Tyne Metropolitan College
Using technology to support learning

This case study was produced by Tyne Metropolitan College as part of the ELS project with the aim of further promoting the use of technology across the lifelong learning sector. It has been supported by JISC TechDis, a leading advisory service on technologies for inclusion and accessibility.

Tyne Metropolitan College

Tyne Metropolitan College is a medium sized general further education college. It was established in March 2005 as the result of an amalgamation between Tynemouth Sixth Form College and North Tyneside College.

The college offers provision in all 15 sector subject areas. The majority of its learners are on government funded programmes. Its provision includes courses at foundation level through to higher education. In 2009/10 there were 1,357 learners aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses and the college enrolled 4,971 adult learners, most of whom were part-time.

Learning Support Department

Additional learning support is good. Learners with multiple and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good specialist support to enable them to access learning. (Ofsted 2011)

Learners on foundation courses achieve very well with success rates being above the national average.   Support needs are frequently reviewed and modified to help learners become more independent. Additional support for other learners is well planned. The role of support workers in class is clear and effectively used. (Ofsted 2011)

ELS Plan

The specialist support worked with the college team to agree the aims of the project, which were as follows:

- To assess the use of technology to enhance the delivery of the curriculum for young adults in a specialist and mainstream providers by supporting learning support staff to collect and collate evidence of achievements, wishes and aspirations of the learners. (learner voice)

- To trial the use of technology in a supported and systematic way with both support and time for reflection included in the programme.

- To expand a previous project for teaching staff in the use of technology, in order to give the learning support staff both the confidence and proficiency to enable them to record and report on the 'learner voice'. There will be an emphasis on reporting or storing of digital content as well as recording.

In order to facilitate this, the college purchased a number of flip cameras and a text wall. The aim was that staff should collect evidence and information using the flip cameras, and would be able to feedback instantly using a text message. The staff team began using the equipment in the Autumn term, but in order to support their skills and confidence in recognising and recording effective evidence or both learner progress and learner voice, it was recognised that they would benefit from additional training.

Introductory session

To support this, a half-day session took place with Lisa Featherstone from JISC TechDis in October 2012 aimed at introducing the concepts of both the Learner Voice and Reflective practice.

Evidencing Learner Voice

Ask the learners -

> What did they do?
> How did they do it?
> How did they feel?
> Will they do it the same again?

Using technology to capture the evidence of achievement by

> Camera
> Audio
> Textwall
> Twitter or Facebook?
> Email
> Shared space (moodle etc)

It is important to note that this may include negative events as well as positive ones. Although it is important to capture progress and achievement, learners can also gain from seeing video footage of themselves which is less positive, if sensitively introduced and effectively supported. For example, video footage of aspects of behaviour which challenge or disrupt, viewed after the event, in a calm and safe environment can provide a very enlightening experience. Having the opportunity to see and discuss what happened, explore why he or she reacted in that way, and consider how their behaviour affects others can help an individual to identify and acknowledge their role as well as providing a basis for identifying other more appropriate ways of responding. Similarly, staff who experience challenge from a learner and capture it on film can use the video evidence to support them in analysing triggers and considering how the responses from them and others around them contribute to the behaviour and outcomes for the learner. This can be invaluable in understanding the purpose of behaviour and developing effective management and support strategies.

Reflective Practice

This involves the support or teaching staff reflecting on the achievement of the learner and considering both the situation and the consequences of the event. As learners are all very different and many have spiky profiles, staff need the skills to both recognise and capture learning/behaviour which represents a significant achievement for each learner, as this will vary from individual to individual.

What?

What has the learner said, done or indicated in their own way. This could be an example of a learner vocalising in a particular way for the first time, or indicating they want to do something again.

It might include evidence of a learner showing the ability to wait for their own turn within a group situation or showing increased independence when in the residential setting.

Whatever the achievement, is it is a good idea to have a record of the time, date and the nature of the achievement. This can of course vary in format from a written report by the support staff, a video or photo of the learner taking part or an audio recording of either the learner, one of their peers or a member of staff describing the event.

Now what?

Having recorded the event - what is the significance of this?

Is it one of many similar achievements?

Is it a first or one off event?

What were the circumstances in which it occurred? Did these have an impact on the achievement?

Working together with the teaching and support staff to share the event - how is this to be stored for future reference?

So what?

It is important to record as well as you can the circumstances of the achievement as well as the event itself.

How significant is this? How will it be discussed and evaluated by the learner? Does the individual see it as significant? What measures will need to be put into place to encourage further achievement - or to prevent it happening again if it is a negative event?

Staff cohort

The group chosen to take part in the project were a set of 6 support workers who work with one particular group of complex learners. The course is delivered as discrete provision within the college. Each of the support workers are hourly paid and at least 2 of them are agency staff engaged on long term contracts.

The ELS funding enabled the Additional learning support manager to give the staff a half day for an introductory session to explain the concept of the project, explore how they might contribute and consider how they can involve the learners they are supporting.

Outcomes

The cohort of staff were familiar with the idea of using technology to record achievement, but this had previously only been done by the teaching staff. The support staff were provided with a set of flip cameras and an opportunity to become familiar with them. They had not previously had experience using the college Virtual Learning Environment and the project also gave them the opportunity, the motive and the means to do this.

The learning support staff quickly became engaged in using the flip cameras to record incidences and evidence of achievement. The cameras proved an effective tool for capturing the achievements of learners with profound and complex needs and as such enthused the staff who were keen to capture the small but significant steps of progress made by those they work with. The experience enhanced their confidence and skills in using technology more widely and the team began to post thoughts and comments onto the text wall.

The use of flip cameras has also had a very positive impact on learners' awareness of their learning and progression. Although learners had some awareness of their personal targets and goals prior to the project, the fact that the person supporting them throughout the college day is using the camera to record progress and continuously reminding them of both goals and achievements, has resulted in much greater involvement in and awareness of progress.