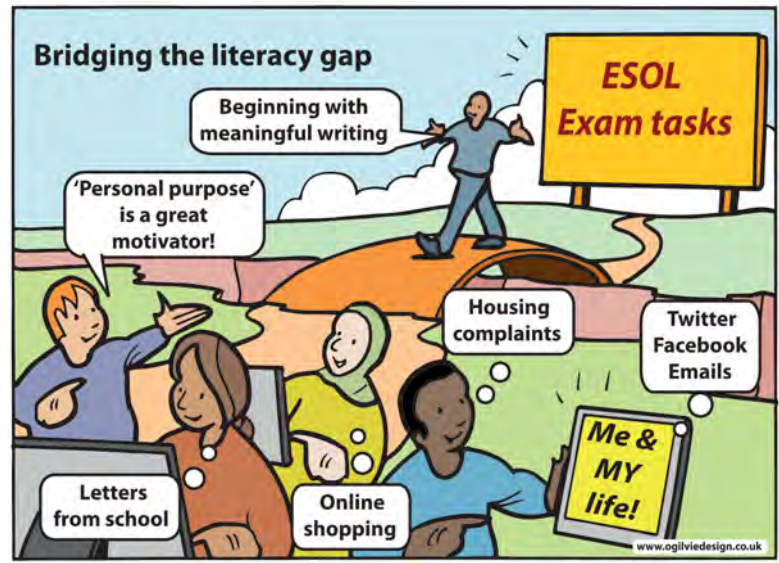
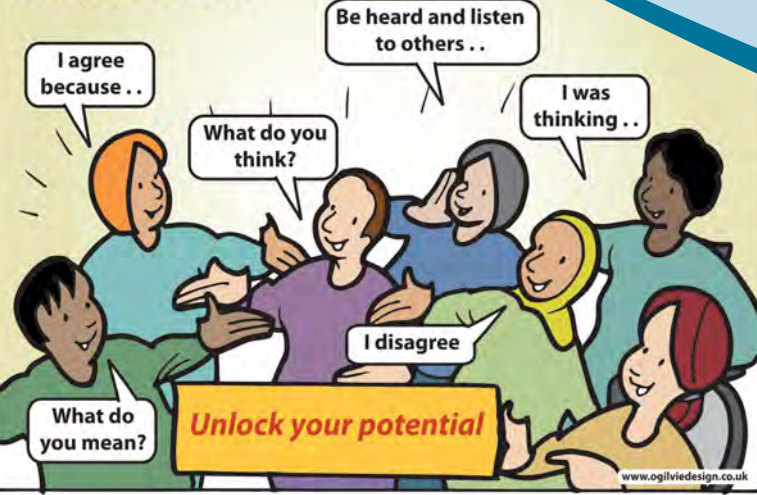


RaPAL

Practitioner Action Research Edition



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Journal

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacies Network

Welcome

Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL) is the only UK-wide organisation that focusses on the role of literacies in adult life. We promote effective and innovative practices in adult literacies teaching, learning and research; and support adult literacies practitioners and researchers. We enjoy engaging in debates that touch on English language and literacy, numeracy and digital skills across homes, communities and workplaces. Through our members, digital journals, conferences and fora, policy and advocacy work, we are active in Europe and have international links.

What we do

- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Publish a journal three times a year
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacies
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacies
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives

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The editorial group for 2019-2020 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Gwyneth Allatt, Angela Cahill, Claire Collins, Vicky Duckworth, Sarah Freeman, Tara Furlong, Toni Lambe, Sue Lownsbrough, Jonathan Mann, Juliet McCaffery, Mary-Rose Puttick, Anne Reardon-James, Yvonne Spare and Rachel Stubbley.

RaPAL members are involved in the compilation of the journal as editors, reviewers and referees.

We are a friendly group – open to new members and new ideas. Please contact us with any contributions (views, comments, reports and articles) and do not be put off if you are new to the field or if you have not written for a publication before. The journal is written by and for all learners, tutors/teachers and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacies work and to encourage debate.

Why not join us?

Further information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk

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Editorial

Claire Collins and Andy Convery

Claire started her career teaching English in Poland and Greece. The lure of ESOL practice drew her back to the UK in the late 1990s and she honed her craft teaching adult ESOL and literacy, then supporting learners' and, latterly, other teachers' English development in all its various forms, including Key then Functional Skills, GCSEs, and English embedded in vocational and technical areas. Claire now heads up national professional development and action research programmes, as well as projects in the creative and media industries, and initiatives focussing on adult literacy and digital literacy learning.

Andy enjoyed 26 years teaching 16-18 year-olds at Redcar College in the north-east of England. He began his career teaching English and gradually moved into teacher education. Andy is an editor of the Educational Action Research Journal and his own publications have attempted to share the challenges of conducting and reporting on teacher action research. Recently he has been working with Claire Collins Consultancy to support practitioner action research in Education and Training Foundation-funded projects.

In 2019, the Education and Training Foundation commissioned a partnership of organisations (ccConsultancy, That Reading Thing and The SfL Network) to run a national action research programme with teachers, support assistants, librarians, managers and other 'practitioners' working in a wide-range post-16 settings across England, including FE colleges, adult community learning, prison education, and work-based learning settings. The programme is named 'outstanding teaching, learning and assessment' (OTLA) and, in 2019 – 20, its focus was on English (literacy, language and ESOL). This special edition of the RaPAL Journal provides a space for some of the researchers who took part in this programme to share their 'knowledge claims', their understanding of what works, where and why in the places they work, with the learners they teach and support. In this editorial, two of the programme national leads will highlight some key themes arising from the action research projects which the writers describe and explain in this journal. For several writers, this was their first attempt at submitting their professional experience towards publication, and they were supported and mentored by a wider team including Professor Jean McNiff and Peter McDonnell from the national OTLA programme team.

The articles in this edition offer many diverse and hopeful stories of learning English in the post-16 sector. Tricia Millar, from That Reading Thing, begins by explaining the background to her work, using phonic approaches to support adults to become more confident and able readers and spellers. This led to her co-authoring the Post-16 Phonics Toolkit (ETF, 2016), which in turn led to her work on the OTLA programme,

mentoring action researchers and leading a group of mentors to support practitioners to try and improve their capacity to support their learners' literacy development. Tricia's article points to a common thread that OTLA researchers addressed when undertaking action research, that it is concerned with immediate practice development – 'What can I do to improve my practice?' and also more enduring professional development, in the case of the researchers she supported, to understand English spelling code, 'working from sound to print and back again'.

Natalie Chapman, from Redcar and Cleveland College, explains her own phonics professional development journey, through her action research to support 16-19-year-old construction learners' literacy development. Natalie kept trying new approaches, iteratively building on what worked with her learners, enabling them to become involved in her own learning at the same time. Natalie describes 'showing her vulnerability' and the fact that she, like them, was improving her practice. Natalie's action research led to wider applications of the approaches she had developed across the college and she moved on to work with learners in a maths setting, who were also lacking in confidence at word level, this time with regards to key maths terms. Natalie was driven by her wish to help learners tap into wider language resources having witnessed many 'learners fail a maths exam which they were capable of passing because the language used was too great a barrier for them to overcome'. Her article provides images showing learners' improving ability to spell and Natalie notes that, for one learner, 'this one small step to success changed their whole attitude to learning going forward'.

Sue Lownsbrough picks up the theme of professional development by describing a small study she undertook while working on the OTLA programme, to try and understand action research as a form of professional, as well as practice development. Sue was providing a range of CPD for participating teachers, and she reflects upon her own experience of taking part in CPD sessions when she was working in a college to ask 'which approaches ensure more effective professional development for English teachers?' In Verity Greaves' article, she also positions English teachers as learners, and describes what happened when she supported managers and tutors to engage in action research as a form of professional and practice development. Verity reflects on the frustrations one can feel when occupying a more distanced quality manager's role and uses this to transfer power into her tutors' hands so that they take responsibility for trialling approaches led by their learners' preferences and priorities. For many 'time poor' sessional teachers, this in-class action research proved successful in so far as it led them to trial and then embrace new practices, giving them justified confidence in their improved professional judgement.

GCSE English resits are a significant concern in England's post-16 eco-system, and this topic is explored in articles by Elizabeth Draper, Charlotte Bowling and Emma Ireland. Elizabeth explains how she wanted to explore ways to improve her organisation's post-16 English curriculum for vocational students and how she involved learners in her college research team, positing that they might be best placed to speak to their peers about English and to explore and help articulate their predominantly negative attitudes

to English learning at college. Learners who took part in the research activities not only illuminated key issues and helped to identify changes to improve their peers' experiences but also demonstrated the educational, and social benefits of active involvement in college research communities seeking to make organisational change.

Charlotte explains why she and her colleagues wished to trial approaches to change learners' negative mindsets about their English abilities and critically evaluates approaches that 'can seem out of place with the different types of learners which teachers encounter within the post-16 sector'. In response to this, Charlotte's project team developed a framework for mindset activities, working with learners and teachers to adapt strategies that might accommodate different teachers' preferred styles with discrete groups of learners. Charlottes notes a significant outcome of the work was that some learners 'were using English skills to critically explore mindsets. Through this application, the real nature of language and the power of the word in social, economic and political contexts entered the classroom'.

Emma, working alongside Charlotte on the mindset project, explores what happens when teachers develop 'mind-set for learning' practices in resit GCSE English Language classes. She focusses on the development of learners' sense of self-worth, belief and regulation in learning and how this in turn influences teachers' perceptions of young people's attitudes towards the learning of English. She explains that open and ongoing discourses between teachers and learners relating to resilience in learning 'fosters transformative relationships in the classroom' and importantly, this can change teachers' perceptions of their learners – and their resulting practice – for the better. Emma explains how some teachers had not previously been aware of their power to reinforce students' negative perceptions about learning English. This new focus on mindset approaches has shone a light on this practice for some colleagues, so they could address their own misconceptions about lack of engagement to better support their learners. Emma found that focussing on indicators of improved motivation and other 'mindset' factors 'sharpened' teachers' abilities to provide 'constructive feedback on soft skills, which create conditions for independent, self-motivated, and directed learning'.

Dom Thompson writes from the perspective on a College manager who is not an English specialist but is keen to stimulate learners' wider development through promoting reading. He engaged two different subject teachers from performing Arts and Business Studies to participate in his literacy action research. The Business students enjoyed visits from a local author but were generally reluctant to read a short book that he had produced, seeing the text as abstract and separate to their study concerns, which could be addressed elsewhere. In contrast, the Performing Arts students were liberated through reading the text of Anna Karenina and testified to how it had opened doors to their appreciation of the central character's development, and compared the book favourably to the film of the book which now seemed to offer a superficial portrayal. Dom concludes that engaging staff members and, importantly, learners in this action research had been a small yet significant step in promoting a change in college culture.

At Suffolk New College, Louisa Hubbard introduced visualisers into classrooms to improve learners' understanding of language analysis. Visualisers beam small or large screen images of documents and are intended to help teachers to model the annotations of text, so that learners can better appreciate the practice and techniques of textual analysis. She describes how this created a CPD opportunity that staff greatly appreciated; she notes how the resulting collaboration 'ensured that a wide range of professionals' experiences nourished the project', and it is these shared moments in the development of a professional community that are integral to both our pride and our well-being as English and literacy evangelists. Interestingly, she notes that students do not always reap the intended benefits from staff use of the visualiser, so this provides a subsequent opportunity for further nourishing reflective development with her colleagues.

Finally, Cathy Clarkson also welcomes technology as she explores how she adapted a social media application (Yammer) to provide in-lesson discussion (synchronous chat) for ESOL trainee-teachers who are required to participate in mutually observing their peers' practices. Her research highlights the importance of stimulating reflection by improving ESOL trainee teachers' 'noticings' whilst they are observing. She also compares the benefits of 'while-' and 'post-observation' discussions, so that she can guide and stimulate trainee teachers' awareness of their own and other teachers' decision-making both during and after a session. This article is a major contribution to ongoing debates in this journal about how language teaching can best be taught. Common themes have emerged across the 'Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment' programme, such as the fundamental challenges of low motivation and disengagement in learners who have experienced repeated cycles of failure in English, and the positive outcomes when these same learners experience success in their efforts. The learners' emotional recoveries frequently become reflected in literacy teachers' dispositions, as their engaging in project work helps remove frustrating blockages and empowers, energises and uplifts teachers who delight in learners' success.

These action research projects have engaged both teachers and learners, and a significant moment in learners' literacy achievement repeatedly occurs in these accounts when teachers invite the learners to engage in the research and to help share and shoulder the responsibility for improving their literacy practices. Often, the success of the projects is evident in the complementary voices of both teachers and learners, and it is in these conversations that literacy as a social and educational practice is realised. Time and again in these accounts from practice, we discover both teachers and learners showing curiosity in embracing the challenges, and pride in sensing their newfound potential. We are sure there is much that you will enjoy reading and now invite you to delve deeper into the journal articles that follow.

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Education and Training Foundation (2019) Post-16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit. London: Education and Training Foundation. Available at: <http://bit.ly/Post16Phonics>

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Note from the Journal Coordinator

Yvonne Spare

Yvonne can be contacted on journal@rapal.org.uk

Welcome to Volume 101 of the RaPAL Journal and our last one of 2020, in which we return to a look at some of the action research being carried out by a group of practitioners taking part in a programme of teaching, learning and assessment.

Our plans for the coming year include:

- Volume 102 (Spring 2021) **Survey100 Project Report**

Submission of first drafts by end January 2021.

Editing team: Gwyneth Allatt g.allatt@hud.ac.uk; Toni Lambe toni.elambe@gmail.com;

Jo Dixon sojoto1770@gmail.com.

- Volume 103 (Summer 2021) **Conference edition: 'Adult basic skills: building back better'** from L&W English, Maths, ESOL annual conference

Submission of first drafts by end March 2021

Editing team to be decided. Enquiries to journal@rapal.org.uk

- Volume 104 (Winter 2021) **Open edition** – suggestions welcome

Editing team to be decided. Enquiries to journal@rapal.org.uk

We are inviting submissions for articles for these forthcoming editions for 2021. We would particularly welcome longer academic articles suitable for peer-review and would ask you to contact us earlier than the deadlines above to allow discussion of your proposal. Any comments about this or other editions or ideas for future content can be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk. Don't worry if your ideas for an article do not fit one of our themes – there is space in all our Journals for items of interest to our readers. Don't forget that most Journal editions contain articles by new writers, including adult literacies learners. There are guidelines on our website on the [Write for Us](#) page and we offer as much support as you feel you need. We are also interested in hearing what you think about your Journal. There is a feedback section on the website so that you can comment on anything you have read in this or previous editions. Follow the link to our comments space at the bottom of the page, which needs the password that has been circulated with this edition. We look forward to hearing from you.

We hope you enjoy this edition of your RaPAL Journal.

We would like to reiterate that the articles we publish are not necessarily representative of the views or position of the membership body, and we do not advocate any given course of action in any given context. We do, of course, support freedom of speech and of academic liberty, and the pragmatic achievement of objectives as a negotiated consensus.

People, places, methodologies – an adventure in phonics for the post-16 sector

Tricia Millar

Tricia trains teachers, vocational tutors, support staff and community educators in shame-free and engaging phonics approaches to reading and spelling which get teen and adult learners 'unstuck'. She is the creator of That Reading Thing, an age-appropriate literacy programme and That Spelling Thing, a collaborative tool for classroom & vocational teachers. She is one of the lead authors of the ETF's Post-16 Phonics toolkit, a team member on the Citizen Literacy project creating an app and resources for beginning adult readers and a consultant on cross-curricular literacy strategies for SEMH schools.

My journey to using phonics with older learners began in the 90s when, through local youth work, I met young people whose poor reading prevented them from getting a decent GCSE. When I went to the local high school to volunteer my services as a Canadian trained English teacher, they asked me to work with D students who might be able to get a C and register on the published league tables. When I asked about those students who were unlikely to get a C but could still improve their reading, the school clearly did not have a plan in mind, so I started my search for an age-appropriate reading methodology. I discovered the work of Professor Diane McGuinness (McGuinness, 1998) and although I knew nothing about phonics, her ideas made sense to my linguistics trained brain and I started using a programme based on her approach in a small secondary school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It was linear, logical and easy to deliver but we quickly discovered the limitations of 'A fat cat did run up a hill' and 'Camp Man had a tent' with teenage boys.

Thus emerged 'That Reading Thing', (so named by the young men who were using it), a linguistic phonics programme which maintains the underlying idea that there is a logic to the English code working from sound to print and back again but rather than a child-oriented progression of lessons, it builds on what most older strugglers already know and do and incorporates that into incrementally more complex activities. It is structured, sequential and time-limited but placed within a shame-free, facilitated discovery framework so the programme itself mitigates the anger and embarrassment young people feel about not being able to do things their peers seem to find easy. The ethos, which is as important as the methodology, is summed up in 'The Deal' which is explicitly stated as, 'You never have to know anything we haven't learned together.' In his evaluation of That Reading Thing (TRT), Greg Brooks noted,

The key factors in TRT enabling many of these young people to make such good progress are (I surmise) the fact that all tuition is one-to-one and not like school, the use of an approach which makes immediate sense to the students and enables them to detect their own steps of progress, however small, and the programme's distinctive feature dubbed 'The Deal'.

What does this look like in practice? Most teenagers already know basic alphabet sounds and can blend and segment so we start with simple whole meaningful words with the advice to spend no more than five to ten minutes on them unless you need to slow down to accommodate a student's special educational needs. If a young person can read and spell CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words like 'sap', 'dub' and 'quip' or even just 'sit', 'bet' and 'tan' then there are hundreds of words within their grasp and you can move on to longer words using the same CVC structure. The only way to make this basic code and simple structure anything like age-appropriate is to work on building, spelling and reading longer words in the first session. In That Reading Thing (TRT) that means words like "upset", 'rapid' and 'fantastic' then moving quickly on.

The practice sentences and texts, even in the first levels, include high frequency words but, because of The Deal, those words are given freely if the student does not automatically know them. Because most teenagers have many years of school behind them, even if attendance has been patchy, they retain knowledge of letters, sounds and whole words. As they come to trust their tutor and stop fearing embarrassment, they seem to 'remember' and be able to read beyond what we would expect at a given level. This latent knowledge is the main reason TRT discourages the use of decodable readers and instead asks tutors to do paired reading of authentic text, where the student is expected to decode some things but not others. It means that learners can read anything they want with the standard approach being that the tutor will read as much as the student does. That might be a sentence, paragraph or page and they can get through whole novels in this manner.

The first sentence in TRT is 'What did Cal tell that big man at the pub? He was mad!' I read that sentence for the first time with a streetwise and funny 16-year-old from Birkenhead and (even though I had written it) immediately apologised because I was worried he would think it was babyish. His reaction was, 'NAH! That's the first sentence I ever read.' I knew then that it was fine to simplify text in order to make learners feel safe and get them to the next step. What was not fine was making them work at this level for any longer than they needed, aiming to have them reading practice sentences like, 'The instructions were simple but the desk was difficult to assemble' within a handful of lessons, a feat possible only with a carefully scaffolded approach which prevents unnecessary over teaching and expectation of perfection before moving on. For instance, the learner who struggles to hear all the sounds in consonant clusters like 'pl' or 'pr' doesn't have to keep working on words like 'plan' and 'print' until they stop making errors. They can keep moving and still practice those clusters in words like 'problem', 'prescription' and 'accomplishment'.

The structure and sequence of the lessons are obvious to the tutor but not to the learner as the activities vary and something new is added in each level. We also try to make sure they experience working with words they thought were too hard for them. We quickly add sh/ch/th to the basic alphabet sounds so they can be spelling 'establishment' and 'astonishment' in the second or third hour. Further new graphemes are added and then the most common spellings of endings like <le>, <ing>, <er> and finally, <tion>. The quickest students, those who have just missed learning to

read, can get from 'fax' to 'conditioning' in about five 1-hour lessons whilst someone with dyslexia will work slower and might get there in eight or ten 1-hour lessons. The 'Levels' in TRT have no normed reading age or awarding body equivalent so two learners can be at Level 24 (all the ways to read <ough>) one having got there in ten hours and who is now reading a novel and the other having got there in twice the time and still working slowly through short texts from the local newspaper. That is the 'student-centred' element of TRT. It is meant to take a learner 10, 20 or 30 steps beyond their starting point as a springboard into 'the rest of literacy', not a replacement for English classes.

