business students responded well and this avoided their choosing topics which did not lend themselves to correct standard, length and structure.
- Encouraging Business students to repeat the same task, using an accessible topic, over the course of four sessions and responding to feedback each time to make specific improvements. Tracking improvements for students to reflect on and ensuring continued engagement by providing instant feedback and linking to vocational aspirations.
- Seeing the impact on reading skills and motivation to read as students were keen to present a book review to a high standard.
- Scaffolded activities, in particular short presentations in the first weeks and using templates for presentations and writing frames. Starting the

Functional Skills adult evening classes with presentations and, where possible, following the theme through the rest of the lesson.
- Teaching some basic PowerPoint skills to adult learners for whom technology was a barrier to giving presentations.
- Vocational and English tutors having time to plan together and support their shared students in each other's sessions which, aside from meeting the aims of this project, supported improved working relationships through informal peer support and observation.
- For adult learners, RARPA is already used for the first six weeks to assess their commitment to the course before they are enrolled for a qualification. Including presentation tasks in their first six weeks has been an excellent way of finding out whether students are serious about gaining the Level 2 qualification. Two students left the course in second week having struggled to present to the group for 1 minute on a familiar topic, indicating that this serves to also self-select students to some extent.

Even better if:
- Timetabling allowed for English and vocational staff to work together in this way throughout the year, planning jointly and supporting students to see links between subjects.
- Improving links between presentations and career / vocational development such as part time adult learners studying Functional Skills level 2 in order to progress onto the Access to HE course through using presentations as a means of applying to the HE course (e.g. presenting a personal statement or mock interview explaining career aspirations).
- Presentation skills formed part of the diagnostic assessment process for all vocational learners and all teaching staff supporting the student were aware of their key areas to develop, tracking this through a shared and student-centred ILP.

12c. Developing New Teaching Strategies for Improving English

Gateshead College
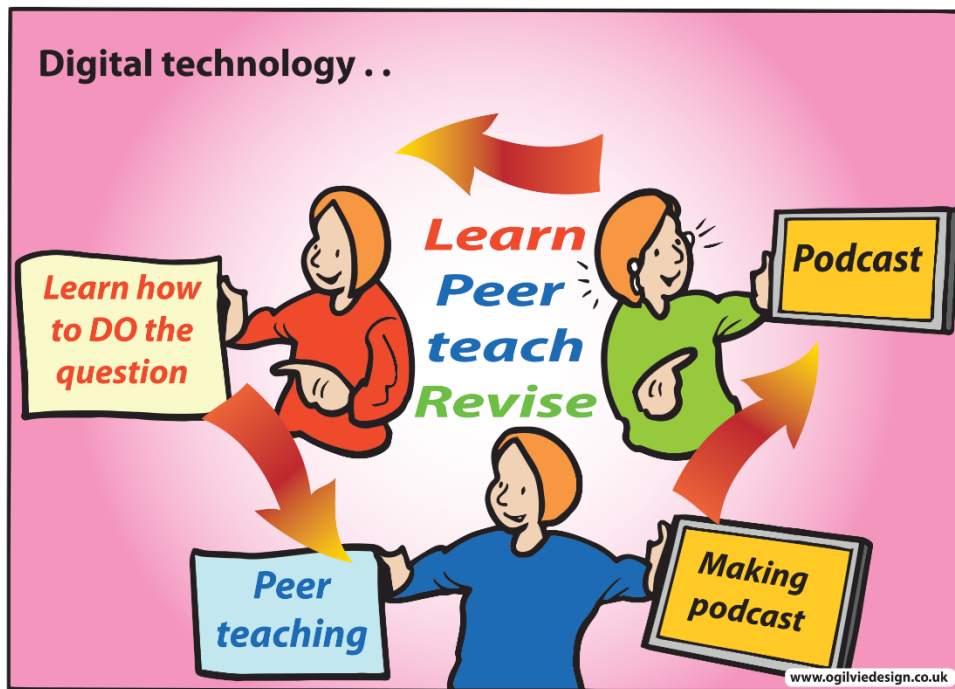
This project was designed to explore how teachers can better develop learners' English abilities through pedagogy of teaching practice. The focus was to use innovative digital technology as a means to reach disengaged learners to maximise participation in English.