All of the above is to say that after almost two decades, my involvement with Post-16 Phonics, from being invited to join the teams developing the Education and Training Foundation's Post-16 Phonics Toolkit and accompanying training to being the phonics mentor for a funded OTLA (Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment) English programme, has been part of a long journey of helping older and often discouraged learners discover the sounds and symbols of English and use them to read and write. That description is wordy but written with care. I still find it difficult to view the term phonics as anything but problematic in educational circles because people tend to have their own idea of what it signifies, regardless of what it actually entails. Phonics may be considered childish or 'drill and kill' or patronising. It might be considered ineffective because of the mistaken belief that English is not a phonetic language or it may even be considered political. Author Philip Pullman recently tweeted,

Why is it that if you know someone's position on climate change, you also know their views about Brexit, teaching with phonics, ending the lockdown, and (in all probability) capital punishment?

It would have been bad enough as an isolated controversial statement, but it was 'liked' almost 36,000 times.

The decision to participate in an overt phonics project took some thought but has been the most fascinating, albeit steep, learning curve of my years in education. If you read Section 3 of the Post-16 Phonics toolkit, you will notice many similarities to That Reading Thing but tempered by experts in post-16 literacy. One key difference is a lack of 'programme'; instead it offers ideas for sequence and activities from the most basic CVC words through to complex vocational spelling but also acknowledges that most teachers will want to use phonics in short bursts and incidentally when the need arises. We had hoped that Post-16 Phonics would be adaptable for as wide a variety of tutors, learners and settings as possible and the most recent OTLA English project has allowed this envisioned adaptability to be tested. This paper will explore some of the people, places and uses of phonics I have encountered since joining the Post-16 Phonics team and how they have met, stretched and confounded my expectations about who would and would not be open to using phonics post-16 and what this unstructured phonics looks like in practice.

People and Places

As a newcomer with little understanding of the demands on today's Further Education sector, my only expectation was that a wide variety of teachers would be working in classes or groups with diverse learners. During the toolkit writing process I learned that, in many colleges, experienced and formally trained English tutors now concentrate exclusively on teaching GCSE, and tutors, including vocational instructors with no specific literacy training, are now teaching Functional Skills. However, the toolkit was aimed at teachers who, regardless of experience, would approach the subject confidently and were interested in creating their own resources using the concepts outlined in the document.

The tutors we met through training and the four OTLA phonics projects represented every part of the sector. They included the non-specialist tutors mentioned above and experienced English teachers but there are also other staff members who deserve a mention.

Learning Support Assistants

During the pilot phase of Post-16 Phonics training, we were fortunate to work with learning support assistants who grasped the methods and had time to work one-to-one with learners. Unfortunately, by the time that college was participating in the OTLA project, their LSAs were being timetabled in a way that prevented them from offering consistent support in the phonics strategies learners had been using in class.

Vocational Instructors

As an outsider stepping into post-16 education, I was surprised to find that vocational instructors are often viewed as a barrier to improving learners' academic outcomes. Coming from a youth work perspective and having created a literacy programme for youth workers to deliver, I was shocked that the professionals who are most likely to have good relationships with reluctant learners were not being widely trained and equipped to function in literacy support roles.

Volunteers and frontline staff

Training and supporting volunteers have been a large part of my literacy experience. Greg Brooks' evaluation of That Reading Thing found that learners gained 3.5 months of reading age for every month of tuition, all of which was delivered one-to-one by youth workers and community volunteers. Volunteers are not a 'cheap option' for delivering literacy because they need high quality training and support to be effective. However, a good volunteer is priceless and the Haringey Adult Learning Service project was fortunate to have such a volunteer take a very active role in their research. As well as training and supporting volunteers, HALS trained frontline admin staff in strategies so they could informally assess and assist learners whilst filling in forms.

Learners have been equally diverse

Even though the toolkit was created to address changes in Functional Skills, practitioners coming to trainings have challenged us to think about how phonics can meet the needs of all post-16 learners from those working towards pre-Entry ESOL with and without SEND/LDD through GCSE resits up to higher level vocational courses with complex vocabulary and writing demands.

Of course, the most important thing about older learners, regardless of the level they are working towards, is the life experience they bring with them to any learning situation and post-16 phonics needs to work with that prior knowledge and not against it. The prison workshops and college vocational courses included adults who were learning to spell vocabulary that was familiar as they were using it on their courses. In other settings, particularly a foundation maths class, younger learners were trying to spell unfamiliar vocabulary that related to concepts they were just learning. Others were older learners who considered themselves stuck in their progress and embarrassed by the difficulties they had had for many years. 'S' had joined the Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) Spelling Club.

S was initially quite quiet in the course but her confidence built from session to session as she saw her own progress. This was quite different to her experience of other courses where she had felt 'out of place' and like leaving the study as she was 'not fast at learning like others.' S was present for every session and even reported that she had to rearrange her shift work in order to attend the club. (Haringey Adult Learning Services Appendix 2)

Engaging participants on the OTLA projects

During the phonics pilot, training tended to start with theory and move to practical application and even experienced teachers were honest about how difficult that was. Using terms like 'phoneme' and 'grapheme' (sounds and how they are represented in print) and discussing concepts out of the context of practice was frustrating for many and, anecdotally, caused them to doubt their ability to use phonics. The first 'fun quiz' I left for a group was crushing and I began to learn that I was fluently speaking a language that others were only hearing for the first time. This experience shaped ideas about what training and support to offer OTLA phonics projects given that many of the participants would not be experienced English teachers.

A recent phonics current practice questionnaire, (Moss et al, 2018), had indicated that most teachers taught word-level decoding skills but there was a significant gap between confidence in teaching the strategies, 'sounding out' (69%) versus teaching 'sound symbol relationships' (44%). A That Reading Thing mantra is 'sound it out is not enough' meaning that learners have heard that phrase for years and have little to no understanding of what it means. Instead, for reading an unfamiliar word, we ask learners to say the sounds and identify what word they hear. For spelling, they say syllables out loud then, syllable by syllable, write the sounds they hear, engaging visual

memory to get the correct grapheme for the sound in that word. They use a 'spelling voice' to clear up unstressed vowels and we notice meaningful parts (morphemes) when they are helpful for supporting memory and expanding vocabulary. For more support we start with word puzzles (one grapheme on each piece) which increase the safety of spelling by making errors almost impossible and help pinpoint exactly which part of a word a learner might be struggling to remember. See figure 1 for an illustration of how we can look at 'psychology' and 'physiology', two words that vocational tutors from several fields said learners struggled to differentiate.

physiology

5 syllables in a 'spelling voice'

9 graphemes - 1 per sticky note

Key morpheme - 'phys' physical, physics, physio, physique etc



psychology

4 syllables in a 'spelling voice'

8 graphemes - 1 per sticky note

Key morpheme - 'psych' psychic, psychologist, psychotic etc

Extra discussion: the morpheme 'logy' - physio/logy psycho/logy, astro/logy etc.

Discuss preferences for spelling voice syllables (above) or morphemic syllables.

Figure 1

All of these strategies are included in some form in the toolkit but spread out over several chapters so I underpinned them for the projects with a 'strengths-based' spelling workshop from That Spelling Thing, the sister to TRT. It is practical rather than theoretical and requires no internet or special resources, important in prison trainings. Most projects used either or both of the sticky notes and dry erase boards recommended in the toolkit but even they were optional. Spelling with older learners is perceived as less taboo than reading for working in groups and improvement is also quite easy to perceive for both tutors and learners.

Reluctant teachers of spelling

Not every teacher who participated in the OTLA projects was initially enthusiastic, as they were co-opted into the project rather than part of the initial vision. This was especially true of vocational tutors who were experts in their own fields but not at ease with the idea of teaching spelling. Prison workshop instructors have the added complication of negotiating an environment with dangerous equipment, so it was

crucial to deliver a phonics approach that was always shame-free and didn't conjure up previous negative experiences of education.

At one prison training, it was obvious that instructors were not enthralled with having to spend two hours learning about spelling. What got them on side was learning that I, just like the prisoners in their workshop, could not spell 'diaphragm' either. The ability to teach spelling did not hinge on the instructors' spelling abilities. Instead, it hinged on understanding the idea that words have syllables and sounds and we only have to remember the bits that trip us up. For me, it was the <gm> spelling of the /m/ at the end of 'diaphragm'. Diaphragm was not the only word I needed to ask someone to look up in the dictionary which was a perfect example of what we mean when we say that everyone is somewhere on the same literacy continuum.

For extra support for the instructors, I broke all the vocational words into syllables and graphemes; however, when their final project report came back, I was surprised to see that the instructors had success with their learners by leaning heavily on syllables rather than sounds and graphemes. As mentioned above, these learners were adults learning a trade and were familiar with the vocabulary they were learning to spell. The horticulture instructor used plant identification cards she had made previously and added the plant names broken into syllables. She noted her surprise when a learner said it helped him remember how to spell the <the> syllable in chry/san/the/mum when she had needed to pay extra attention to the <chry> spelling. A learner in a construction workshop created a syllable matching activity to work on spelling the names of tools like the one in Figure 2. If I were creating this resource for word study I would 'nudge syllables to isolate meaningful parts' (Millar, 2018) in 'bolst/er' and 'cutt/er'. However, learners are always free to split syllables in a way that will most help them remember how to spell the words. This resource is a helpful example of the toolkit's advice to 'start with the learner's voice'. It would be interesting to spend more time getting feedback from learners and instructors about why that syllable approach was preferable. Was it just that it was sufficient or perhaps that it was more grown-up or less difficult for instructors to deliver? Would they use the grapheme approach with more training?

trow		sel
chi		er
ten		el
roll		er
point		on
sand		ster
bol		ter
cut		er

Entry Level learners in a college

Tutors at the Education Training Collective in Redcar had been part of Post-16 Phonics from the beginning participating in the pilot training. They therefore had more time than other projects to develop their understanding of phonics skills and concepts, but for some it was the short hands-on spelling workshop that helped cement the idea of 'phonemes versus graphemes' and why they are useful. At a dissemination event towards the end of the project, several tutors remarked on how they no longer had dictionaries in their English classes. They explained that learners used to ask how to

spell a word and be told to look it up in the dictionary. They would copy the word and then the next week they would go through it all again. Since starting with 'saying the word out loud, listening for syllables and writing the sounds', they had stopped using dictionaries for the purpose of copying answers and had begun to take responsibility for learning how to spell the words focussing on what each individual needed to work on remembering. It is worth noting that I hope there are still dictionaries in the classrooms so that both teachers and learners can check on the correct spelling after attempting it independently. So much of Post-16 phonics is about altering the timing of current strategies.

That learner independence caused one teacher to remark on how she stopped viewing them as lazy and started seeing them as able to learn. For a future practitioner-led research project it would be interesting to know if that attitude change was widespread amongst the staff and the extent to which learners began to see themselves in a different educational light.

Adult Community Learning

Haringey Adult Learning Services (HALS, 2020)) wanted to see how Post-16 Phonics would work with learners who had chosen to attend an extra-curricular spelling club. The teacher and volunteer who ran the club came to the project late and with little phonics training. The very experienced English teacher confessed that she was not entirely comfortable with using phonics as a strategy with adults but both she and the volunteer offered their full commitment and got to know the toolkit and, quite late in the day, I managed to offer them a short training session.

In their Entry 1-2 group they noticed learners had trouble hearing the short /u/ sound as in 'cup' so created a story with a lot of example words to assess who was hearing them and who was not. They also did a rhyming activity with words like thunder/blunder and rumble/mumble for some vocabulary building and included a look at doubling rules in a traditional way by changing run to running, push to pushing etc. I might describe those activities as balanced literacy combining traditional English teaching and phonics approaches. The most phonics-oriented activity they did was some word stretching as per the toolkit. This is where I might have stuck to my ideas about sequence and suggested they use only Basic Code sounds but the students benefitted by their not asking me! They started by spelling 'fun' then gradually spelling bigger and bigger words so that, by the end of the hour, learners were spelling 'misunderstanding'.

fun

under

thunder

understand

understanding

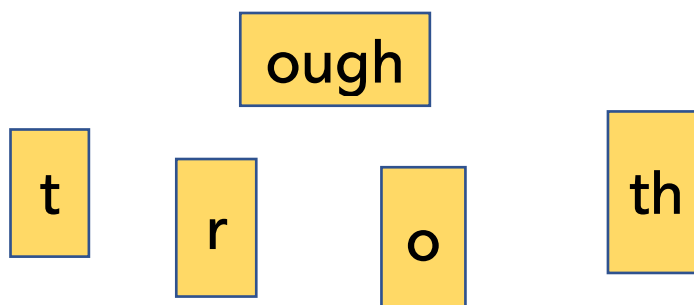
misunderstanding

This scaffolded phonics approach was accessible even for a learner who had been assessed with Pre-Entry Level writing. It was noted that learners moved from simple to complex with 'more ease and less anxiety' and their report notes the power in an approach that 'recognised and valued learners' prior knowledge such as the learner having a 'database of sounds'.

Activities versus theory

The 'fun to misunderstanding' activity has been shared many times including at OTLA writing and dissemination events. The enthusiasm for these short and useful activities shows a desire for practical versus theoretical when it comes to phonics and it would be interesting to further explore how a little can be achieved by teaching key activities rather than key concepts. Another widely cascaded lesson is a puzzle approach to <ough> based on an activity from That Spelling Thing but happily shared with the Post-16 Phonics community.

Have each learner make five puzzle pieces:



Explain that <ough> can spell several different sounds so we decide what word it is based on the other sounds in the word. One at a time, build: 'though', 'thought', 'through', 'thorough'. Then add a puzzle piece and build 'bought', 'brought', 'borough'. Add <ou> and <gh> and build 'rough' and 'tough'.

Every time they build a new word they write it on a dry erase board. When you have a good list, elicit more possibilities. If they have no ideas, add words like 'enough', 'fought', 'cough' etc and have them spell those. The aim is fluency when reading and confidence when spelling rather than guessing or trying to visually recall word shapes or strings of letter names.

This kind of starter activity, along with the incidental puzzles like psychology/physiology (above) are simple to plan and require few resources. This one in particular has been cascaded in staff meetings and even a managers' meeting. We encourage this approach to make sense of the spelling lists in the new Functional Skills tests.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have been surprised and encouraged by the openness towards phonics post-16. I expected class size to be a barrier but participants on the ground reorganised sessions to make sure individuals got the support they needed in smaller groups. I expected formally trained FE teachers to reject the idea outright but they managed to combine phonics with their existing approaches and see how it helped learners get unstuck. I expected vocational instructors could be brilliant at teaching spelling but they and their colleagues needed some initial encouragement. The same can be said for learning support assistants. I hope the OTLA reports (ccConsultancy,2020) show the whole sector what a brilliant job they both do.

Phonics might always be contentious. It has been described recently by two Australian academics as ‘neoliberal ableism’ (Duke, 2020). On the opposite side, some will always call for fidelity to a prescribed delivery as laid out in some commercial programmes. However, we have learned through OTLA that Post-16 Phonics, as we had hoped, can prove effective when it is used to enhance current practice rather than replace it. The results have illustrated how much phonics is not a magic wand to be waved over the sector but an effective strategy that can be woven into what teachers have always done: creating lessons and resources for the needs of the learners in front of them.

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Post-16 phonics to support learners in maths

Natalie Chapman

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Background

I teach English and Maths at a college. Because of the literacy challenges we faced, our Functional Skills teaching team were keen to participate in a Post-16 Phonics pilot which explored how we might adapt strategies and resources recommended in the ETF's 'Post-16 Phonics Toolkit' (ETF, 2019) in the classroom. We investigated teaching reading, writing and word level skills at Entry level. The Toolkit had been specifically designed for the post-16 sector, introducing approaches to phonics teaching and suggesting how we might assess learners' needs, and testing resources designed for 16-18 and adult learners. The toolkit emphasises how the approach to Post-16 phonics differs from the popular perceptions of drilling associated with primary school phonics and guides practitioners on how to support learners from their very different starting points. The key messages from the post-16 phonics toolkit include:

- Capitalise on learners' prior knowledge; every learner who enters the classroom will have different experiences of literacy, unlike primary school children who are just beginning their literacy journey
- Be flexible and don't teach phonics as an end in itself; phonics should be embedded naturally into a literacy session and specialists should primarily focus on exploiting those missed opportunities
- Don't teach sounds, draw on the sounds in the oral language which learners bring to the class. (This was particularly important when working with learners with a broad North East accent; post-16 learners already have the bank of sounds in their speech regardless of their pronunciation and accent.)
- Do use age appropriate texts and choose reading materials that interest post-16 learners; breaking the stereotype that phonics is a 'babyish' topic is key to getting learners engaged and on board.

The three parts of the toolkit introduced some of the terms used in phonics to describe key aspects of spoken and written language, described what phonics looks like in the post-16 classroom and suggested how to put post-16 phonics approaches into practice in your setting, adjusting the pace and sequence for your learners.

I was part of a team whose job it was to test the toolkit in everyday practice. The toolkit is presented as a highly informative and detailed self-help guide, offering much that is needed to get started using phonics. From the outside, much of the terminology is initially difficult to interpret: we needed to come to terms with the difference between a 'digraph' (two letters representing one sound, e.g. pie), 'split digraph' (a digraph that is split by a consonant, e.g. bite), and 'trigraph' (three letters representing one sound, e.g. light). In practice, I found the simplest way to digest the toolkit was to pick an activity, get creative and give it a go. I often found myself adapting the resources to better suit my learners and I would contextualise the materials, so they were more relevant to a specific vocational area.

My pilot class was a group of 16-19-year-old Entry level Functional English construction learners, who were often disengaged, had negative previous educational experiences and worryingly low reading and writing levels. To begin with I felt quite concerned and out of my depth; how was I going to get young adults to engage in a topic they associated with primary school? I doubted my own ability and questioned whether I could ever teach using phonics.

The pilot year was a journey of professional reflection. I needed to be completely transparent with the learners. I told them I was no expert and I would make mistakes just like they would. I created a list of 'graphemes' (how sounds are represented in writing) and carried it around with me to every session; I would have been lost without it. I had to refer to this list every session to identify what were one, two (digraph), three (trigraph) letter graphemes and how many phonemes (sounds) made up one word. As a specialist, demonstrating you are unsure of something in the middle of a session and having to refer to notes can be uncomfortable, but it is important you embrace this part of the process. If anything, it makes you relate to your learners' insecurities, and also helps learners see that reading and spelling remain challenging for everyone, in differing degrees. Learners were more willing to risk spellings on their erasable mini whiteboards and these became their new writing books. Post-it notes replaced dictionaries, which had always been of extremely limited value to these learners, and they were removed from the classroom. It was important to recognise that one activity did not suit all so using a varied approach helped further progression. Small steps were celebrated in the classroom; improving one key spelling was a success.

In the first session the learners openly told me they had never been able to spell and didn't want to start trying now; it was evident that this immediate defence was to mask their vulnerability. I sensed that bombarding them with phonics tasks would be damaging and small taster activities would work better for this specific group. I began using phonics as a starter activity and focusing on one key sound or spelling in each session, and for some, this enabled them to grasp a spelling and significantly improved their confidence. I would often start with a word stretching activity; I would write 8-10 single letter graphemes on the whiteboard and ask them to make as many words as possible with the letters in a set time. It was an activity that everyone could get involved in; even the least confident could identify a few spellings correctly. Once the initial anxiety had faded, you could see that the learners started to enjoy it and would

even compete with one another to see who could make up the most correctly spelt words.

This activity was then stretched further once I had identified learner levels. The more confident spellers would be given more complex graphemes (combination of letters) on post-it notes and would work independently or in pairs to create key spellings and recognise how many phonemes (sounds) made up a specific word. The post-it notes worked exceptionally well; learners would say the sound on each post-it note and then they would blend the different sounds together until they created an accurate spelling. I found that it was important to put digraphs (double letters that represent a single sound) on one post-it note, (for example, ch, sh, th, ll, ss), that way the learners very early on can identify how two, three or even four letters can represent one grapheme. Once specific root words were created with the post-it notes I would then stretch it further by adding prefixes or suffixes onto a single post-it note. For example, if the learners had grasped what phonemes made up the word 'comfort', they could then use prefixes and suffixes to then make the words comfortable, uncomfortable, discomfort, comforting, comfortably and so on, creating complex words that they could never imagine being able to spell.

One of the most challenging parts of phonics was actually persuading the construction students to say the words out loud in front of one another. They were easily embarrassed and that barrier would reappear. Fortunately, I had a committed Learning Support Assistant who would work one-to-one with specific learners who did not like to perform in front of the rest of the group. She would encourage them to practise sounding out the words every session with lots of positive reinforcement. I believe having the right support in class is one of the key ingredients to the successful delivery of phonics in post-16 education. At the start of the academic year the class was timetabled for one 90-minute session and consisted of 14 construction learners and one Learning Support Assistant. I soon found out that managing a large low-level group with a range of abilities and behaviours as well as trying to teach phonics effectively was proven to be difficult and progress was frustratingly slow. Fourteen was too large a group to provide the level of individual support that was needed. I made the decision to split this group into two groups of seven, for two 60-minute sessions and by doing this the dynamics of the group completely changed, learners became more willing to engage. Having a smaller group really enabled me to get to know where each individual learner needed to start with phonics and that one-to-one approach really helped to nurture their insecurities and maximise learning. I learned that to make phonics work successfully in a post-16 classroom, learners must feel comfortable in their learning environment and only then will the active learning take place.

As the pilot year drew to an end there was a noticeable change in learners' attitude to writing and willingness to just 'give it a go'. Attendance had significantly improved, and all learners successfully achieved a full Entry 2 or Entry 3 English qualification. For some this was the first qualification they had ever achieved in English. The pilot really helped to develop my confidence in time for the revised Functional Skills qualification. I was

not an expert at phonics and still felt I had a lot to learn but I now had confidence in the basic knowledge needed to help me to continue with this journey.

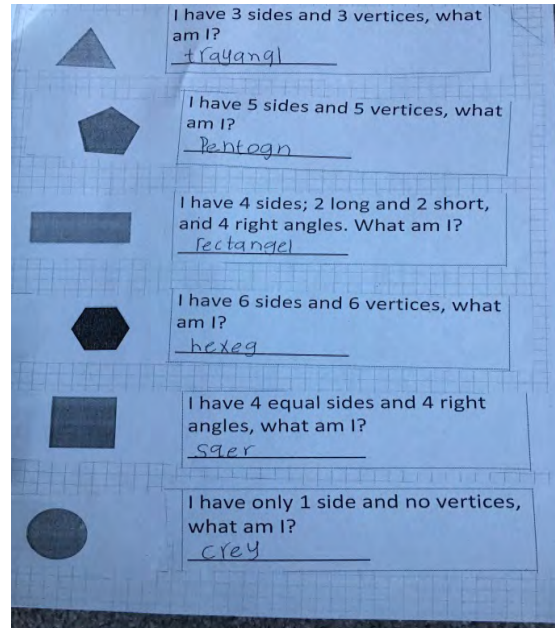
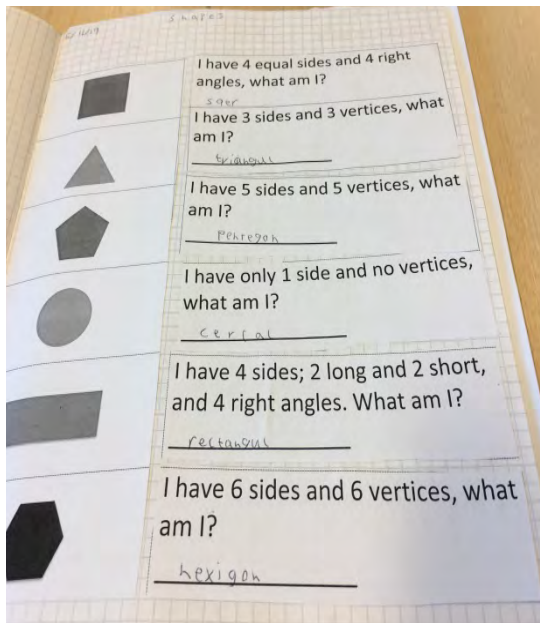
Introducing Phonics into Maths Teaching

Our Post-16 Phonics project became extended for an additional year when we received funding from the Education and Training Foundation's 'Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment' programme. This meant that we could continue to draw support from our phonics mentor, Tricia Millar. I was keen to continue but wanted to explore a different focus this time. As a dual teacher of English and maths I have often tried to interlink the two subjects more closely. I have witnessed learners fail a maths exam which they were capable of passing because the language used was too great a barrier for them to overcome. Embedding phonics in maths was the next challenge I wanted to explore on this journey. I was hoping the developments I had made with the construction learners could be transferred into a maths class setting. This raised questions about embedding phonics in maths. There was no additional time for this on the curriculum. It is a maths lesson, not an English lesson and English teachers don't teach fractions in their class. I wanted to prove that investing time in improving English practices in a maths lesson would be worthwhile for both learner and teacher.

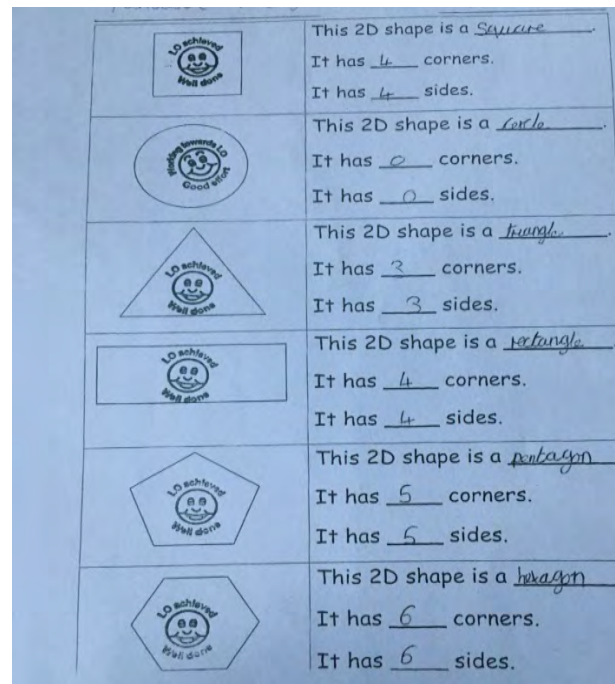
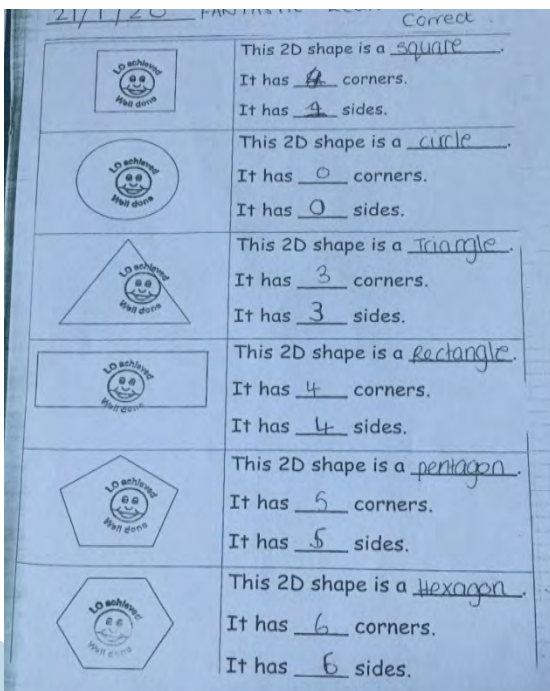
I began by identifying common failings in learners' Entry level maths papers; for example, when a learner was asked to name a shape, often they would spell it incorrectly or leave the answer blank due to not having the confidence to attempt the spelling. I found this very frustrating! When I asked the learner why they did not identify the shape was a hexagon, their response was because they did not know how to spell it. In theory, the learner knew the mathematics applied to the question, but lacked the English skills necessary to be able to answer the question correctly. Even more frustrating, the learner could have gained the mark, even if the word was spelt incorrectly but was recognisable. Again, this goes back to low self-esteem; the learner could have attempted to spell the word incorrectly but was embarrassed, so never attempted it at all.

The group I was collaborating with this time round was a foundation learning entry level Functional maths group. The group consisted of a range of different abilities. The majority were high needs and spelling was certainly a barrier that contributed to a lack of progress in maths. The learners focused on spelling six common 2D shapes, as this was a spelling target they all shared. The activities were spread out over 8 weeks and would usually be delivered as a short starter activity each session. Learners worked on a range of activities including sounding out syllables, reading out terminology and definition cards, matching card activities, using whiteboards and grapheme tiles to spell out key words, keeping a spelling glossary and using a spelling washing line in the classroom. All learners completed pre- and post-tests which demonstrated the improvements they had all made. One learner, who got all six incorrect at the beginning, was now confidently spelling all six correctly – what an achievement!

Spellings before using phonics in the maths classroom:



Spellings after using phonics in the maths classroom:



I found that starting with a spelling checker worksheet at the start of the project really helped me to identify what spelling gaps each individual learner had. Some had basic knowledge, the syllables they identified in most words correct and some phonemes correct (cercal, rectangul, hexigon) whereas some had complete sounds or syllables missing (sqer, crey, hexeg) the words were not recognisable.

The next activity I focused on was syllables. It was important to check learners' knowledge of syllables and not change their preferred method of exploring syllables.

Some learners would clap their hands, some would tap their finger or foot, and some found putting the hand under the chin and feeling the movement of their chin when speaking out the sound worked better for them. I created a resource that had the six shapes on it with two headings. They had to speak out loud what the shape was and then write in one heading how many syllables they thought the word had. The next heading asked them to correctly spell each of the syllables identified. The syllables activity really helped to make some quick corrections with their spellings. One learner who spelt the shape hexagon as 'hexeg' at the start of the project recognised the shape had three syllables and then sounded out the correct spelling of each of the three syllables (hex – a – gon). They wrote the three syllables on the whiteboard and then joined the three syllables together to create the correct spelling. This was a big achievement for this learner as they really lacked confidence with spellings; this one small step to success changed their whole attitude to learning going forward.

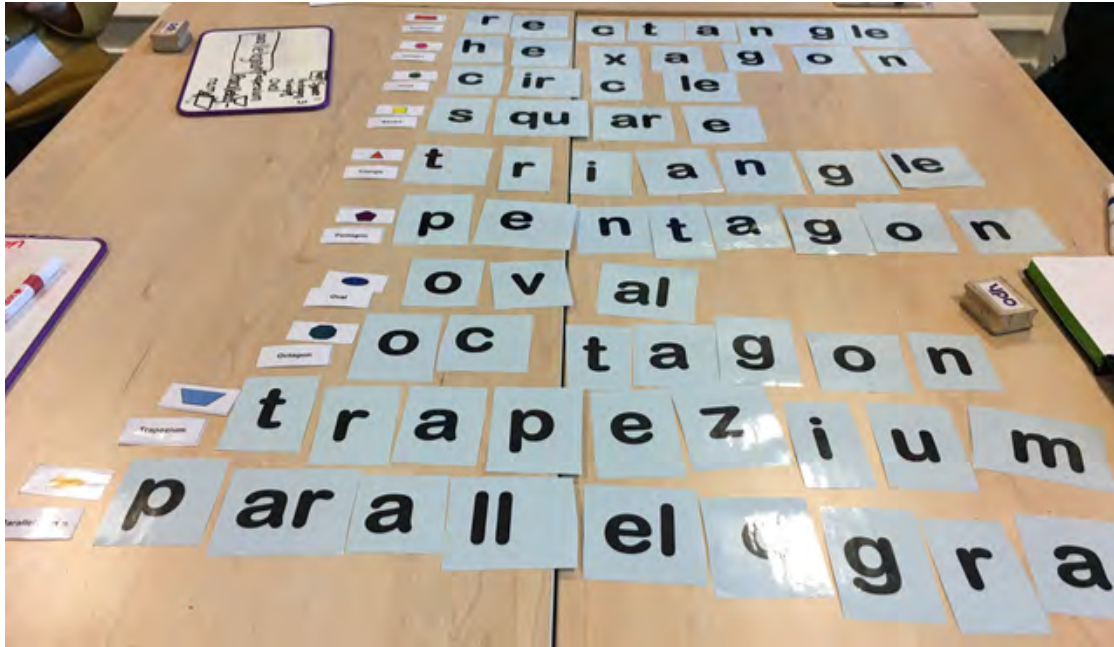
There were certain spellings that the syllables task did not improve. The word 'square' only has one syllable and, although the learners all recognised that, it did not break the word up to help them with the spelling. The word circle was also misspelt by the majority of the class. All could correctly identify that the word had two syllables, but the first syllable contained the 's' sound spelt with a <c> (sir – cle), which caused confusion. This then led to an in-depth discussion about certain rules in the English language and how the letter 'c' represents the 's' sound when it comes before the letters **e**, **i** or **y**, otherwise it represents the 'k' sound. We looked at some examples how to apply the rule (circumference, centimetre, Celsius, cylinder) and examples where the rule did not need to be applied (cuboid, calculator, coordinates, clockwise). By exposing and discussing these common misconceptions, learners had a better understanding of why some letters can represent different sounds.

The final activity completed with the class was introducing grapheme cards to represent the phonemes (sounds) of each shape. This was a match card activity and completed in small groups. Firstly, the learners had to practise their reading skills by matching the correct mathematical definition to the correct shape. The learners explored the language and made connections that the language used represented the dimensions of some the shapes (tri - three, penta - five, hex -six). From this, I began to appreciate how morphology can also contribute in post-16 phonics. Being able to identify the meaningful parts of words helped learners build their understandings of word formation leading to greater confidence in the spelling.

Following this, the learners had a range of grapheme cards and had to correctly pick the correct cards and put them in the right order to build the correct spelling. The match card activity encouraged all learners to participate and it gave them the freedom to move the cards around if they changed their mind. They would place the grapheme cards together and discuss whether or not the sounds were correct. If it didn't sound correct they would replace it with another sound. The learners worked together and correctly spelt all six 2D shapes without any help. A stretch activity was then handed out to see if learners could manage spelling new shapes with the grapheme cards. Now

that learners had the basic knowledge of phonics, some were confidently attempting to spell more challenging words without complaint (parallelogram, trapezium).

The completed grapheme card activity:



Probably the most satisfying result was witnessing how something so minor as correctly spelling six 2D shapes had noticeably empowered them as individuals. Their whole personas seemed to have changed in the classroom, their newfound confidence was infectious and it most definitely inspired me as a teacher to want to continue and further embed phonics into maths.

Perhaps the important thing I realised was the value of developing learners' spellings in mathematics rather than highlighting the spelling mistakes and asking them to make corrections using a dictionary. By analysing the letters and sounds and incorporating time in the session to discuss the mathematical terminology and language, learners made more rapid progress and achieved full Entry level qualifications in both English and maths. Not only could the learners spell the shapes correctly, they understood the properties of the shape, what the language of that shape represented and could identify the shape without hesitation. This is most definitely a concept I want to examine further, the synergy between phonics and mathematics and how it will increase mastery and progress.

Conclusion

Reflecting on both the English phonics pilot with the construction group and also the phonics project to support learners in maths with the foundation learners, it was interesting to discover that although both groups were very different, the outcomes had many similarities. Both groups of learners became more engaged and motivated. Having confidence to attempt spelling had a positive impact on their behaviours and attitudes and working with a smaller group improved participation and achievements in phonics.

There is a fundamental organisational challenge to post-16 teachers using phonics. Most literacy classes are still timetabled for full classes of learners. I needed to adapt and reorganise with the help of learning support assistants so that activities could be tailored to give adequate attention to individuals in groups.

I gradually adapted some personal phonics guidelines:

- Don't teach phonics as an end in itself; instead, make it relevant where possible to whatever else is being taught
- Do phonics in short bursts because spending a full session on just phonics can be quite intense and learners are more likely to disengage. Completing short 15-20-minute activities each session or embedding phonics naturally into another topic like shapes created more effective active learning
- Because post-16 phonics relies on pace with learners building on their successes to remain motivated, it was important not to apply the same sequence of phonics activities with every learner. All learners will enter the classroom with a different knowledge of phonics; don't waste valuable time getting learners to repeat something they can already do. Some learners may only know the phonetic alphabet and will need systematic support while others will only have few spelling errors, so assessing your learners' ability at the very start enables you to create the appropriate resources for each individual learner
- Don't think of phonics as exclusive. For example, to support the phonics, I encouraged the use of morphology in maths. When students examined the meaning of the word, it helped them to make greater progress. Once the actual word represented something to them (tri - three, penta - five, hex -six), it enhanced their memory in phonics and mathematical terms. This is a clear example of where the toolkit recommends the use of morphology to support memory. The clearly meaningful prefixes and suffixes can be applied to other words to increase vocabulary (Chapter 8.3)
- I also discovered that I needed to leave plenty of time for planning; phonics is so new to post-16 education that I struggled to find suitable age appropriate resources. We created a PADLET within our department and shared resources to help to reduce the workload. I found that adapting my own resources to suit each group or individual learner worked better. Not only did it capture the learners' interest, it helped me build a working understanding of phonics.

Finally, like my successful learners, I accepted that I must risk making mistakes. When I began the pilot, I felt inexperienced and some activities did not go to plan, but it was these moments that educated me the most. My experience suggests that phonics approaches can be adopted within different subject areas to enhance and enrich a learner's wider education, enabling them to become functionally literate in all walks of life.

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Exploring approaches to ensure more effective professional development for English teachers

Sue Lownsborough

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"Teachers are best placed to know about their subjects and their learners' needs within their local contexts and, as Thompson and William (2007) make clear, teacher professional development is the "fundamental lever for improving student learning"." (Scales, 2011)

However, do they need something more than professional development to enhance their practice and so benefit learners?

As part of a professional exchange for practitioner action research I was given support to undertake some research into effective approaches to professional development and so, prompted by my experiences and observations described below, I conducted a small-scale research project on how professional development can be supported to maximise a positive impact on participants' teaching practice and learner progress and achievement.

This research focuses on approaches which can create barriers and the things which enhance the effectiveness and impact of professional development for English tutors.

How do we maintain and channel the participant's energy and motivation, skills and new learning at the end of a course into sustained changes in practice benefiting tutors and learners?

Trainer support

I started my research by identifying the specific times and elements during the courses which had optimised my efforts to effect changes in my practice after the course:

- Copies of the PowerPoint slides for note taking as the training progressed
- Opportunities to reflect and record as in the Assessment for Learning model
- Action planning time
- Practising approaches to experience how they would work in practice and to consolidate
- Drafting a lesson plan using the approaches.

The last two features supported me as I had the idea(s) and the resource to hand to trial new approaches promptly.

The training sessions that I had attended, though engaging, motivating and containing excellent approaches and resources, but without sufficient time for reflection, practice or application, reduced the likelihood of me implementing what I had learned. I valued time which was created to reflect, revise and plan a trial once back at my desk. Post-course follow-up in my organisation was often limited to completion of a form rating the course and its impact. This was not motivational and little importance or value was attached to the exercise.

Having a mentor however did provide me with the impetus, motivation and support to create a space to recall, reflect and trial regardless of whether I had been given time on the course or not. One course stands as an excellent example which had a deep and long-lasting impact on my professional development. The resources were presented in a professional folder with the slides and added notes at relevant points and ample time throughout for reflection, note taking and action planning. These were communicated to the trainer and were followed up in meetings with my mentor who supported me to prioritise the actions, implement them and adjust, with plenty of time for thinking and reflection.

In other situations, meetings with my line manager to discuss the success or otherwise of the professional development created a supportive environment to improve my practice. I found follow-up support extremely beneficial whether it came from my organisation or a mentor from the training course and mentoring rather than a discussion significantly enhanced the impact of the professional development. This however also needed an input of time.

So, were my experiences representative of other practitioners and how did taking part in an OTLA practitioner action research project differ or was it the same?

I adopted two approaches to explore these questions:

- an empirical approach which was the most powerful
- a simple questionnaire that I shared with a small number of tutors and a manager

Empirical Approach - OTLA Project

Working on the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment Project (OTLA) as a mentor and as a strand lead, I was able to witness the struggles different project teams encountered trying to form and launch a manageable project taking account of the size of the action research, getting colleagues engaged and involved, and mapping out the steps to take. Many found this very challenging, partly because they had no experience of taking part in practitioner action research and were feeling slightly overwhelmed ('Is my practice and my research going to be of any value or interest to others?') and partly the amount of time it was taking to plan and start the project. There were teething troubles: for example, plans had to be significantly reduced in size and scope, team

members went off sick, colleagues in other departments needed much persuasion, resources had to be developed, progress tracked and evidenced and all this alongside the day-to-day activities of tutors in the post-16 sector: planning lessons, teaching, tracking and recording progress, chasing up missing learners, covering classes, attending meetings and so on. Tutors often felt overwhelmed. However, support from their peers on the project, their mentor and strand lead, professional development sessions and meeting with organisations from across the country taking part in the OTLA lifted and motivated them, giving them the momentum to persevere. Support from others was a critical factor in helping them to develop their resilience and complete the project successfully.