Summary

To inspire and engage learners to improve their English skills and increase their confidence, learners were given podcasts to listen to, with the aim of developing skills, knowledge retention, critical thinking and metacognitive resilience. Learners were set assignments on GCSEpod or used these as a flipped learning approach, whilst others used the resource primarily for

revision prior to their final exam. Additionally, some learners created their own podcasts to either peer teach or as a revision tool.

Podcasts had a positive impact on a minority of learners, encouraging them to gain a more responsibility for their own learning, bringing the 'fun' factor back into lessons. The flipped learning approach increased learners' confidence, encouraging them to revise or feel more prepared for lessons, particularly when new topics or skills were introduced.

Rationale

The focus was on resit learners who have not achieved a high grade and, therefore, were generally less motivated to excel, and part-time adult learners who have returned to education later in life. A significant proportion of full-time learners are 'reluctant learners', as they have to repeat GCSE English, some several times, in order to achieve a grade 4 or above. Low self-esteem is a significant barrier for many learners as they fear failing again; 'believing it is safer to not try at all, than to risk embarrassment'.

Teachers do their utmost to be creative and use current and contemporary topics to engage learners in the development of skills required for GCSE; however outside of the classroom, learners tend to be reluctant to continue their studies. The modern learner engages in digital technology and podcasts were therefore used to bring this into the classroom, making best use of learners' mobile devices both in College and at home.

The content of 'GCSEpod' are varied and are specifically linked to the GCSE English assessment criteria. GCSEpod allows teachers to assign learners a personalised playlist, with follow up assessment tasks; a flexible approach to learning where learners can take control of their progression and identify areas of development, as well as enabling teachers to develop focused intervention. Each of the selected learners used as case studies utilised the podcasts in preparation for further study both inside and beyond the classroom.

Case Study 1: A flipped learning approach was adopted, asking the learner to access the GCSEPods and assessments before the lesson, in preparation for the introduction of a new topic or assessment objective, encouraging learning outside of the classroom. This study considers the longitudinal impact of GCSEPod, as the student accessed the materials last year and is re-taking the GCSE this academic year, as well as the benefits of podcasts on learners where English is not their first language.

Case Study 2: The approach for this case study was to use the Pods as a revision tool in preparation for the November exam, following a June 2019 result where they were 3 marks from achieving a Grade 4. Practitioners worked collaboratively to create assignments specified to each of the assessment objectives across both exam papers, which included a range of pods to watch, followed by a number of questions to assess understanding and learning.

Case Study 3: For this case study, the student was introduced to GCSEPod and was encouraged to explore the content independently, as well as assigned podcasts set by the teacher. The student was later introduced to a podcast created by a member of staff, looking at a whole exam paper, outlining the assessment criteria and how to approach each question, rather than a specific skill. The student was asked to compare the two pods.

The student considers the convenience of accessing the pods as a new form of learning, as well as reflecting on the content and how they reflect the skills needed to achieve a Grade 4 in the GCSE examination.

Case Study 4: The approach for Case Study 4 was for students to create their own contextualized pods, as a self-reflection, exploring how to answer the questions on AQA GCSE English Language Paper 1, using their own knowledge and a sample answer produced by themselves as a peer teaching and revision tool.

Figure 12c-1: Case Study approaches

Approach

Each teacher adopted a differing approach to using GCSEPods and podcasts within curriculum planning. Focused learning walks, observations of teaching, learning and assessment, data tracking for GCSEPod engagement, self-reflections, surveys, learner interviews and written feedback were obtained to measure the impact of the use of digital technology in engaging learners.

Some learners used GCSEpod as a flipped learning approach, where they were asked to access GCSEpod and complete assessments before their lessons, while other learners used GCSEpod as a revision tool in preparation for the November resit exam.

Some teachers also used GCSEpod as an introduction to the beginning of their lesson to engage learners, whilst some learners created their own video podcasts as a tool for self-reflection, revision and peer teaching.

Schemes of work were reviewed, allowing us to map the podcasts to the assessment criteria for GCSE. Regular meetings monitored progress and shared learners' responses. Any issues were quickly identified, allowing early intervention or changes in how we approached or delivered future lessons.