Case Studies

Features	Organisation 1	Organisation 2
Aims	To create and trial a vocationally relevant English assessment tool for those learners who have achieved GCSE grade 4 or FS level 2 to further develop their English in a contextualised manner	To encourage learners to be confident in planning and agreeing their own targets for learning.
Initial proposal	Written by senior manager	Written by programme co-ordinator with senior manager named
Induction meeting attendance	Senior manager, English programme manager and English tutor	2 English tutors
Attendance at monthly collaboration meetings	Senior manager and English tutor	Did not attend most monthly meetings. Operational duties prioritised by management.
Establishing the project	Established very quickly by the team	Tutors struggled to shape the initial proposal into a clear, manageable proposal.
Mentor visits	Visit by mentor showed good progress was being made. Suggestions for minor changes were welcomed. Met with senior manager and the tutor. Visited classrooms and spoke to learners	Visit by mentor helped the tutors to create clarity around aims and approach of the project. Meeting limited to talking to 2 tutors.
Attendance at training events	Tutors attended training events. Senior manager attended one event.	Did not attend training events

Achievement of project aims	All aims achieved and plans for building on. An example from one learner who explained how she now used the writing planning tool in other aspects of her course (planning how to develop some software) and in her life.	Project achieved some of its aims - for example tutors wanted learners in English classes to self-assess at the beginning of the course and monitor their own progress. They now have access to a mat which has prompts that they can refer to when writing in their diary at the end of a lesson. The self-assessment selection was not so successful as it was in maths. Several theories were offered as to why this might be so without a definitive answer.
Dissemination	Whole team presented at the final dissemination event and their report is in the final project report.	Tutors attended the dissemination event but did not present. Their report is in the final project report.

Approach 2 - Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised eight questions and a final section giving participants the opportunity to comment further if they wished. I distributed the questionnaire in paper form to 6 tutors and conducted an interview with a maths and English manager by telephone using the questionnaire as a framework for discussion. The tutors were all taking part in the OTLA project and the manager was the only one who I managed to speak to. The questions I asked can be seen below in the Appendix.

The responses were very similar to my experiences as described above with time, or lack of it, featuring in most answers and a request for post-course support also identified as an effective and welcome step in the professional development process. Some respondents suggested a follow-up call from the trainer, some wanted support from their line manager. The manager interviewed felt very strongly about the benefits she had experienced having a post-training mentor to support her, over a period of time, to implement the new practices. Practitioners also liked resources and approaches that featured small steps and that were easy to put in place, all of which were attributable to the time needed to implement changes to practice. One respondent commented that they found the opportunity to write a lesson plan incorporating the new resource especially helpful as was the chance to try the resources and approaches introduced.

The OTLA participants, by the nature of the professional development approach – practitioner action research – had different experiences but similar outcomes which

contributed to successful outcomes. Though the project included several training sessions the development was grounded in the practitioners' own professionalism, their experience and their ideas, supported by peers and colleagues with specific training sessions taking a relevant but supplementary place to their expertise and experience. The practitioner researchers' journey towards improvement in practice had an organic, multi-dimensional approach: experience, issue, idea, formulation of approach, possible training to supplement the idea at some point on the journey, trial, revise, trial, implement and disseminate, compared to the more linear journey of traditional training courses: development need, training, implementation (hopefully!) and dissemination.

However, although the routes differed the challenges and the environment optimising a successful outcome were very similar. The action research practitioners had to create time and space for thinking, creating a plan of action, persuading managers and peers to support and get involved, establishing and trialling the project, amending and implementing alongside project meetings, collaboration and dissemination events. This demand on time was significantly greater than a day's training, then time to plan the learning into a lesson and disseminate. However empirical evidence: the energy, the motivation and enthusiasm at the training events and at the dissemination events, were far greater than any I have seen following a training session and the feedback from participants supported this. The participants' presentations and successes created a vibrant, optimistic energy.

Similarly, support provided for the practitioner action researchers: peer meetings, collaboration and dissemination, support of a mentor, strand lead and their peers and manager(s) at their organisation all played an important role in the success of the individual projects. A strong support network contributed significantly to the resilience, motivation, enthusiasm and ultimate success of the practitioner action researcher and their project. However, as identified above, this needed an allocation of time.

Conclusion

In the hard-pressed post-16 sector time, especially in the current unprecedented pandemic, is always important. Practitioners assume many roles beyond what is generally perceived as a teacher's role outside the profession: administrator, data analyst, student counsellor, marketer for the organisation, external liaison advice and guidance to name some other duties; however, at the heart of what they do is teaching, learning and assessment and their aim is to help learners learn, progress and achieve. A continually shifting landscape from government policy, rapid changes in technology and now the Covid19 pandemic, means professional development needs to be a continual planned yet flexible process to support practitioners in their roles ensuring what they do for students is the best it can be.

For training to be effective this small research project has shown there are key elements necessary to maximise the impact of professional development on teaching, learning and assessment and ultimately on learner progress and achievement.

The results of this research examining two different approaches to practitioner professional development shows that these elements are critical to successful implementation of new practices. Time and support create the right environment in which a practitioner can develop not only their teaching and learning practices but also confidence in their ability to know what is right and what is needed for them:

Time – everyone involved from practitioner, manager, peer and mentor must create time. Time, or lack of it, has been used as a justifiable reason not to have implemented the changes or implied through lack of a support framework however with careful management and prioritisation time can and must be made:

- to plan and undertake training or practitioner action research
- to practise what has been learned or trial a proposal
- to integrate new learning into a practitioner's practice.

Support – this needs to be in place throughout to encourage practitioners and show their efforts are valued and worthwhile:

- The trainer building in opportunities for practice, application and reflection
- The manager providing a wrap support including prioritising time for all stages of the professional development process: preparation, engagement, collaboration, trialling, implementation and sharing
- Peers for collaboration and dissemination
- A mentor or coach, internal or external, to enhance the learning from training or research to embed new approaches and resources for the benefit of the learners. Mentors act as a critical friend supporting the tutor to greater autonomy and confident of their professional judgements and decisions.

“Teachers have a responsibility to undertake CPD but managers also have a responsibility to create an ethos which values and encourages professional development and trusts teachers to undertake it.” (Scales, 2011)

It is a practitioner's responsibility to develop their skills, and their motivation and commitment to do so results in outstanding examples of changes to their practice thereby improving learners' engagement and progress in English. Improved practice can be achieved without time and support, as demonstrated in one of the case studies, by the tutor's commitment. However, support must have a positive impact on a practitioner's experience and enthusiasm to continue going forward.

A study into professional development conducted by Professor Steve Higgins, Philippa Cordingley, Professor Toby Greany, Professor Robert Coe, *Developing Great Teaching* found that among other key factors effective professional development needed to take place over a period of time and though time was not seen as the most critical factor

time was needed to ensure the improvements were of high quality and so impacted on the learner experience:

“to be effective in producing profound, lasting change, professional development interventions had to be prolonged. **The most effective professional development lasted at least 2 terms – more usually a year (or longer).**” (The Teacher Development Trust, 2014)

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Appendix

Questions:

1. At the end of a CPD event how positive did you feel about its future impact on your practice?
2. If you were able to use the CPD approaches, how successful do you think they have been?
3. What were the most important changes that you wanted to make?
4. Have you been able to use the CPD experience in any way upon return to your organisation? Perhaps:
 - A. Immediately implement at least 1 action
 - B. Put to one side until you had time to plan how to implement?
 - C. Disseminate your team
5. If you delayed action are you likely to come back to it at a later date?
6. What could have been done better to support you to action what you had learned?

Possible ideas:

- A By the trainer
 - B By the Education and Training Foundation
 - C By your organisation
7. Why do you think that it is sometimes difficult to implement changes?
 - A. No time
 - B. No support
 - C. Other

8. If you were able to use the CPD approaches how successful do you think they have been? Can you give an example?

9. Any other comments you would like to make? For example: "Thinking more widely, can you remember any CPD events that did change your teaching? What was so special about those events?"

Enabling English tutors to become facilitators of learning: a quality manager's perspective

Verity Greaves

Verity has managed an ESOL curriculum for an adult education college and a community learning provision in the third sector. She is a qualified coach and experienced English language tutor and examiner. She is a quality manager for The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, adult community learning service.

Introduction

I work as Quality Manager for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) Adult Community Learning which currently subcontracts adult learning to twelve organisations. My role is to develop tutors' skills within the service and provide a supportive and collaborative space. Within the adult learning service, I run tutor Continuous Professional Development (CPD) meetings three times throughout the year to provide an opportunity for tutors to develop their skills through peer-to-peer working and to have an opportunity to reflect on their teaching. The providers also run their own in-house CPD for tutors. However, one challenge we face is that CPD attendance and engagement is variable as most tutors are casual and often work for more than one organisation.

My role as quality manager is at times remote from the classroom delivery which is carried out by the subcontracted organisations, so I had to depend on the managers to monitor tutor involvement and progress. I have experience of directly managing tutors in my previous work, which is different to having an additional layer of management through subcontractors. The relationship of the local authority is to be supportive and build capacity in subcontracting organisations. This is because of the funding arrangement; both are dependent on the other to deliver and community relationships take time to build.

In my observations of tutors across the service as well as external observation feedback, I became aware there was a need to encourage more active student-centred learning rather than the didactic approaches sometimes practised by specialist language teachers. In some classes, tutor talk and teaching from the front was a common feature and at times the pace of learning was slow and learners quite passive. 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). I wanted to use the opportunity of joining an Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) English project to give tutors further scope to develop a greater range of strategies and techniques to meet learners' individual needs. This would hopefully result in learners improving their confidence and independent study skills.

Practitioners from four of our subcontracted organisations – Kensington and Chelsea College (FE College now known as Morley College London), Clement James, Westway and Nova New Opportunities (third sector organisations) – agreed to conduct small-scale action research projects with learners within their own settings. I set the project aims to use action research to explore how the challenges highlighted above could be met:

- 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 teaching practices through peer-to-peer working and reflection
- To enable tutors to access and generate a range of strategies and active learning techniques to meet learners' individual needs, helping build confidence and independent learning skills.

In order to investigate active teaching methods, a team of seven tutors and four managers volunteered to work together to promote and develop strategies for individualised learning. The managers were in regular contact with the tutors and could enthuse and motivate tutors to become involved in the project. It was important to establish buy-in with the project although some of the managers were also busy teaching and often had a range of additional responsibilities which made attendance difficult. This was challenging at the start as the tutors and managers often work right across the borough and tutors did not want to take on more work if they could not see the benefit, did not have a lot of time, or possibly, as a new tutor, lacked confidence. We met in monthly team meetings and these, especially those held off-site, offered an opportunity for tutors and managers to meet, collaborate and feedback results from the project. The additional opportunities of OTLA regional CPD events created ideas and enthusiasm for the project. It was important to set dates for meetings well in advance and provide key deadlines to give the project some structure and create a rhythm of professional development.

Developing active learning techniques

I wanted to support managers and tutors to engage in action research. We delivered training at the start of the project around implementing action research as well as using different resources and active learning strategies. I incorporated these into an autumn term service meeting with all organisations where eleven tutors and four managers attended.

I also invited a tutor from a previous Education Training Foundation peer exchange project entitled 'Fostering Independence and Growing Resilience' to share some active learning techniques. The strategies included flipped learning, peer assessment, flip grid (a video, conversational platform) and the KWL (Know, What I want to know, Learned) research strategy. The presentation presented tutors with practical ideas about teaching techniques which had already been tried and tested.

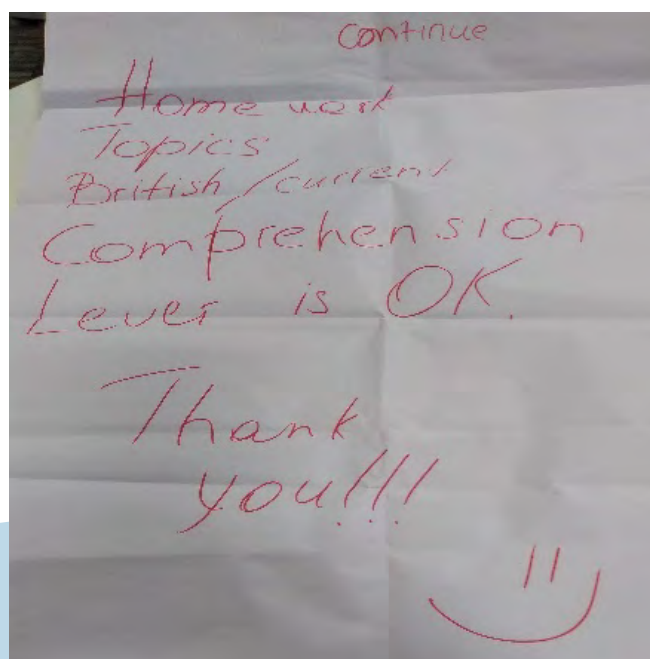
I hoped to encourage tutors to become more reflective and Kolb's experiential learning cycle was explored as a model of reflection. It was also important to assess tutors' starting points with doing action research. Some tutors have more experience than others. It was essential to model some action research examples for tutors and then follow up by using an exercise with some starter questions. I asked them to write one thing they wanted to explore and reflect on for the new teaching term, and their examples included:

- I will research Adults phonics reading and feedback to RBKC
- I will get the teacher toolkit flow chart for reflective practice and aim to spend five minutes after class to REFLECT
- I will try to encourage the tutors to involve learners in contributing their resources and experience in the class and try to be more adventurous
- I will learn more about teaching phonics – by the end of the Autumn term 2019. I will research online and will talk to literacy teachers in my organisation. I will evaluate before the start of Spring term 2020.

The exercise gave myself and the ACL managers some idea of what tutors wanted to explore or needed more training on. We would explore the action research ideas in the next meeting and throughout the academic year. There were frequent examples of wishing to explore phonics which was not surprising as tutors wanted to be better informed for the reformed Functional Skills exams. Consequently, we ran an ESOL with phonics training which provided further opportunities for tutors to analyse teaching techniques to practise and improve spelling. The tutors were particularly enthused by these strategies covered in the phonics training which informed some of the action research ideas in the autumn ACL service meeting.

The importance of collecting feedback to inform tutor techniques

In order get the project up and running, I sent a learner feedback tool to managers and tutors to complete with learners. This was 'Stop, Start, Continue' and was done as a quick exercise in class, often with the tutor away from the classroom so as not to influence the learners. I found this on the British Council website, and it seemed to be a quick and accessible technique. The only resources are a board/flipchart paper and pens. The tutors asked the learners what they would like to do more of in class, what they wanted to stop and things they wanted to continue. The learner data was further collected from questionnaires, observations and reflections of practice, videos of learner feedback and



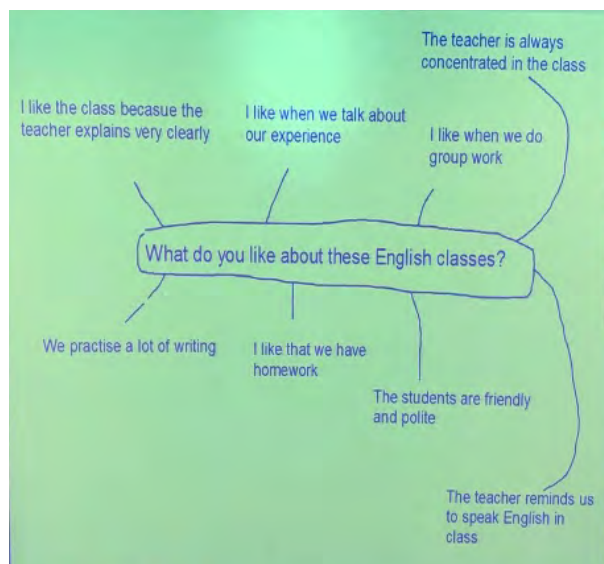
learner evaluations. I also sent a reflective tool to tutors for their own reflections. It was important to provide tools for tutors to give them a sense of belonging in the project and so they felt supported, as hourly-paid tutors are often time-poor and work many hours for different providers.

The tutors decided which techniques for active learning they would like to try based upon the collated learner feedback. They gathered evidence from the sessions and reflected on how effective their existing teaching approaches were in building learner engagement and confidence. Tutors used learner feedback to assess what learners would like more of, and used this feedback to select future more active learning techniques. Some of the challenges around gathering learner feedback included difficulties accessing online questionnaires, time constraints and 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. The learner feedback was often not what was expected. For example, 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,

Students didn't want to fill in anything from 'Stop' part of activity. Found it uncomfortable. (Fatiha, ESOL Entry 3 Tutor)

I discovered that collecting reliable feedback from learners is often challenging and learners in a community environment are often unused to using their learner voice - they need support with this. The feedback from learners seemed at times at odds with the project focus of developing independent learner strategies.

Nevertheless, the results from engaging with what learners want 'more of' and trialling the active learning strategies was overwhelmingly positive. Tutors adopted 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, and peer-assessment tools.



Helping tutors develop as facilitators of learning

From the results of tutors' action research, we discovered that active learning techniques can be used with learners at low levels, and can improve resilience as learners develop and practise independent skills. It also speeds up the progress that

learners make. This surprised some tutors and inspired them into developing more active learning techniques. This also moved tutors into more effective facilitator roles. For example, a reflection on using a chant for spelling based on phonics:

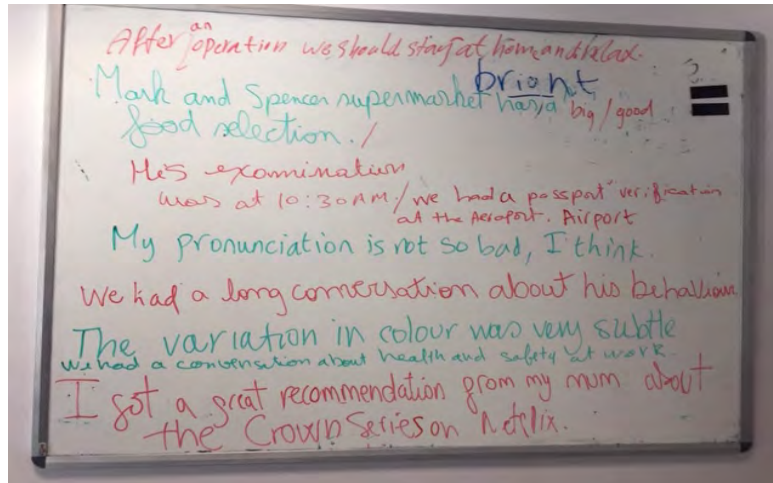
This exercise helps students to be much more independent when studying a new word. They learn how to practise, to check and correct the word by themselves, and not with the help of the teacher as usual. This is a huge step, especially for illiterate pre-entry ESOL students. (Laura, Pre-Entry ESOL tutor)

This is especially important for adult community learners who are often on the first steps of their learning journey and have been identified as hard to reach. If learners develop independent learning skills and techniques and reduce their dependency on the tutor, they can build resilience which will help them in their daily lives. This will also give them the skills to access information about other courses, employment and voluntary opportunities.

Instead of relying on their tutor, they start to rely on themselves and in the process gain confidence. 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. Importantly for adult learners, they also develop skills for outside the classroom such as employment, accessing healthcare and further education.

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. They like to 'pinch and personalise' resources and teaching techniques. The peer learning results in tutors developing and increasing their repertoire of strategies, but they make their own judgements about what to select, for whom and how they will use it. This became evident as one of the most successful meetings was when more tutors attended and shared their ideas, feedback and resources.

Towards the end of the project, tutors described, summarised and evaluated their participation and identified changes to their teaching, learning and assessment practices. Tutors recognised the value of using more active learning techniques with their learners and developing their own skills. The image below 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.



I noticed that this active approach to learning spelling yielded greater progression than more passive approaches. (Melissa, Level 1 Functional Skills Tutor)

An Entry 2 ESOL tutor discovered learners wanted to speak better English for work and develop their confidence so she set a task to research information about their home countries' festivals, produce a presentation and then share with the class. Learners were able to develop a range of skills from this set activity, such as their digital skills from researching online; their writing skills as they had to present their findings; their speaking skills as they had to come to the front of the class and read their corrected work and finally their listening skills as they had to answer their classmates' questions.