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

- Changes in staff practice have been evident through curriculum planning and, as a result, planning for learning has significantly increased and diversified the use of ICT.
- Podcasts have been specifically mapped to the assessment criteria for GCSE English. Teachers have therefore been encouraged to consider how to implement the use of podcasts into sessions and as a tool for setting homework, flipped learning or peer teaching to engage learners.
- GCSEpod was used as an effective revision tool to support learners resitting GCSE English, as learners were able to get instant feedback. Previously revision sessions were classroom based and feedback could be delayed.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

- Greater focus on designing a more digital curriculum for learners, encouraging flipped learning, where learners are encouraged to watch pre-selected podcasts and complete assignment tasks in preparation for the following week. As an organisation, we achieved a 'Star Podformer Status' for the most assignments set in September, out of 1,250 subscribers nationally to GCSEpod (Figure 12c-2).
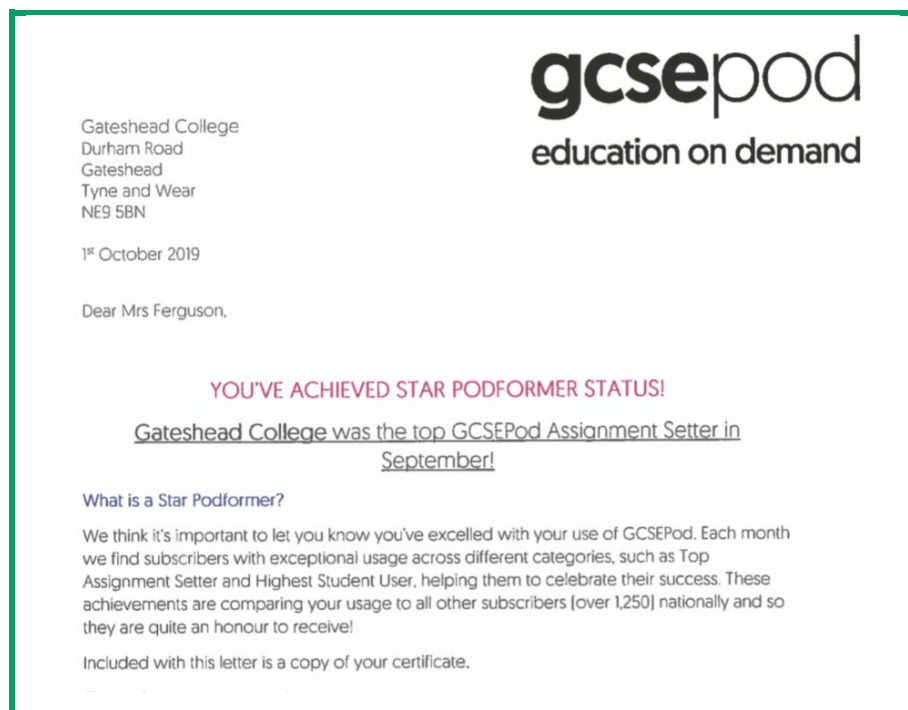

Figure 12c-2: Star Podformer Status

- The use of creating contextualised pods as a revision tool will be developed as CPD for staff across other vocational areas as a way of engaging more practical learners with background theory.
- We have built stronger relationships with other FE providers involved in the project and have been approached by organisations to offer CPD sessions on creating podcasts as a tool for teachers or created by learners in the classroom for peer teaching.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Homework assignments for flipped learning consist of either one or more videos, followed by a series of assessment question in the form of freestyle and multiple-choice responses, individually selected by the teacher; multiple-choice questions are marked automatically, allowing learners to self-assess instantly. Free written responses are marked by teachers and feedback given constructively, allowing teachers to mark and respond to learners' work more efficiently, as well as reflect, track and monitor learners' progress.

Learners who have used the tool as a flipped learning approach have found it beneficial in aiding their understanding when something new is being introduced or as means of consolidating any previous knowledge.

> *"GCSE pod gives you an idea of what the lesson is going to be about. This is good because it doesn't make me look like I'm lost in the class."*

Completion of homework online had increased initially, but as learners progressed through the academic year, the number of completed assignments online decreased.

Some teachers assigned fewer pods as the year progressed; pods were initially used as an effective introductory tool, but it was believed they did not develop the higher order thinking skills necessary to develop learners' confidence in enhancing their responses. Therefore, this impacted on the number of assignments created on GCSEpod.

For a minority of learners, engagement with GCSEpod, outside of the classroom, significantly improved performance; although not consistently across the case studies or active users. For many learners, their level of engagement with GCSEpod decreased, once they became familiar with the skills and assessment criteria required for GCSE English.