I found this approach very rewarding as the learners became the teacher and seemingly enjoyed sharing their information about themselves with the rest of the class. (Rhonda, ESOL Entry 2 Tutor)

Learners felt more engaged and increasingly had a role in steering sessions, sometimes adopting a tutor's role in presenting to the class and leading discussion. Pre-entry learners worked on their own to practise their spelling without being dependent on the tutor. Tutors began to recognise that using active learning techniques leads to a role of facilitator rather than knowledge giver as Carl Rogers explained:

Learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly in the learning process. When he chooses his own directions, helps to discover his own learning resources, formulates his own problems, decides his own course of action, lives with the consequences of these choices, then significant learning is maximized (Rogers, 1969: 162).



An ESOL Entry 2 learner presenting her research at the front of the class.

Tutors need to identify as part of the learning process, and as learners themselves, so that learning arises from an active dialogue between tutor and learner. This is highly valuable in a community learning setting where learners can often feel disenfranchised by lack of opportunity, or without the confidence or language skills to find their voice. Community learning exists to strengthen the members of that community and to support them. I believe that, through our project, we moved some way to helping community adult learning tutors become enablers of personal empowerment and community strengthening.

My reflections on establishing productive active research activities

Looking back on the project, I can identify some principles from my own learning about the role of a quality manager in an adult and community learning setting.

- It is important to set the learning, developmental and collaborative tone in tutor CPD sessions. Identify good practice amongst tutors from class visits and ask them to show and tell for other tutors. This works more effectively than tutors being told by managers what works well
- Provide a clear schedule with meeting dates and deadlines to maximise tutor availability. The meetings which had more tutor engagement were more successful. The tutors were able to assess the effectiveness of the techniques they were trialling with their learners and gain valuable insights from their peers
- Provide examples of techniques for tutors and models of reflection to focus their action research. Use a variety of methods and techniques to differentiate for tutors and use examples to demonstrate
- Build on participants' previous experience of completing action research to inform current practice
- Delegate and instil trust in others. Although a lead for the project, I was not able to attend the final dissemination event and I was able to delegate to a participating manager and a tutor to make the final presentation which proved a great success (and built confidence in presenting for the manager and tutor)
- Tutors need constant encouragement. Two tutors were initially reluctant to participate due to a concern over time commitments. They went on to produce great examples of action research and one tutor had a blog published for other tutors to read
- As a manager I have often coached tutors to get the best out of them. I would like to continue action research as part of tutor CPD as I have realised that a prescribed 'top down' approach often does not work, so my challenge, like the tutors, is to become more of a facilitator than a director of learning.

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Engaging students-as-researchers to understand GCSE resit students' experience of English

Elizabeth Draper

Elizabeth is an experienced English practitioner (29 years) as teacher, Head of dept (Sixth Form College), Director of English (FE college), coach and mentor. She has been active in FE (locally and nationally) making reading more accessible and 'high profile': She ran a cross-college reading campaign over five years, including the involvement of local libraries and national agencies, showing how reading can have a positive influence in bringing people together, creating different kinds of affirming opportunities. She is currently a freelance advisor, mentor, writer and 'pedagogical activist' in curriculum development (English) for the post-16 sector. You can contact Elizabeth via: @draperel (Twitter) or draperel@googlemail.com (email)

Background

In the summer of 2019, over one-third of students in England did not pass their English GCSE examination. More than 190,000 young people who have gone through 12 years of English teaching conclude this experience facing at least one further year of study in post-16 education attempting to achieve this qualification. The 'resit' experience of a curriculum often proves to be demoralising for many. At the moment, the GCSE English curriculum is heavily academic in context and challenge. In the English GCSE exam, critical readings include more archaic texts which often rely on a narrow field of social, cultural, institutionalised practices of English (Peim, 1993) which do not appeal to students who do not enjoy the cultural capital shared by those from more advantaged backgrounds. For significant numbers of students, their own lived experience is undervalued. GCSE English does not serve their interests.

The project: 'Rethinking the English classroom'

There are important questions to be asked about the school provision of 'English' and its consequences for too many young people. This article describes how we explored ways to improve our post-16 English curriculum for vocational students, utilising the agency of 'student voice' through student-to-student consultation following a process of 'student-as-researcher'. This type of research engages with the learning process that comes from the practice of a 'dialogic pedagogy': where teachers and students engage in a critical interrogation, questioning and investigating together, listening to multiple voices and points of view and where the student perspective is central. Research findings lead to some form of action to determine improvement in an educational process (Draper, 2019). In an ideal world this form of student engagement provides important insights which can instigate student-informed improvements in education. This account looks at how a student-led consultative process can contribute towards creating a more student inclusive system, but also it considers the practical limitations.

Our project, 'Rethinking the English classroom' sought to explore ways of changing resit students' negative attitudes towards English. We investigated the connection between

what happens to resit students whilst at school and how this affects their Further Education performance. We discovered what teachers and students experience on a daily basis: that, for many students, English lessons are an alienating experience which regrettably, can continue at college. Our vocational students' disengagement is a consequence of a GCSE English curriculum which is driven by an academic model.

This project encouraged students to consult their peers about their English experience. We aspired to engage in participatory action research, described as 'an integrated three-pronged process of social investigation, education and action designed to support those with less power in their organisational or community settings' (Atkins and Duckworth, 2019). In our context, those 'with less power' are resit students and we aimed to help them express their own grounded realities. We reflect on our practical research methods and processes and explore the challenges of trying to empower students-as-researchers.

Student action research: engaging with post-16 students about English

Student action research is about consulting with and engaging students in a research process that leads to action and influence in college decision-making processes about their learning experience. Our focus was the experience and situation of subject English at school and as a resit at college. Our student-led research process involved student participants in a student-to-student consultation process which attempted to stimulate a greater degree of student participation in decision-making processes. We aspired towards the ideal of 'young people lead and initiate action' from Hart's (2004) 'ladder of participation'. Our success in a funding bid, from the Educational Training Foundation, provided resources and a supportive external 'community'. This external recognition made it easier to galvanise colleagues, and students, and get them involved. Increasing the level of student participation in college life is claimed to strengthen students' interest in and commitment to college life and their own work (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007), something we especially wanted for our resit students.

Firstly, we identified which colleagues we wanted to enlist to be part of the project. This included the English department, senior managers, managers of relevant teams, individual teachers and support staff. Our project was launched at one of our weekly whole college briefings where the success of the funding bid was celebrated, and the project's ambitions explained. From there, meetings were organised with individuals important to involve in and support the project. Face-to-face communication was essential, email culture avoided. We needed to win over staff to become involved in the project by showing how it could help their students and themselves in their work as teachers.

Secondly, student participants were identified. Three groups from the construction curriculum area were chosen, historically our most challenging and reluctant resit students. These 24 students were all male, on level 1 or level 2 diploma courses in brickwork, motor vehicle, plumbing or carpentry and joinery.

Thirdly, students to act as researchers needed to be found. Being a student researcher requires skills of communication, organisation, demonstrable confidence and motivation to participate in a new college initiative. We had to adapt to circumstance; the Student Council was already established, so it was here that we found students who fulfilled this remit. We did not have time to start from scratch in a wider recruitment drive. We enlisted a group of Level 3 students who had all achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and were studying either Health and Social Care, Performing Arts or Graphics, a mix of first- and second-year students. We began with 12 volunteers; over the weeks these reduced to a dedicated core of six - four males and two females who continued to the end. We lost some student researchers along the way due to demands of their courses, demands of time (and some early morning meetings) and conflicting deadlines.

Consulting the construction students

A start up survey of 37 questions was devised to explore the construction students' prior learning experience of GCSE English, student perspectives and attitudes in response to their English experience at school and college. Once the project had been explained to students by vocational teachers, the survey was delivered on-line, under the assurance that it was confidential and anonymous. The questions were mostly framed in statements to which students responded: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. For example: 'I was often absent from school'; 'In school there were often cover teachers for my English lessons'; 'In college I find I need more support to help keep me on track with my English work'. The end of project survey elicited responses to the digital element of our revised pedagogical approach in particular and revisited questions about their English experience after the research process.

Students-as-Researchers

To develop the construction students' survey responses, we convened the student research group on Wednesday lunchtimes with, importantly, lunch provided. There was a training day to embed the project in the students-as-researchers framework and raise awareness about issues around the GCSE resits in a wider educational context and forge the group together as a working group. Each student was given a project notebook for recording ideas. Communication was sustained through use of a What's App group we created, and after each workshop notes were uploaded on to the student research site we created on Google Drive.

In the first workshop some of the same questions as in the start-up survey were posed to the student researchers to get them thinking about their own experiences of having studied English. In our exploratory discussions, these students who had successfully passed GCSE English suggested that the value of having good English skills included building confidence, positive status, helpful in everyday tasks, opening of opportunities and employability benefits. They acknowledged how GCSE English was a gateway qualification offering access to employment and higher education, and how the value of self-expression created greater opportunities and social mobility, as well as agency, 'Helps you influence and make change through having good English skills'.

For our student-researchers who had been successful in English, they remembered English lessons at school as largely positive. English helped you express your perceptions, views and opinions with pride, helped with creativity, excitement, recognition, stories, debate and analysis; but they also acknowledged that the exams could be negative, especially for others who weren't as 'good' at English, articulating this through associated terms such as: 'restricted', 'nervous', 'regret', 'pressure', 'setting', 'worry', 'stressful', 'controversy' and 'divided classes'.

These responses show a mix of feelings, pragmatism and creativity when considering what English means to them, compared to the more utilitarian 'basic skills passport' responses given by the construction students. These responses also reflect their own interests as a mix of Health and Social Care, Graphic and Performing Art students who had achieved a grade 4 or above. Nevertheless, the utility value of GCSE English to progress in education and employment is apparent.

After these exploratory discussions, the student-researchers were shown the construction students' responses about their resit experiences. This was needed to draw the student-group into the point of the research. The strength of feeling and range of experiences expressed, coming from a range of local schools, ignited their interest and motivated them to be involved.

These student-as-researcher workshops were productive and lively. The students developed the following insights from reviewing the construction students' experiences of English:

- Students' fear of failure
- Resistance to resit hardened by school experience
- Lack of exam confidence
- Self-image in front of other classmates gets in the way
- Experience of cover teachers at school – negative, disruptive effect
- Impact of lower class 'setting' on students' self-esteem and status in school.

The importance of confidentiality, respect and trust were emphasised; consultation processes were agreed; planning and preparation began. Student researchers came up with their preferred research methods, either one to one, or addressing a focus group. They prepared thematic open-ended questions arising from discussions, and devised images of different jobs that might prompt discussion with participants to elicit their attitudes to the value and relevance of English skills.

Student-as-Researcher activities

After six weeks of workshops and preparations with our student researchers, one-to-one interviews and focus groups were set up and recording devices secured. This was the student researchers' first experience of such a process and because of time constraints we were not able to carry out 'dummy runs' to refine, review and re-draft questions. This process, however, certainly had a positive impact on the student researchers, as can be seen by their contributions and relationships forged with each other, with staff and with the construction students and in their follow up work. They

reflected positively on their experience of being able to create the space for resit students to give voice to their experience, be listened to and to be acknowledged. The fact this space was in the name of research increased their sense of being valued in the activities. Their student-as-researcher experience appears typical of that witnessed and evaluated by Fielding and Bragg (2003).

Student-led conversations

All research was recorded, in full knowledge of the participants. One-to-ones and focus groups took place without any staff members present, only students. They took place in their vocational areas, in safe familiar places where staff were within easy reach and doors left open, safe-guarding measures in place. The sessions were introduced by the student researchers and the Enrichment Co-ordinator, with their vocational teacher present.

Some conversations were livelier and more willing than others. After the first research session's review, amendments were made: e.g. focus groups to have male/female mix leading the session rather than two males or females; male respondents were reported as reluctant when faced with two females leading the session. The one-to-one sessions seemed to garner the most responses, students seemed more guarded in the focus group sessions, perhaps too aware of others so not as keen to speak out.

The research took place over a three -week period. Student researchers negotiated agreements with their course teachers to enable them to have flexibility to carry out research. There were times when students didn't turn up at arranged meet up times, although the WhatsApp group worked well as a wake up (literally sometimes!) call.

When the research was finished the student-researchers discussed the findings. Key points arising from the recordings were discussed and informed the presentation that was then created. This presentation was aimed at the Student Council, a meeting attended by the Principal and other senior leaders along with the student representatives. Findings were also presented to the English team and construction curriculum managers. This was a chance to reflect on and raise awareness of the challenges that the resit curriculum presents, as seen from the students' perspective. The meeting discussed the relevance of the English curriculum to vocational subject areas, together with the importance of construction teachers promoting English skills in their sessions when appropriate and being supported by 'team English' in their endeavour. Changes for the following year were agreed in response to findings, for example in terms of timetabling – remaining with the three-hour 'workshop' structure and type of sessions; continuing with the use of digital technology which had already had such a positive uptake from the students. The student researcher findings led to positive action at college strategy level in terms of curriculum planning for English and raising the profile of student research as a valuable resource to inform strategy and enrich college culture that is now part of the college experience to be further developed in the future, capacity allowing.

The construction students' school experiences of English

The majority of construction student participants wished they did not have to resit GCSE English; they recalled unsatisfactory experiences of English at school, instability in the classroom due to multiple 'cover teachers', and inadequate support when they struggled with the subject. Some spoke of the hierarchies created by 'setting': those in higher sets they felt were deemed to be worth more to school and were treated better. Students revealed that they had been put in classes in a different building to the others, with bottom sets physically 'annexed off' from the rest, adding to their feelings of not being valued, increasing their frustration and anger about English. Some admitted that they had themselves been the source of the disruption in their classes and that when they clashed with their teacher they would forgo support and get detentions. These responses highlight the, arguably legitimate, rebellion against English that is often carried through to the post-16 context.

Students registered feelings of guilt, depression, resignation and acceptance in responses to retaking English. Some blamed themselves for the situation: 'my own fault for failing at school', and saw it as an inescapable trap: 'got to do it-can't avoid it-there's no way around' and some were fatalistic 'it's my second time resitting...I'm not going to pass it again' or were resigned 'I know I need to get it done for my apprenticeship.' Some wanted English to be optional or rejected the offer entirely, 'No. I just want to do my course'. Many reluctantly acknowledged that the need to retake made the most sense e.g. 'to get it over with and maybe find an apprenticeship when I leave college. Just basically get it done.', 'Can't go to level 2 until GCSE achieved', 'It is important to have GCSEs in your CV to be able to get a good job with good pay'.

The place of English in further education

Most students agreed they would rather study English that was more directly relevant to their vocational course, albeit still as a separate subject. Many also agreed that they would find it easier to be in English classes without people they know (having revealed that often in school they would get distracted by their mates rather than focus on lessons; it is possible that it is easier to admit to being distracted by, rather than embarrassed by, one's friends). The majority responded more positively to their experience of college life and the study of English; they agreed that they felt more motivated and better understood, examples of what they said about their experience at college provide us with some insight: 'Less hectic'; 'More focussed on the work – as I don't know people in class like I did at school'; 'Treat you more like adults, understand you more, more relaxed'; 'Support, helping us, pushing us in the right direction, not doing it for us'. And 'I'm getting a lot of support here. Pretty good, smaller classes better. In school we had 30 people in class, never learn anything in that'.

The majority agreed that they were glad to have the opportunity to retake GCCSE English even although at the start of the project most wished they did not have to retake it. This demonstrates that they do see value in the qualification, if regrettably not the actual course and content of study. In terms of rethinking the structure and

timings of the sessions for English, the majority preferred the three- hour ‘workshop’ slots rather than two separate sessions in the week.

The attention of the research project itself certainly focussed minds. The questions steered their thinking and their answers provide a glimpse into their GCSE English resit worlds. At the end of the project the majority agreed that they found the opportunity provided to think and talk about their experience of English at school and college was helpful; it aided their engagement with the purpose of English and gave them a sense of ownership and responsibility - their input mattered.

The response from these construction students presents a challenge; could they also conduct research into their lived English experience? We have seen the benefits for those acting as student researchers; could research become part of the post-16 English curriculum? Could construction resit students help design a short participatory research project as part of their induction process to stimulate them to actively think and talk together about English? Their responses and achievement in doing this could then be used to inform subsequent sessions and we might have more motivated students being taught by teachers who more fully appreciate their interests and barriers.

Conclusion

The findings from this pilot project reveal GCSE students’ resit experience and show what could be possible were this kind of research to be extended, have more time and resource. Through hearing the views of some students, in dialogue with other students, we are given an insight into how they have arrived at this point in their lives, what they think of both the prospect and reality of the GCSE resit experience and why. This gives us a starting point: ‘Start where the children are at, not where you think they might or should be’ (Heathcote, 1995). Enabling students to converse with each other is part of an invaluable process of meaningful engagement: ‘Too often as teachers we focus on content to be delivered and too little on the recipient. Teaching is about being attentive to the conditions and the needs of those recipients. Yes, it’s hard, but there is no point in planting a sun-loving plant in the shade.’ (Kidd, 2020)

Student feedback echoes what researchers tell us, that significant numbers of those who ‘fail’ GCSE English feel disenfranchised at school – ‘annexed off’ in some cases. The resit cohort is in part victim of ‘the subject shrinking only to what is assessable’ (Bleiman, 2020); casualties of the interminably unresolved ‘relationship between the academic and the vocational...the curricular battle’ (Bleiman). After being branded an English failure, students arrive at our colleges ready to take on new vocational courses but have the additional ball and chain of the resit.

We think that this project shows how what happens in English at school affects English in F.E. It is important to acknowledge what students think and feel when they arrive in our classrooms. Listening to these students can be part of the process of ‘developing a curriculum of hope through a pedagogy of power’ (Kidd). We are ceding students some power and control here; within the framework of student action research they can find

agency through their critical voice and because of this, important incremental change can take place.

English is nothing less than a different model of education; knowledge to be made, not given; knowledge comprising more than can be discursively stated; learning as a diverse range of processes to be embarked on with outcomes unpredictable; students' perceptions, experiences, imaginings and unsystematically acquired knowledge admitted as legitimate curricular content. (Rosen, 1981)

This case study shows how social investigation can be part of students' education and how student-research can improve the experience of education. This project was a first step which benefited those who participated. The student-researchers developed greater self-confidence and empathy whilst the resitting construction students became more engaged as they began to appreciate that reasons for their previous lack of success were not always within their control, and they appeared to welcome the opportunity that taking English at college may give them another opportunity within a more supportive and purposeful framework.

However, in future sessions perhaps we could try and engage the construction students directly as participative action researchers in their own right. They can be helped to develop their under-appreciated English skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing in order to investigate their college-based English provision and to provide insights into what has proven successful in their previous experience, and where barriers remain. This would be a bold step, but it may lead to a more appreciative approach to building on any successes, and from this student-centred research approach, they may see a direct benefit from 'doing English' (Eaglestone, 2020). Perhaps this might deliver on the promise of a 'curriculum of hope' (Kidd).

There is much more to be done to address the problems inherent in the English curriculum. It is not fit for purpose for too many students, fixed as it is on an academic model which we in Further Education have to shoe-horn into a more vocational context in the name of progress.

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Putting mindset theory into practice: promoting positive expectations in GCSE English Language resit classrooms at The Sheffield College

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Introduction

Across all sectors of education, constructivist approaches to teaching, learning and assessment place the learner at the centre of education, and the learner's perception of themselves in the education system becomes paramount. If they are indeed at the centre of their learning journey, how they perceive the path ahead of them, the path which has brought them there and if the path has caused them any travel sickness, can determine the behaviours which teachers see in classrooms across the country. Dweck (2006), a leading voice on pedagogical mindsets, classifies the consequence of two different types of journeys: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset.

Dweck also outlines (2015) that a fixed mindset describes a learner whose perception of themselves is that they cannot learn a particular subject, that they lack the required intelligence and they are forever stunted in their ability to succeed in this subject. Subsequently, those of a fixed mindset begin to demonstrate behaviours which reflect their perception of their learning ability. Quite typically this can manifest as low motivation, low resilience and poor self-belief, which in turn are represented by negative classroom traits. Unsurprisingly, a fixed belief about their inevitable academic failure (reflecting their lack of innate intelligence) leads to low effort and further failure which only reinforces these learners' intrinsic negative beliefs about their ability.