> *"Once I got an understanding…as an overview, I felt I didn't really learn much."*

Learners felt the pods were relatively basic and did not develop higher order thinking skills.

Case Study 3 preferred the tutor's own podcast, as he could engage with the tutor which felt more relatable and '*adult-like*' in comparison to GCSEpod, which he felt was too monotone and '*boring*'. Furthermore, he felt the tutor's podcast was much more in depth '*showing you how to analyse language*' and went beyond the basic level of GCSEpod. He felt the podcast was aimed at a particular set of learners, who were familiar with the tutor's teaching style.

Although the number of pods streamed and downloaded increased with learners using the GCSEPods to revise for the November exam, learners said they, '*preferred to be taught in a classroom because they were able to ask questions*', allowing teachers to elaborate and stretch and challenge.

Both case studies 2 and 4 used GCSEpod for 6 weeks leading up the exam, both successfully achieved a grade 4 in the GCSE English November resit. Case study 2 started at Entry Level 3 and continued to progress over a three-year period. The learner passed his exam on his third attempt. Case study 4, had a positive impact on his learning and improved his self-confidence, he was able to gain instant feedback and identify areas of development, allowing him to reflect on his answers without having to wait for tutor feedback. Overall, he felt his skills had developed as he is now able to identify more technical aspects of language to meet the assessment criteria required for GCSE English.

For a minority of learners, GCSEpod allowed learners a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning, allowing them to set individual targets in order to focus on their weakest areas or skills, becoming more autonomous.

However, for learners where podcasts made a positive impact on development and engagement, podcasts are not the only factor having a positive impact on learning; more research is needed to fully explore the impact.

Learning from this project

Learners have a digital platform they can use at any time, which works well for some learners, fitting around their working lives. GCSEpod appears to be aimed at lower level learners or is effective as an introductory tool for a particular skill or topic, which should then be developed in class. Although, learners tended to use GCSEpod as a tool for revision purposes, leading up to their end exam, this should be used alongside taught sessions, allowing teachers to proactively support and motivate learners to develop skills gaps.

The voice in GCSEpod uses Received Pronunciation which learners are not accustomed to and found difficult to engage with. In contrast to GCSEpod, learners engaged more with the teachers' podcasts because the voice was familiar, allowing learners to relate to the teacher. Furthermore, the content was more contextualised and vigorous and, therefore, more challenging; although, it was evident teachers used a specific learning style suited to learners and, therefore, a more generic approach or teaching style would be more suitable for a wider audience. Having said that, it was evident the teacher had built up a relationship with learners, enabling them to reflect on previous teaching which GCSEpod could not.

Observations of classes, where learners created their own video podcasts, proved to be highly successful in some sessions; although less keen to record and listen to their own voices. These sessions have proved to be a highly effective engagement tool, which positively impacted on teaching, learning and assessment.

Where learners have not enjoyed making their own podcasts, the 'have a go' reflective approach has meant teachers have re-evaluated the concept of learners creating their own podcasts and re-trying this teaching strategy, using an alternative technology for learners to record their own voices. This will be assessed over a longer period with different vocational areas to fully assess the impact.

12d. Digital approaches to rethinking the English classroom in a post-16 GCSE English resit context, informed by student action research