Dweck provides examples of tools for enabling learners to transition from a fixed to a growth mindset, where learners come to appreciate that intelligence is not fixed, but is malleable, and that adopting different strategies can raise individual achievement. However, like many generic learning materials they can seem out of place with the different types of learners which teachers encounter within the post-16 sector. As teachers, we are taught to contextualise learning, adapt resources and differentiate tasks according to context, and the same approach is needed when we are trying to grapple with our GCSE English resit students' innermost perceptions of themselves in the hope of encouraging their commitment leading to greater self-efficacy.

One criticism of 'growth mindset' pedagogy is that a generic approach is too abstract for teachers to really embed within their classrooms. As a practitioner, there seems

nothing worse for my learners than being presented with a broad statement, stance or strategy which aims to include all of them yet helps none. Many generalised resources fall into this category. Our departmental team found that changing a student's mindset needed to be context dependent, individualised and relevant to learners. We realised that creating a strategy which can be rolled out, packaged and sold to every teacher struggling with behaviour was unlikely to be effective. When we started our journey to change GCSE resit learners' negative mindsets at The Sheffield College, we realised we needed to encourage individual approaches that teachers would adopt, adapt and own.

The bigger picture

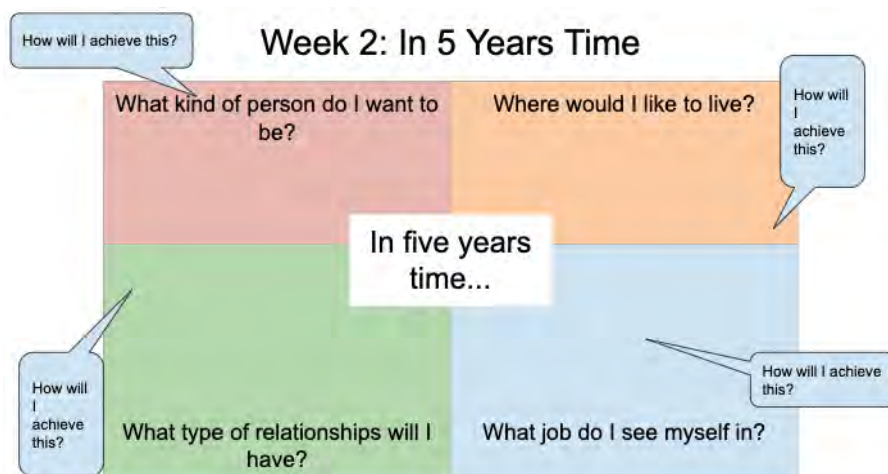
The pedagogy of mindset seemed particularly important with learners in our context due to their nature as 'resit' students. Their fixed mindsets were reinforced by repeated academic failure, the learners' perception of a grade 3 as a fail. This situation is made worse by the funding requirement that learners must continue to study and repeatedly resit English examinations until they achieve a grade 4 pass, which is perceived as enabling entry to the workforce or to progress to further study. We needed to help learners remove this label of failure, to realise that success was achievable through a combination of renewed self-belief in their potential through adopting more appropriate English practices, and thus a 'growth mindset' could be achieved.

The characterisation of this perception of failure which we associate with a 'fixed mindset', at The Sheffield College, manifests in behaviours such as inconsistent engagement, low attendance and poor punctuality. Learners can show a lack of concern over their progress and general apathy to their situation. From the first lesson back after summer, this indifference can seem glaringly obvious in a resit class and it seems inconceivable that learning, actual real learning, can take place until some hefty groundwork has gone in to chip away at this reluctance. What our growth mindset framework aimed to do was to deconstruct these obstacles by examining what their foundations were and address these explicitly within the lessons.

Instead of a singular 'strategy', we cultivated an 'approach' which was responsive to the needs of our learners. Our approach, through evaluation, became a framework for which associated resources were developed. It is important here to point out that the resources resulted from our team investigating how a framework for mindset could be applied within our context of a large general further education institution. Every school or college creating a mindset framework may well produce an entirely different set of resources. Therefore, the ones designed for the purposes of the students at The Sheffield College may not always be transferable and consequently will not have the desired impact. Indeed, it became clear that individual teachers within our organisation applied the framework differently to optimise the impact this would have with students. What the initial framework helped us to do was to enable our concept of growth mindset to transcend the abstract and deliver tangible resources which might resonate with our learners.

Our initial approach

Although generic policies and procedures can detract from personalised teaching and learning, there is also an argument that they ensure consistency across large institutions and achieving such consistency in our approach to learners' mindsets, across the English academy, could be a problem. We adopted an action research approach and potential solutions emerged from our discussions. Through a needs analysis of resit learners, we developed both a diagnostic assessment and an initial scheme of work to sit alongside the current GCSE scheme of work. This was coined as our 'Mindset scheme', and each week would include an activity which would explicitly promote positive self-regard leading to improved engagement in English activities. These mindset activities were mapped to the types of challenges which arise at the beginning of an academic year, and they created opportunities for learners to review their situation and to more positively adapt the language they used to describe their learning experience. For example, rather than a mistake being considered as a failure, we suggested how it could be perceived as an opportunity to move on. One typical learner, in a discussion about failure, simply verbalised this as, 'When you do a mistake in your life, you learn more' and was able to apply this to his learning.

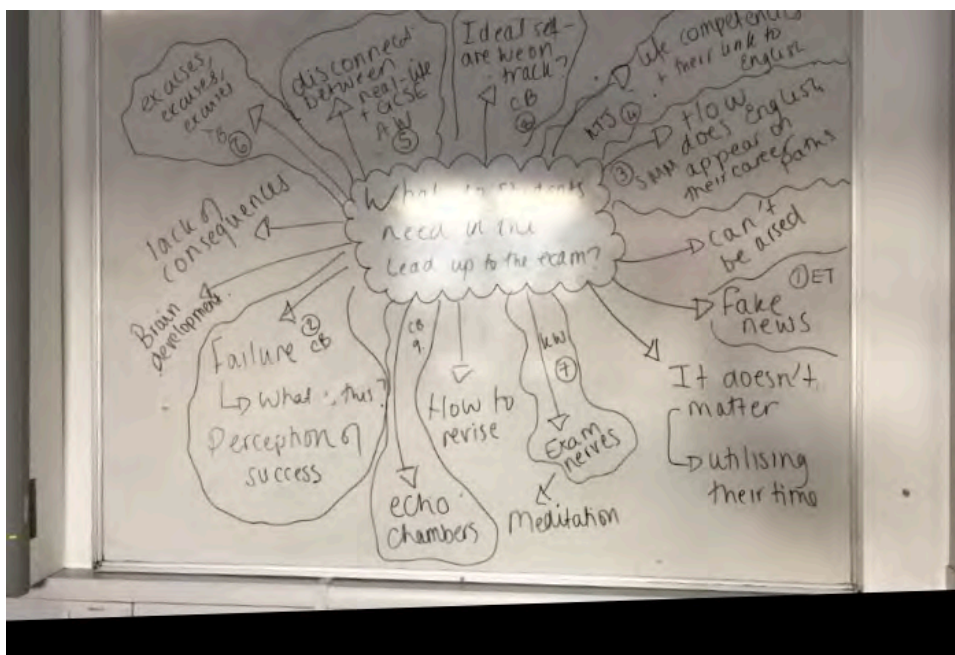


From experience, many learners enrolled on vocational courses do not see the relevance of English in their chosen study programmes when they arrive from secondary school. Understandably, they have the

belief that upon entering college they would finally be able to study what interests them: hairdressing, engineering, childcare. Yet, when they don't attain that all important grade 4, three hours of their timetable is allotted to studying a subject they thought they had left behind. To address this and help learners be more open to studying another year of GCSE English Language, we created a resource called 'In 5 Years' Time', which encouraged the learners to picture where they would like to be in five years in terms of their employment, relationships, location and identity. Students were asked to identify how they were going to achieve this and we teachers attempted to facilitate a discussion to establish links between their current situation and desired future outcomes. Akbari (2008), who writes about the transformational power of education, suggests placing learners' real-world experiences at the heart of what we do in the classroom will enable learners to reflect upon their identity and develop their understanding of the value they have as individuals within the wider context.

Adapting our approach

We began with a somewhat prescriptive approach aimed at ensuring that mindset had a consistent presence across the academy. Some teachers were familiar with mindset approaches and had engaged with individual learners about raising their self-confidence in English activities, but for most teachers this approach was new. After discussing the proposed scheme of work, we decided that we collectively needed to offer a growth mindset approach, otherwise the outcome would be inequitable. It was also decided that in order to meet the needs of the professionals teaching the scheme of work, it was crucial that they were to be consulted on the content, acknowledging that the learners' teacher is typically the most aware of their needs and therefore they are the professional who can provide informed advice. We acknowledged that a practitioner-led grassroots approach, which embraced and valued all our English teachers' differing beliefs and interpretations, would be the most credible and have the greatest impact for our students who are at the centre of our efforts.



The most successful aspect of the initial scheme of work was its responsiveness to a mindset needs analysis based on the current cohort of students. Whilst our plans had been drawn up based on former students, it was now possible to refine the plans in response to challenges staff were facing in their current classroom relationships. Using a needs analysis as a starting point in a departmental meeting seemed appropriate as it would encourage teachers to explore mindsets and prevailing attitudes which had become manifest over the first half-term. Through discussion, we identified common features across the team shown above, in the board annotations. As a practitioner, this was both reassuring and cathartic. We drew up a list of typical behaviours, and as a team we were able to problematise each one individually, exploring solutions by identifying how contrasting positive self-images could be encouraged. Teachers then chose their own areas of strength regarding promotion of positive behaviours for learning and created a short activity, adapting the original resources as a guide to length and layout where needed. The activities were then shared in an online drive.

One example of a challenge that teachers faced was the levels of respect students would show towards their peers (and ultimately themselves). This manifested in the way that learners were not using the opportunities presented for self-improvement. Often this was apparent through the negative language they would use to describe themselves and others in the class. The team decided that the classes were lacking in a sense of community or shared

social experiences and developed the RESPECT worksheet, using music as the medium to explore their shared experience of the education system. Another member of the team used a different approach to addressing this theme and asked the students to work in groups and create a project proposal which would create a community feeling in their local areas. The discussion around these activities helped learners make the links between the ideas they represented and how they were relevant to their own learning. For example, in an observed activity with a study programme group, one learner discussed why developing a deeper self-awareness would help them to learn, explaining that if they were not aware of external factors affecting their motivation, they would not be able to put in place strategies to limit or enhance the impact they would have. It seemed that regardless of the specific mindset exercise, it was the conversation between teachers and learners which enabled the biggest changes in classes.

The impact of our approach on the staff

The sharing of mindset resources meant that staff could access activities flexibly, based on the behaviours which the teachers anticipated might arise at each stage. Each teacher was encouraged to differentiate and have agency over the teaching and learning of this concept. The impact on learners was that their individual learners' needs were being met, and challenges were being discussed democratically which resulted in better classroom atmospheres, as evidenced by teachers' reflections.

When discussing some of the tasks involved with the project, some students will open up and express reasons for their lack of incentive and often they need inspiration on a different level. Indeed, with one of the tasks (Distraction)

'Working-class children get less of everything in education - including respect'

Play RESPECT by Aretha Franklin while students think about the task

Those on free school meals and receiving pupil premium 27% less likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths.

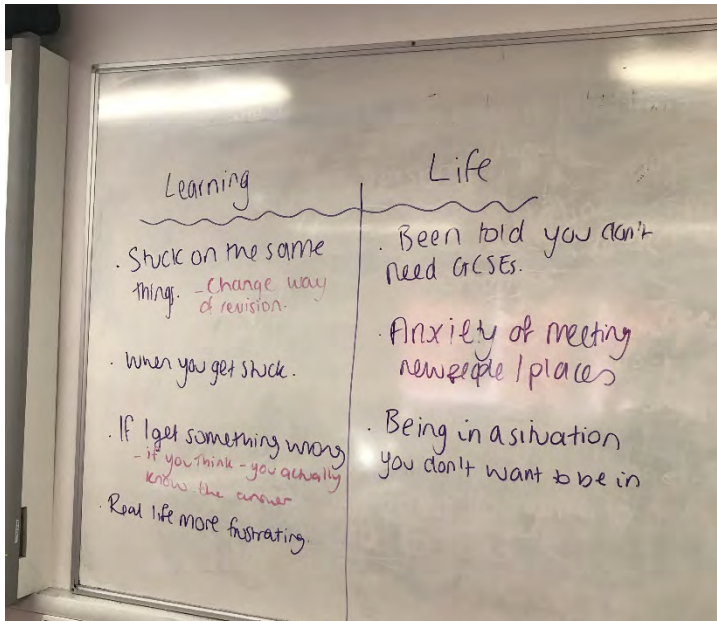
1. How does this information make us feel?
2. Do you think this is true?
3. Are people with GCSEs more respected than those without?
4. Why do you think this is?
5. What needs to change in order for working-class children to be respected by society? Create an acronym for RESPECT to demonstrate this:

some students began to assess the fact that they were much more intelligent than they realised. I feel that, rather than learners accepting failure, a small glimmer of recognition of their own personal intelligence, in some cases, displays small levels of progression and this in return lifts the teacher.

The comment posed by this member of staff implicitly describes a scenario in which the students' awakened sense of potential proves inspirational to the staff member and is illustrative of the positive culture which was gradually being established in this classroom as a result of mindset activity. There had also been a shift in learners' intrinsic beliefs about their intelligences and if we consider what this tells us about self-worth and consequently how this may raise aspirations, we can begin to see a ripple effect that a longitudinal study could explore in greater depth. Sisk et. al. (2018) in their meta-analyses challenge some claims made for the effects of mindset by suggesting that this approach only accounts for minor changes in attitudes for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. As a practitioner, I would suggest that even influencing one student positively is a significant success. If this small impact causes bigger ripples, one single student can begin to affect change beyond their individual sphere. Is it not too trite in response to Sisk, to offer the old adage of 'Rome wasn't built in a day', and add 'but, at least one brick was laid each day'?

The impact of our approach on the learners

Over time, the ethos of changing mindsets towards learning English in the classroom began to transcend the individual activities and for some lecturers became thematic in their lessons so that learners were using English skills to critically explore mindsets. Through this application, the real nature of language and the power of the word in social, economic and political contexts entered the classroom. This was apparent in the texts selected by teachers, or the stimulus used for writing and the conversations learners would participate in. For example, one lecturer used an article for Language Paper 2, which looked at the effects of choice and decision from which learners were able to draw parallels with their own academic and life successes. It created a setting which encouraged the learners to discuss how relevant their study of English was as a vehicle of social mobility and transformation. Learners demonstrated their grasp of this theme through tackling complex vocabulary and engaging with a range of relevant perspectives to discuss more sophisticated ideas which they were embracing. Ultimately, this benefitted learners' ability to tackle higher order questions which would appear in the exam, such as evaluation and comparison.



Giving the learners the opportunity to discuss, examine and question their feelings about being a learner helped develop their critical voice which was needed both in life and learning. This dedicated time was a valuable opportunity for learners to critically reflect upon and communicate their motivations and attitudes. The mindset project helped provide them with the vocabulary and space to develop their voice and agency to generate self-respect. This helped foster a positive learning culture and environment which subsequently increased engagement and positive attitudes which reflected in staff discussions regarding increase in attendance after break and fewer negative comments recorded in ProMonitor.

Looking to the future

Towards the end of the second term, staff were invited to a second 'Planning for positive mindsets' meeting. Teachers were again asked to reflect on the behaviours of their students and predict what challenges may arise as the June examination approached. At this stage it was clear that

Week 30: Positive Affirmations for the week before exams

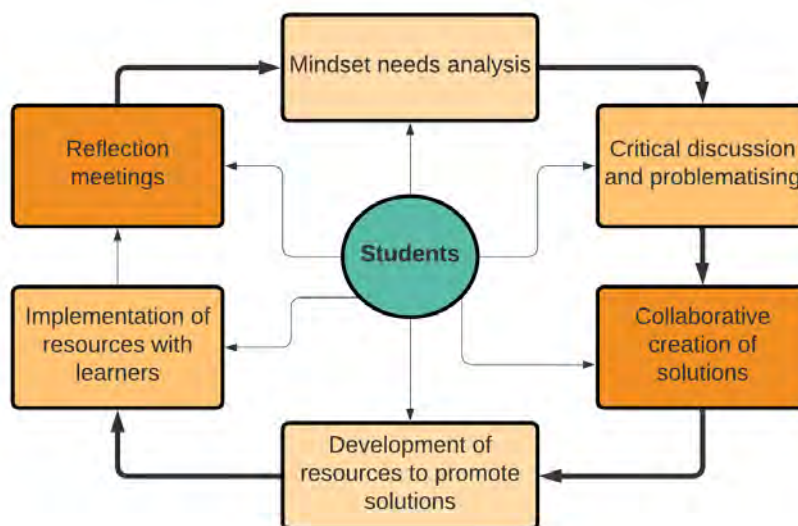
Monday 25th May	The harder you work for something the better you will feel when you achieve it.
Tuesday 26th May	You are confident. You are focussed. You are unstoppable.
Wednesday 27th May	Mistakes are the stepping stones to success.
Thursday 28th May	Strive for progress, not perfection.
Friday 29th May	Stay positive. Work hard. Make it happen.
Monday 1st June	Tomorrow you get the chance to put your hard work into practice. Try a guided meditation before bed tonight to help you relax and get an early night https://insighttimer.com/crystalreeroad/guided-meditations/breathing-into-sleep
Tuesday 2nd June	Good luck for today. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. You've got this!
Wednesday 3rd June	You are enough.
Thursday 4th June	Tell yourself: I can. I will. End of story.
Friday 5th June	Good luck for today. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. You've got this!

teachers had a wealth of knowledge about the mindsets of individuals within groups, as illustrated in their attitudes and behaviours. Teachers took the lead and explored different ideas that each cohort might respond well to, and from this we designed a

final medium-term plan in which activities were sequenced to take into account a rise in exam pressures as well as exam techniques. We wanted to help learners demonstrate resilience to challenging scenarios they may encounter. Teachers also created plans for a wellbeing week and one teacher offered to lead a text campaign of positive affirmations in the days leading up to the two exams. This demonstrated a real understanding from the staff about what their students needed and how they could equip them for an incredibly difficult situation. This final meeting was exciting and experienced teachers looked forward to building these new resources into the revision focus that the scheme of work illustrated for the final term. Unfortunately, the opportunity to implement this was frustrated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mindset Framework Flow Chart

Charlotte Bawing | May 11, 2020



Reflection

Over the course of the academic year, the project changed from being a centralised scheme of work to a collaboratively created sharing site in which teachers responded to the individual needs of their classes. Each staff member of the academy became a stake-holder and creator of a consistent approach to mindset for learning, which showcased the strengths of teachers and therefore ensured the learners had access to a holistic set of resources. This was achieved through a cycle of: needs analyses; critical discussion and problematising; collaborative creation of solutions; development of resources to promote solutions; implementation with learners; weekly reflection meetings. This experience has convinced me that if teachers are to adopt mindset approaches within their practice, it cannot be implemented by the dissemination of a set of resources or statements posted on a wall. It requires a flexible framework which responds to the emerging needs of students in their specific contexts and is adaptable to the judgements made by each teacher.

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Changing mind-sets for learning and teaching: an exploration of the impact upon teachers and their practice of the embedding and delivery of a ‘mind-set for learning’ curriculum in resit GCSE English Language classes

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact upon teachers and students of the embedding and delivery of a mind-set for learning scheme of work within a resit GCSE English Language curriculum in a large General Further Education College. It outlines the changes such a sustained, focussed and whole team approach to the development of students' sense of self-worth, belief and regulation in learning has on teachers' perceptions of young people's attitudes towards the learning of English. It examines how open and ongoing discourses between teachers and student relating to resilience in learning fosters transformative relationships in the classroom, in addition to enabling teachers to refresh their professional practice. The paper considers the considerable impact delivery of the activities has on tutors' use of language in the classroom and their perceptions of themselves as English teachers.

Introduction

‘They’re not interested!’ ‘They’ve had enough!’ ‘They just want to get it over with!’ were phrases too often made by some of our most committed and experienced teachers about some of their students’ attitudes towards studying GCSE English Language. As a curriculum manager in a large inner city General Further Education college, I was fully aware that these statements were not made by teachers who lacked care or compassion for their students, but were made by individuals who worked tirelessly to do their very best to support ‘demoralised students’ who are forced to take multiple resits (Offord, 2018). Such teachers had themselves become disheartened by the fact that despite their continual efforts to prepare students for an exam, which David Corke attests is ‘not appropriate for all students’, the golden ticket of a grade 4 pass was routinely only achieved by less than a third of their students.

Most of the team had taught GCSE English prior to the introduction of the recent 'Condition of Funding', so memories of the halcyon days of over 40% A-C grade passes still loomed large in the collective consciousness of the academy. Teachers empathised with their younger students, perceiving the government's insistence on their resitting GCSE English Language and maths until they achieved a pass or the student reaches 19, to be unfair and exceptionally damaging. They felt that the majority of students just 'did not want to do it!' Conversations urging teachers, who made such comments, to remember the underlying reasons for disinterested behaviours, a lack of self-esteem and self-belief, would sometimes dominate staff meetings and less formal interactions.

The English teaching team is large and diverse, and not everyone shared these perceptions of students' attitudes towards learning. Some practitioners were fully attuned and sensitive to students' underlying barriers to learning. They understood that seemingly disinterested behaviours are linked to previous failure in English and maths, subjects that offer a passport to further educational and employment opportunities. Such teachers routinely challenged students' intrinsic lack of self-belief. They communicated positivity and supported individuals to build resilience. This was an apparently natural element of their practice. Yet for others in the team a focus on 'getting through the Scheme of Work', supporting students to master the techniques to trigger a grade 4 dominated their practice. Whilst such tutors' enthusiasm for the subject, combined with their kind and supportive natures, ensured that they built positive working relationships with their students over time, it was evident that some staff were unwittingly reinforcing students' negative perceptions of the learning of English. Their natural empathy would lead them to make comments to students such as, 'I know you don't want to do it but...' or 'just think if you work hard, you won't have to sit it again next year...' Through a combination of force of personality, determination and care for their learners, these teachers coaxed their students through the academic year towards the final assessment. Often in their anxiety to ensure that they delivered the English syllabus thoroughly, teachers would forget to explicitly challenge these students' damaging perceptions of themselves in relation to learning and life.

After the Government's minor change to the Condition of Funding in 2019, which tacitly signalled their insistence on the continuation of the GCSE resit policy, I became convinced that as a team, we had an ethical responsibility to modify our approach to the delivery of the subject. I was acutely aware that for many students this all too familiar, seemingly inaccessible and difficult curriculum, signified failure. For our progressing Study Programme students, in particular, enrolment onto GCSE English Language was becoming 'a Groundhog Day of multiple resits.' Many in the sector, myself included, were deeply concerned that the policy, risked putting students off learning altogether. It seemed to me that addressing students' perceptions of themselves in relation to learning, through the delivery of a range of activities would help to build confidence, self-esteem and self-regulation in learning. I hoped that it would encourage those teachers for whom initiating such discussions with their learners was not routine practice. I hoped that it would enable a more consistent approach to the learning of English within our academy. After all, why should only

some students be routinely encouraged to think more positively about themselves and their abilities?

Establishing the project

Teachers in the team received the proposal to develop, embed and deliver a mind-set for learning curriculum within the existing Scheme of Work with enthusiasm. They were keen to trial the new approach. Furthermore, they were open and honest in relation to their existing attitudes to, and abilities in, developing students' self-confidence and belief in the learning of English. Whatever their levels of experience and skill in this area, they were open to undertaking Continual Professional Development. Before the start of the academic year, teachers engaged enthusiastically in training and collaborated to evaluate resources developed by one of the leads on the project. These resources involved visualisation activities such as In Five Years, which encouraged students to consider their personal and professional lives in the future and the steps they would need to undertake to achieve these goals. Activities encouraging students to reflect on past experiences in life and education and what they have learnt from them such as The Best Mistake were also delivered early in the academic year. Such activities offered teachers at the outset of the academic year insight into students, their hopes, aspirations, experiences and factors which might be affecting their relationship to learning. Activities such as a statement flipping exercise explicitly tackled students' use of language and challenged them to consider and reassess their relationship to learning. Whilst some activities focused wholly on the development of students' attitudes towards themselves and learning, other tasks enabled explicit development of curriculum related skills. A Metaphor for Life reading task, for example, developed students' skills in reading comprehension, language and structural analysis whilst also encouraging them to explore ideas relating to perseverance and the achievement of goals. We designed the mind-sets for learning scheme of work to work in parallel with the GCSE English Language with the intention that it would help students to prepare concurrently for forthcoming challenges, such as mock examinations.

At the end of the project, teachers wrote reflective accounts. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in the paper are from participating teachers' reflective accounts of the mind-set initiative.

Tutors delivered the activities regularly throughout the year. They adapted the resources and approaches to meet their differing teaching styles and the characteristics and needs of their groups. Additionally, teachers met regularly to reflect upon and discuss their progress, develop further materials and explore emerging issues. Involvement in the project has had a significant and likely to be long lasting positive impact on teachers and their practice. Importantly, adoption of the approach appeared to raise engagement and achievement amongst GCSE English Language students.

Early on in the project, it became evident that paying explicit attention to the development of students' perceptions of themselves in relation to learning, looking for ways and activities to encourage students to believe in themselves and their

achievements to date and their potential to succeed, encouraged teachers to re-evaluate their practice. Experienced tutors started to scrutinise and evaluate aspects of their teaching and learning which they had previously perceived as a strength. One teacher, for example, had considered her use of positive, affirming and enabling language to be an 'intrinsic part of practice' something she 'considered to be a strength which manifested itself in ... increased engagement from learners.' However, she found that making the strategy explicit to her learners, through the delivery of the activities, enabled them to tackle 'their own mind-sets during turbulent periods in their learning journey.' This, she attests has helped her to 'refocus learning to a student-centred approach' as opposed to her pre-existing 'teacher-led strategy of tackling negative language used in response to learning English.' Another teacher found engagement in the project had had a 'great impact' on her as a practitioner, forcing her to 'stop and think more about how to combat issues with motivation' in her classes.

Importantly, the focus within the activities upon challenging students' damaging and limiting perceptions of themselves in relation to learning helped to engender a more holistic view of learners. Some teachers began to question their long-held perception of students' central role being 'primarily...learners of GCSE English Language,' and their role 'to teach them' the subject. Delivering the activities fostered a greater understanding of the psychological barriers to learning held by young people and adults who had experienced repeated failure in learning and examinations. Whilst teachers were fully aware of their ethical duty to get to know their students this systematic approach in the delivery of the activities and involvement in associated discussions, 'put more emphasis on this.' 'Exploring and working with developing the learners' attitudes and mind-sets' enabled teachers whose main focus had previously been to ensure the effective delivery of a tightly time-scaled curriculum to develop a more holistic understanding of their students. One teacher openly and powerfully articulated this significant change in his perception of the individuals with whom he works:

Now, I see the students as whole people more, as teenagers who happen to be learning GCSE English. So a holistic view to me means seeing them as whole people, which means thinking about their previous experiences, their home life, their plans for the future, levels of self-esteem, how they cope with problems, their interests outside college, hobbies, family life etc. Like I said it is not as if I have ignored these other elements before but their role as GCSE English Language learners was always their central role. Taking part in the OTLA project helped me to see that this role was secondary, or at least only a small part of who they are. And I think by focusing particularly on developing their levels of determination, their self-esteem and so on, this can only benefit them in their English learning and should almost be the starting point.

Importantly, the proactive planning of activities, which explicitly tackle issues with self-motivation ensured that teachers were not having to fall back continually on their classroom management techniques. This direct and purposeful approach to understanding the self in learning, which was made explicit to learners at the outset of

and throughout the academic year, has proved to have had a significant impact on reducing challenging behaviours associated with 'attitudes (which) reflect expectations of continuing failure driven by their own lack of self-esteem.' (DFE,2017:30). Planning and delivering those activities which directly address underlying attitudes to learning and the self has proved for many teachers to be an effective way to 'get to know students well.' Relationships from earlier on in the academic year have improved. A direct and immediate consequence of this was a significant decrease in behavioural interventions, including a considerable decrease in students 'bunking off' after break. The dramatic reduction of mid-session absenteeism led one teacher to comment, 'I'd forgotten that that was ever even an issue'. Furthermore, it has long been recognised that the quality and nature of student-teacher relationship and the fostering of adult-to-adult, rather than the parent-child, transactional relationship is central to student engagement in Further Education and consequent achievement in learning (DFE, 2017). It is evident that the embedding, delivery and explicit promotion and focus upon confidence in the self and learning accelerates the speed at which this relationship develops. A teacher reported that the activities have been used 'as a way to talk to my students,' improving relationships between the teacher and their students. Such tasks enable learners to see their tutors as 'more human,' enabling a greater understanding of shared experiences relating to motivation and resilience.

Crucially, paying such careful and explicit attention to developing students' confidence and self-belief has enabled teachers to become more skilled in spotting small signs of progress and finding ways to present these in a way which is tangible to students. A teacher commented, for example, that he has a heightened awareness of small and incremental indications of improved attitudes towards learning, which he may have overlooked or not perceived in this way in the past. He highlighted, for example, increases in motivation reflected in students 'answering more questions' than expected in an assignment or learners 'asking for help rather than doing nothing' if they did not understand an aspect of their work. Involvement in the project has not only drawn this teacher's attention to such signifiers of increased motivation but has encouraged him to develop the confidence and strategies to draw learners' focus to such positive steps in their learning journey. Increasingly, he is developing, and refining, a lexicon to present these vital 'steps to success' to his students. This in turn is self-perpetuating. As students receive the recognition for small steps of progress, which could have been over looked or misinterpreted, so they grow in confidence and desire to make further progress. Essentially such teacher behaviours act as a positive stimulus to students' intrinsic motivations. Use of positive praise is of course a well-regarded teacher technique. However, what is clear is that involvement in the project, the daily systematic and explicit foregrounding and exploring of mind-sets for learning has refreshed teachers' practice in this key area. It has sharpened their skills in providing constructive feedback on soft skills, which create conditions for independent, self-motivated, and directed learning.

Changing the teachers' mindsets

It is evident that this activity altered teachers' perceptions of themselves as practitioners. Tutors discovered that the planning for, and delivery of, activities centred on developing the 'whole' student, his /her mind-sets for learning and resilience, engendered a move away from a potentially damaging and demoralising perception of themselves as 'exam factory' facilitators. This perception, a tutor acknowledges, stems from how many students they teach and 'how quickly we need to get them through the curriculum.' For such teachers, time and space in purely subject-focused curriculum delivery had always been a limiting factor in the development of the pastoral side of things. Following the embedding of mind-sets for learning into the curriculum the pastoral side of a teacher's role within session planning became 'more proactive rather than reactive.' Teachers recognised that they must explore ways to 'understand fully the reasons for students' lack of motivation.'

Furthermore, the improved teacher-student relationship stimulated by delivery of the activities enabled teachers to support students whose lack of motivation to learn English due to the 'Groundhog Day of resits' and repeated failure necessitates them 'needing inspiration on a different level.' One teacher found that exploring an activity on the distraction techniques which individuals adopt to avoid undertaking challenging tasks enabled some of his students to begin 'to assess the fact that they were much more intelligent than they realised.' Such glimmers of recognition of 'personal intelligence' displayed for the teacher small levels of progression which he observed, 'in return lifts the teacher.' It is important not to underestimate the importance such realisations have on learners whose self-esteem has been damaged by a 'system which labels more than a third of 16-year olds as failures.' (Busby, 2019)

Certainly, involvement in the delivery of the activities for some teachers has had a transformative effect on their perceptions of the learner journey. Before engaging in the project, although teachers would be committed to enabling learners to share responsibility for their own learning and assessment, most perceived their role to be that of facilitator, ensuring that they provide effective support for his/her student on their individual learning journey. For one highly experienced teacher, as the open discourse with students in her groups progressed during the academic year, deepening in their mutual explorations of experiences relating to learning, so did her understanding of learning. She began to perceive learning to be no longer 'something to be completed as individuals.' For her it became apparent that it is a 'shared journey between the individuals in the group and the teacher.' Her delivery of the activities and facilitating their associated discussions accelerated group cohesion and the sense of community within her adult learners. It ensured that they were soon, 'really working together to achieve, rather than as individuals, sharing life lessons, achievements and experiences in an open way, in a safe space.' She found that some discussions led to this 'being felt in a tangible way' ultimately changing the way she teaches and views adult learning. Crucially, such a focused and systematic delivery of the activities has also increased her empathy, as 'listening to the voices, attitudes and experiences of some of my students, especially some of the older learners has been a really humbling and eye-opening experience.'

The importance of developing a language of personal growth

The most important catalyst for such change, whether it be within the student or teacher, is of course through language. The success of the delivery of the activities, the levels of engagement of the students in the tasks and their associated discussions, all hinge on how the teacher uses language to explore issues relating to confidence and self-belief in learning and life. English teachers, by the very nature of their subject and academic background, are seen to be highly effective communicators. There is perhaps a tacit assumption that all English tutors carefully consider the connotations of the language they use and its potential impact on the individuals with whom they work. This, however, is not always the case. One experienced teacher admitted that 'before the project I gave little thought to the possible implications of the language I used and the potentially negative impact it could be having on learners.'

Indeed, it was the delivery of an activity on the language of mind-set, which instantly compelled this teacher to be, 'much more thoughtful of the vocabulary' he uses, especially when giving feedback to learners. For example, he now avoids using the verb 'try', which he would frequently use with learners who were struggling with an activity. The focus on the powerful implications of language for those who have experienced failure has led him to recognise that when he would say things such as 'just try it' he was perhaps sending 'a message that...they are going to find it difficult and might not be able to do it which now seems to be the wrong message to send.'

The teacher now constantly appraises his use of language. He considers carefully its implicit connotations for learners lacking confidence in their abilities. For example, by eliminating the verb 'try' and by using vocabulary that sends the message that they are able to complete the activity such as 'Complete the next question' or 'Do the next exercise' he communicates to his learners a belief that the task is inherently achievable.

Additionally, when giving feedback he is now mindful to, as Dweck suggested:

adopt the word 'yet' when giving feedback. If a student is not at the appropriate level, I frame the discussion to imply they are not there 'yet', implying that they will get better through practice. Often learners will be quite negative when I give feedback and they have achieved a lower mark than expected. They will use phrases such as 'I can't do it'. Sometimes I would reformulate it by using a phrase such as 'I can't do it, yet', implying that they would succeed if they kept on working.

Importantly, this focus on language and its power has led this tutor to become more skilled in positively reframing learning experiences for students experiencing feelings of frustration and disappointment when not achieving higher marks for their work.

Crucially, he now encourages his students to consider the language they use around learning by asking them to use the phrases 'I can't do it' and 'I can't do it yet' and have a talk about which one felt better to say or more empowering.'

Additionally, now he will routinely:

generate ... discussion about the making of mistakes and that this is how people learn ... framing their mistakes as opportunities to learn something and improve.

In addition to encouraging students to reframe their challenging learning experiences in terms of growth rather than stagnation, teachers gained confidence in frequently questioning students about their mind-sets for learning. They attested that they have increased their focus 'on students being positive and resilient.' One teacher commented that, 'I ask a lot more questions to students when they display a lack of motivation.' Using questions such as 'why do you think you are feeling like that?' she now encourages her students to confront issues relating to resilience. She has grown in confidence in enabling her learners to explore why they are feeling demotivated in class in an open and supported environment.

Critically, for several teachers, increasingly thoughtful consideration of the power of their language has enabled teachers to hone and develop in a much more nuanced way their ability to motivate and inspire learners. One teacher, for example, acknowledged that one of the biggest changes he had observed about himself as a practitioner was that the focus on mind-sets for learning ensured that he had 'a more robust toolkit of words, language and questions' to use with 'learners who are having a negative experience.' The focus on metacognition which the activities demand, has improved his wider practice, beyond delivery of the specific tasks. It has helped him frame learning experiences, which students often perceive to be demoralising, in a way that is more positive. Using words and phrases with connotations of development and growth, such as 'progress not perfection' he has seen a considerable improvement in the ways students react to challenges in learning. Additionally, he now frequently uses questions which encourage young people to consider what they have learnt from that experience rather than purely focusing on what they have achieved from a subject specific perspective.

Importantly, this heightened focus on language has enabled teachers to look differently at their teaching. They now routinely ensure that they are constantly encouraging individuals within their classes 'to believe in themselves.' One teacher perceives his involvement in the project to have been 'vital in reversing... negativity' felt by adult learners who lack confidence in themselves. With these students he integrates within every session discussions around confidence during which he encourages and aims to inspire this within in all of his learners. Whilst he was an experienced and successful teacher prior to involvement in the project, he considers that this continued foregrounding and focus on this transformative human emotion has had an empowering impact upon his students. For many of his students it has ensured that they have made much better progression than expected. In addition, his students have articulated that they are 'extremely encouraged by his positive language.' Although he recognises the fact that 'adults really buy into the attempt to inspire', he highlights the need for him to review and adjust his approach for younger learners who also need constant encouragement. Involvement in the project has attuned him to the underlying reasons for behaviours, which at a surface level he previously interpreted as

disinterest in and lack of care for learning. He now understands much more fully that failing to attempt work, absenteeism and other challenging behaviours are diversionary tactics which reflect expectations of continuing failure driven by students' low self-esteem. (DFE, 2017) It has attuned him to the undeniable fact that resitting English is for many young people a highly stressful and emotional experience.

Managing tensions between English content and mind-set processes

Whilst teachers have, in the main, enthusiastically adapted their approaches to delivery of the English curriculum to incorporate the activities and discussions, some have experienced an understandable internal conflict regarding their priorities as teachers of resit GCSE English Language. Some tutors experienced feelings of anxiety over not having dedicated the whole of their sessions to the facilitation of learning of the subject. One teacher commented, 'I found it a huge challenge to weigh up the benefit of practising another Q4 or using the time to address their fear of failure.' A professional awareness that 'not knowing how to answer question 4 would surely result in students not achieving a grade 4 or above' inspired this tutor to 'succumb to the demands of the academic curriculum,' rather than, 'consistently using mind-set activities' in all of her sessions. Another teacher's anxieties led her to allow the demands of the curriculum to 'win over' leading her sometimes to 'ignore the mind-set activity' in favour of 'teaching to the exam.' However, on reflection both teachers felt that allowing the focus on the curriculum to lure them away from the planned delivery of the activities was in hindsight an error as it 'would have probably helped their English work in the long run.' Crucially, as the year progressed teachers engaging in the project recognised that 'mind-set activities were just as relevant ... as the subject matter.' Involvement in the project led to a more acute and shared understanding by the team that 'if learners are not in the correct mind-set to access the learning of a subject which they have been deemed as failures in, there is little to no point in teaching the content.' Teachers recognised that a way forward would be to place a greater emphasis on the planning of the activities to align with the main objectives of the lesson. During the academic year, there was some successful experimentation with such approaches. One teacher noted that she 'felt most confident and saw the biggest impact when the mind-set resource we used played into the outcome of the session.' This resource which developed students' creative writing skills 'placated [her] need to teach to the exam as it was embedded within the activity itself.'

Conclusion

For many teachers, the embedding and delivering of the activities within the session, underpinned by the careful consideration of the language they use with their students, has had a profound impact on their own personal well-being and resilience. For some teachers this unintended consequence has been transformative. One teacher commented that 'some of the tasks and topics have actually challenged my own thought processes and attitudes about life generally.' She reports that activities, such as ones which encourage students to consider what they can learn from 'mistakes' or failure have helped her to have 'a realisation about the way in which I think about

mistakes, adapting to change and being resilient.’ For another teacher, delivery of the activities made him perceive himself in ‘a more holistic way’ in the classroom recognising ‘that we are not just teachers, or learners, we are people.’ For this teacher, ‘completing the activities alongside his learners’ is ‘having a positive impact on [his] self-belief, self-esteem and confidence.’ He perceives that it is ‘having a huge impact on my life.’ For another teacher, involvement in the project has led her to consider that ‘change isn’t to be feared,’ inspiring her to be ‘less averse to risk and less frightened to choose a less secure option.’ Ultimately, such positive changes in teachers’ perceptions of themselves will not only be of benefit to them in their personal life but also to their students. Resilient and fulfilled teachers are more likely to engage their students, in addition to being genuine advocates for the power of self-efficacy.