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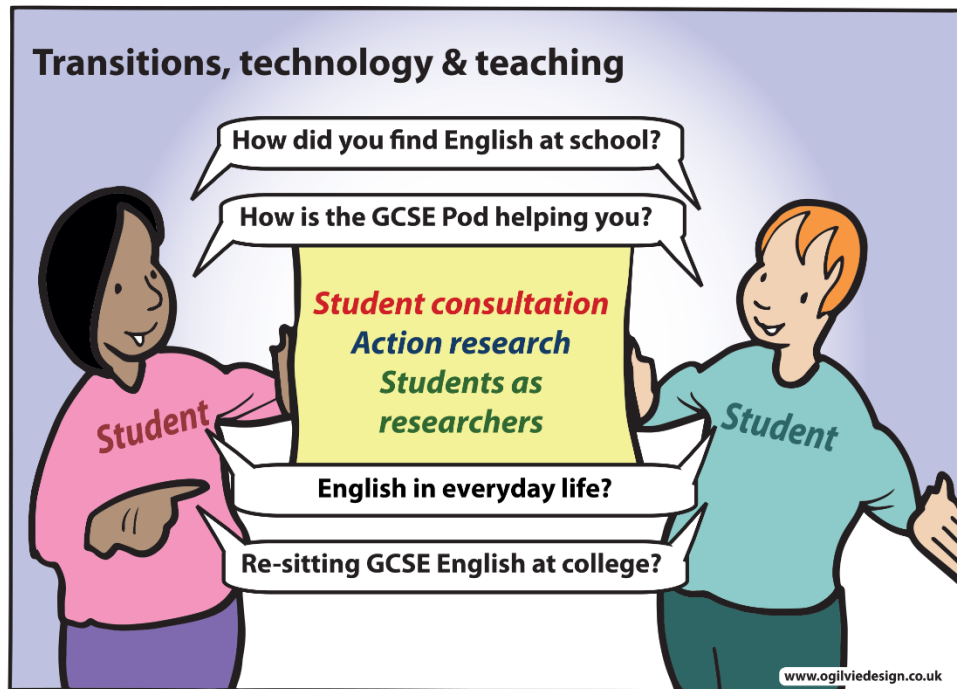
This project has involved funded developmental work on pedagogically 'rethinking' the English classroom for post-16 provision in the challenging context of addressing the needs of the GCSE English resit student cohort.

Summary

We wanted to develop a particular focus on the digital aspect in our newly-formed approach to English, specifically into the potential impact this focus might have had on student engagement. We took the opportunities offered by the new 'holistic' Education Inspection Framework to inform our thinking as we set out to explore how to address the demands of the GCSE curriculum in ways that provided a different approach from that of an everyday school experience. Part of our proposal included structural and content change: this involved a different timetabling strategy and also introducing the use of GCSEPod to our students. This project has also given us a rich opportunity to develop our student-consultation work through student action research.

Rationale

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

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

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

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

and resilience. We hoped to find a more successful, 'fresh', relevant-to-students approach to teaching, learning and assessment of English which would have a positive impact on achievement, attendance and student experience.

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

Approach

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

In the autumn term, three English resit classes, made up predominantly of construction students (our most challenging area, including motor vehicle, plumbing, carpentry and joinery, and bricklaying,) were identified as appropriate participants for the research project.

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

Student surveys were carried out at the start of the project with the three groups. The aim of the starter-survey was to explore students' prior learning experience of GCSE English, and their perspectives and attitudes in response to their English experience at school. It was also to gather information on

their views regarding the effectiveness of using technology as a 'teaching, learning and assessment' tool. The survey responses were used to inform the students we were now calling our *students-as-researchers* in their own discussions about GCSE English.

Figure 12d-1: Students as researchers

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

Figure 12d-2: Student researcher working group

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

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

We hope that these changes in pedagogical approaches to English teaching, learning and assessment will lead to a significant impact on learner experience and translate into a reduction of the gaps in current achievement, as shown in the current performance of our vulnerable students, and thereby improving the overall achievement rates of our students in terms of 'value added'. Strategies including end of survey responses, actual end of year

results combined with student responses in focus groups, and one-to-one meetings will provide us with some idea as to the extent of the impact of our project on students' learning.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

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

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

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

Learning from this project

This 'pilot' project demonstrates the need for a much longer stretch of time in which to conduct a lengthier study into how the resource may best be used. Our findings so far indicate that the Autumn term is a difficult term in which to begin a project of this kind in the context of an FE College. The reasons for this could include:

- Students spend some weeks settling into their classes/courses of study.
- Changes often take place as students switch around courses and/or classes.
- Teachers and students need time to settle in before the possible disruption of any further external pressures and/or processes.
- Induction is a major time-consuming activity during the first six weeks or so of the Autumn term.

- The GCSEPod didn't really get going until after Autumn half-term. Teachers needed training prior to its introduction, involving a good deal of time-consuming administration followed by initial teething problems, all needing to be resolved as students signed up to the course.
- Realistically the student action research group could not be fully established until after the student council had been formed; there were unforeseen staffing changes here which delayed the establishment of the new student council, from which student researchers were recruited.
- And then inspection hit, though we had been anticipating it. As a result, a good deal of time and energy were understandably taken up, a factor that interfered with a number of new initiatives such as this project, given that our capacity is quite stretched. However, the student action research group did become established at the end of the Autumn term, even though it did not really get going until the first week of the Spring term.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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