The integration of the activities, the discussions around mind-sets for learning and the explicit and sustained attention to the language of motivation has profoundly affected the ways in which this and many other teachers involved in the project now perceive their learners and themselves as practitioners. Teachers have developed a greater depth of understanding of their GCSE students’ beliefs and attitudes towards themselves as learners. They have a heightened insight into, and sensitivity towards, the profound emotional impact repeated failure in examinations has on young people. Furthermore, the focus on challenging attitudes towards learning and the self has also enabled teachers to develop their skills in the use of language in the classroom. Additionally, an important and unintended consequence of delivery of the activities has been a fostering of a greater sense of teachers’ professional self-worth and self-respect; changing mind-sets for learners has enabled a powerful change of mind-sets for teachers. This in the longer, as well as short term, can only benefit students.

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You can lead a student to books, but you can't make them read: encouraging a culture of reading in a subject-based setting

Dom Thompson

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There is clear evidence that shows the impact that reading can have on vocabulary, emotional intelligence and exam success (Patton, 2011). 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 on the future success of the young person (Douglas, 2013).

The challenge faced is that reading simply is perceived as uncool by many, in particular, boys (Topping, 2015) and can also be perceived as an act that is forced upon students. This could not have been clearer when speaking to FE lecturing staff, teaching assistants and librarians where, on one occasion, a student commented 'books are dead!'. In addition, anecdotal evidence from staff clearly showed that students did not see the benefits of reading, either for their subject or for their wider personal or professional development. Therefore, it seemed important to see, through some small-scale changes, how lecturers in specific subject areas could challenge this view, particularly with the huge amount of time that young people spend on technology and social media. Could we take advantage of this shift in how free time is spent?

In the 2016 Digital Trends Survey 46% of students said it was important to be able to study on a mobile device, while 22% said studying on a mobile device was extremely important. In addition, 60% of students surveyed said they have used their smartphones for studying. 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 six hours a day. In addition, only half of students visited social media sites almost every day in 2008, compared with 82% by 2016 (Twenge et al, 2018).

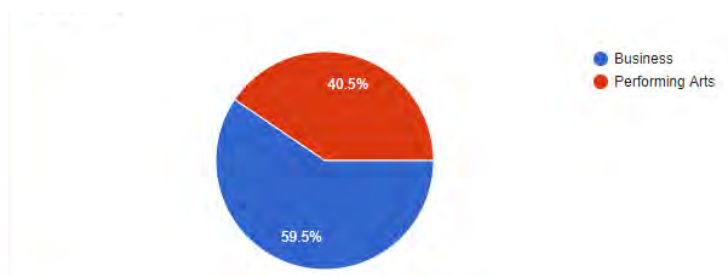
At the same time, young people in the 2010s spent significantly less time on print media, TV, or movies compared with young people in previous decades. The percentage of students who read a book or a magazine every day declined from 60% in the late 1970s to 16% by 2016. The rapid adoption of digital media since the 2000s has displaced the consumption of legacy media. (IBID)

That being said, reading and using technology can, and should, work hand-in-hand and open up more avenues for young people in terms of accessibility, variety and quality. This is something this project sought to capitalise on with the integration of social media use with a traditional reading activity.

Culture or 'The way things are done round here' (Schein, 1993), is something that clearly does not happen overnight. It takes time and small changes need to be enacted gradually to reach the cultural shift desired. According to Schein there are three layers to culture; the 'artefact' (the book/poster encouraging reading), the 'behaviour' (how much is read) and the 'assumption' (that reading is boring/interesting/useful). This project sought to challenge some of the negative assumptions that were seen in students, create positive behaviours and enable access to artefacts that might prove useful.

In order to achieve this, it was key to understand the motivations behind reading (or not reading) for students and then work to challenge any misconceptions or incorrect assumptions. Using the TEST (Target, Explore, Solution, Trial) methodology (BIT, 2017) the focus was on two groups of students: BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma Business students and BTEC level 3 Extended Diploma Performing Arts students. These areas were chosen as they were quite different in terms of subject and also, within those areas, there are very motivated and positive lecturers who wanted to be part of the project.

Fig 1. Q. What subject are you studying at college?



With each group a slightly different approach was trialled/tested.

The Idea

The business students had a presentation by a local author and were given a copy of his book. The author also spoke passionately about his background, his love for reading and the impact this has had on his personal and professional development. 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 the importance of reading. The purpose here was to demonstrate the impact that reading can have (as identified by Patton (2011) and Douglas (2013) previously). In addition, the author encouraged the students to reach out to him on social media with comments about the book and questions that he could then respond directly to.

The performing arts students were given a screen play adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, asked to read this and then also watched the film. The purpose here was to understand what students thought about the differences between the book and the film; what they preferred and why.

Topping, in his 2015 article, argues that young people, particularly boys, feel that reading is forced upon them and therefore do not see the enjoyment in it. This can be seen in Fig 2 and 3 (below) which is part of a survey sent to all students before they were introduced to the book/activity.

Fig 2. Q. If you do read, why?

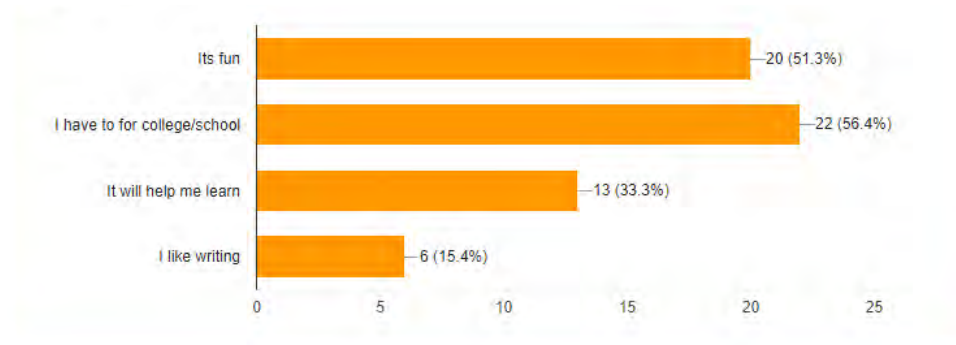
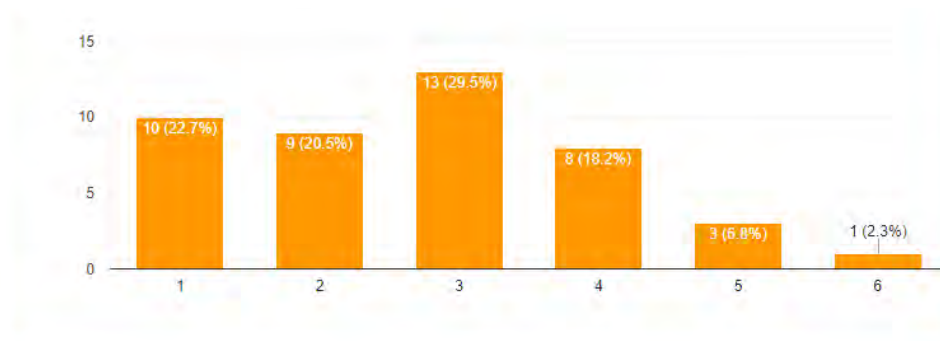


Fig 3. Q. Do you think reading is important? (1 = Very Important, 6 = Pointless)



This shows that 73% of the students scored 3 or above. However, when further analysing the data, if we look at solely the business students (20), then the data shifts with only 45% scoring 3 or above (see Fig. 4). What this also shows, by process of elimination, is that all performing arts students scored 4 or more (in fact, only 1 performing arts scored 4, the rest scored 3 or above).

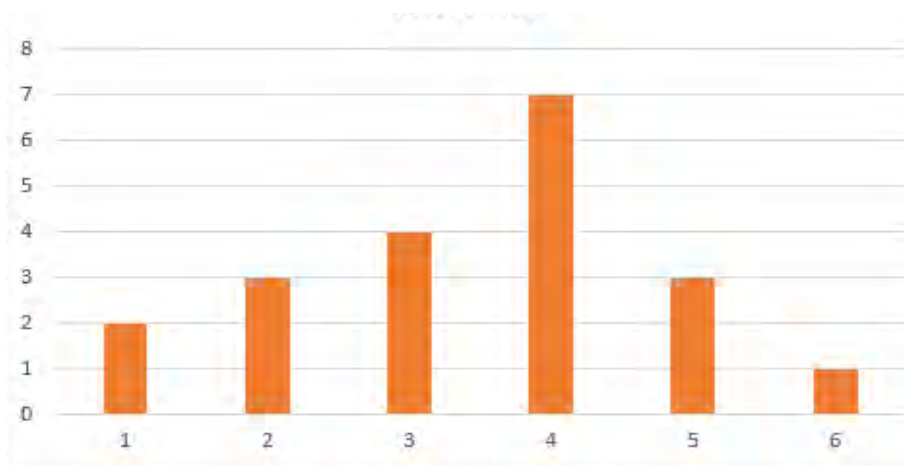


Fig 4. Q. Do you think reading is important (1 = Very Important, 6 = Pointless) – Business students only

At this stage, it wasn't clear why this difference existed; it could have been subject specific, or simply a different group of learners.

It was hoped that, through these two trials, a more positive outlook on reading would be seen and a small shift towards a culture of reading would have been achieved.

However, as a colleague succinctly, and amusingly, put it, 'You can lead a student to books, but you can't make them read ...'

So – What actually happened?

When the author came in to speak to the business students, they were extremely positive, asking questions and engaging with the activities that he facilitated. Sadly, that's where the success faltered somewhat. It was hoped that the book would be perfect; it has ten small chapters (around ten pages each chapter) and at the end of each chapter there were three questions the students could answer in the book to confirm their understanding. And, it linked extremely well with one of the units the students were studying on their course – a perfect fit! Or so we thought ...

Only a few weeks into the project it was clear that the students were not reading the book and, even more surprisingly, had not contacted the author on social media. This was despite his offer to support them throughout the project and also to mentor them with turning their small business ideas in reality. One reason for this was made clear when speaking to one of the students about a month into the project. Perhaps peer pressure played a part here but nonetheless the comment does make you think:

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

In Nancy Falchikov's book (2005) she talks extensively about how assessments, such as in this study, could benefit from student involvement in the decisions made and how this involvement could then have a direct impact on learning. Reflecting on this and comments from students it is now clear that they should have been more involved in the choice of book but, like in many circumstances, hindsight is a wonderful thing!

Although it was a struggle getting the business students to read the book, when the author came back in and delivered the final session with the students they were, again, engaged and truly interested in what the author had to say. The students identified barriers to reading (time and distractions being the main two) and the author was able to give them some useful tips and tricks and also use his own experience to motivate them. This was most likely down to the fact that the author delivered an excellent session; his passion for his subject area and for reading was infectious and he made the ideas in the book

...jump out of the page. (BTEC Business Student)

He did actually make sense; he's done really well, and he talked so much about how reading has helped him do well and make money – I am going to try and read more. I've just got to find what to read that I like (laughs). (BTEC Business Student)

Reading increases your vocabulary; it means you can find out more things and then use them when you need to. (BTEC Business student)

Business Lecturer's views

My view of the project was that it was overall successful and it had a positive effect on the students. I know that several students have increased their reading and lending from the library as a result of the project. The main issue with the project was the students being asked to read two chapters each week and then discuss in a lesson. This proved to be difficult as most of the students were not reading the chapters. However, by the end of the project most students had read the book in their own time. A possible solution may have been to have supplied the book electronically as an eBook. The author was a good presenter and seemed to capture the students' attention and imagination in the sessions. If this project was repeated, then I would be interested in being involved again.

On the performing arts side, the students took to the project from the very start. In fact, just being involved in a piece of research was motivational for them, let alone the project itself. They read the screen play of *Anna Karenina* within one week and then watched the film.

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)

What was very unexpected was that the students, after completing this activity, then petitioned their lecturer to actually put on the play, which they then did (and clips of this can be seen in the video - link at the bottom of the article).

Performing Arts Lecturer's views

Being involved in the Culture of Reading project has been a rewarding experience for the students in my Performing Arts cohort. The students engaged with reading the Anna Karenina play text in a way that was thoughtful and considered, evidenced in discussions regarding plot, character and style; we read parts of the text together as a whole group which encouraged interest and debate. The students were keen to watch the film adaptation of the same title and made some good observations regarding character interpretation and differences or similarities between the two versions. The students demonstrated a keen interest often revisiting particular scenes in the text to explore the sub-text. Some students were inspired to read the full novel version also, as their interests had been sparked. 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!

Final Thoughts

This was only a small-scale study where two approaches were trialled to encourage students to read more as part of their vocational course at college. It sought to demonstrate the benefits reading can have, both personally and professionally, and show that reading can, in fact, be fun, interesting and engaging. Clearly, there were mixed results, with one group taking to the task with passion and enthusiasm and the other being more reluctant. This could have been due to the different subject area, the fact that business students felt like the book was imposed upon them or a myriad of different reasons. The main takeaways as part of the study being that:

- Students listen to external speakers and take on board the comments they make
- Involving students in any decision, wherever possible, gives a project/task more chance of success
- Letting students know they are part of a research project is a motivator in itself.

In addition, in both the business and performing arts work rooms, the project encouraged and developed discussions between colleagues about how reading can be embedded more into schemes of work and lessons, which is something performing arts, business and other curriculum areas are looking at doing in the new academic year.

An example of this would be the linking of grading criteria to reading in Sport. The teaching team are asking the students to select an autobiography of their choice of a person in sport and will link this to the teaching of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students will then reflect on their reading, complete an evaluation of the motivational factors affecting the sports person and, via completion of this, achieve pass, merit and/or distinction criteria as part of their BTEC qualification.

And finally, as has been the case with previous projects, the actual act of completing and being involved in action research in college is also motivational for lecturers. Having the chance to look at their practice, adapt and reflect all the while having the support of being involved in 'research' clearly has a positive impact on staff and is something that, at the college, is very much a part of the culture of the organisation (See articles in FE news (Thompson, 2019) and an AOC *Think Piece* (Thompson, 2017)).

You can hear more comments from the lecturers involved in the project in this short reflective video - <https://youtu.be/T6BiLckBwtY>

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Visualise...with a visualiser

Louisa Hubbard

This is Louisa's first year as Head of English at Suffolk New College, where she has worked for eight years. Passionate about inclusion and developing life chances for young people, she has an MA in Community Education and started her career as a Youth Worker in Nottinghamshire. Here, she developed a fascination with teaching literacy. After a short stop at Loughborough College she re-located to Suffolk. She has taught Functional English and GCSE English Language throughout her career. Louisa can be contacted at louisahubbard@suffolk.ac.uk

Introduction

For those of us who teach young people on the GCSE re-sit programme in FE there are lesson-by-lesson reminders of the obstacles that our students face. My project aimed to explore the use of a visualiser in improving the way we model text annotation and different stages of the writing process. I wanted to look at ways to improve our students' literacy skills and enhance their educational experience in the classroom. The OTLA project provided an opportunity to proceed.

Suffolk New College is a mixed, further education college located in central Ipswich. The English Team consists of 15 tremendously dedicated teachers.

Rationale

The issue that I am addressing is that a high percentage of young people leave secondary school not having achieved a grade 4 or above in their GCSE English. This is significant as it means that their literacy skills are limited. The ramifications are far-reaching and potentially devastating: life chances, social inclusion, economic prospects and the potential for social mobility are all curtailed. I am committed to changing this.

I have been teaching literacy with post 16 students for 20 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. I wanted to address the weak reading and writing skills that are presented by many of our students. With only a year available our students needed to quickly learn and improve their skills.

I considered several different approaches, through discussions with experienced members of the team. Initially, I was going to attempt to embed a reading culture across the college. I do believe that this had the potential to be transformational, but I was sceptical about levels of engagement outside of timetabled sessions. The biggest impact that I could instil was when students were in the classroom. I concluded that the team of teachers were best placed to harness the skills of the students.

An online community of practitioners guided my approach. I have been a participant of this community for a number of years and the educators revered their visualisers. I read description after description stating how crucial they are. I felt that this approach had 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, how had I not used one before? I wanted to implement the use of a visualiser as a new teaching strategy and methodology with the aim of improving teacher/ peer modelling. This particular option was affordable, practical and controllable. I felt confident that I could successfully implement it and this formed the basis of the bid I submitted.

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

Approach

Collaboration ensured that a wide range of professionals' experiences nourished the project. A senior examiner acted as my mentor and a regional subject lead offered advice and guidance. I purchased five visualisers and arranged for the accompanying software to be installed on our computers. I then arranged CPD to embed their use throughout the English curriculum.

With little time available, I 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 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 which provided further motivation.

Progress on the project was an agenda item on a weekly meeting that monitored developments. We looked at a variety of evidence using achievement data gathered from mock assessments, staff reflections, students' focus group discussions and comparison of student work pre- and post-project. These all shaped the research process. Students' bookwork was analysed and discussed. Overall, we were looking at the level of detail that the students had produced. Were they engaging in the tasks? Were their annotation skills improved following the modelling?

We set up and used a Padlet board and Google Forms to enable teachers to provide on-going feedback on their use of visualisers and to share examples of resources they

used. There were some ethical issues in the choice of the focus group. This was not completely random and was dictated by timetabling, availability etc.

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 experience the planning and thought processes that went behind them.

The Padlet board (see Appendix 1) 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 that can be shared with others after the session as revision resources. (see link to sample video in Appendix 1).

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Increased modelling using a visualiser has now become a cornerstone of our English lessons and is included in our curriculum planning documents.

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.

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 (see Appendix 1).

We gathered quantitative data that shows an increase 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 (see Appendix 2).

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

I felt that the facility to record text annotation activities using the visualisers was extremely useful as it enabled us to create detailed catch-up resources for learners who do not attend due to a range of difficult personal circumstances.

From the different types of evidence gathered from our research activities I would conclude that -

- The level of single word analysis has increased
- The level of language feature analysis is greater
- Learners are now able to label words and phrases more fully and accurately with their connotations and associations
- Learners are now able to identify word classes or language features more accurately
- Students report increased confidence in writing a response to exam style questions that includes pertinent and appropriate quotations
- Learners' higher order thinking skills have been developed
- There is a greater immediacy in verbal feedback
- Learners are better able to discriminate between work created at a L2 and L3 (grade 3 or 4).

However, our use of a visualiser has not led to an improvement in all of 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 exams. Unfortunately, many students remain unmotivated and disengaged 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.

The learning that surprised me the most was how much a difference a small investment can make. Budgets have been so incredibly tight throughout my career that the opportunities to gather research and try something new just were not there. I learnt what is possible when a structure is in place that creates the time to reflect on what is happening and place the teacher, the learning and the student at the heart of the matter. This pertains to the importance of bodies such as the OTLA to my organisation, the FE sector and policy makers. In order for the sector to move forwards investment in action research is crucial. It provides an interface between practitioners and policy makers that can be the catalyst to improvements in education and the life chances of young people who are so often forgotten.

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.

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Appendices

- 1 [Padlet board](#) containing a range of project resources including
 - feedback from students
 - feedback comments from teachers
 - links to PowerPoint slides containing exemplars of student work before and after the introduction of visualisers
 - link to video recordings of text annotation undertaken with learners
- 2 [Results from assessments](#)
3. [Feedback from teachers](#) on the initial CPD event
4. [Feedback from students](#) in the focus group
5. [Questionnaire](#) used with teachers

Using an online environment to scaffold ESOL trainee-teachers' reflective noticings: a teacher educator's case study

Cathy Clarkson

Cathy has been teaching in FE for almost 20 years, initially teaching literacy, beginner ICT and ESOL before moving into Teacher Education to teach the CELTA, the L3 Award in Education and Training to volunteer ESOL teachers on the Talk English project and the PGCE. She is undertaking an EdD, engaging in an action research project exploring Yammer, a social networking site (Microsoft, 2019), used in Teaching Practice (TP) to explore the role of technology in observation and learning how to teach on the CELTA.

Introduction

There is a significant element of peer observation on the CELTA. ESOL students come to a two-hour lesson where three ESOL trainee teachers teach a 40-minute slot each. While one trainee is teaching, the other trainees and the tutor, are observing. At the end of the class, the ESOL students leave and the trainees and tutor discuss the observed lessons. Finally, each trainee receives written feedback from the tutor, and they complete a written self-evaluation. These forms, along with their lesson materials and lesson plan, form their portfolio.

To support analysis and reflection, I have previously given trainees specific tasks to complete while observing, which involved a guided handout on which they make notes, working alone and in silence. Yammer has been used on the past two courses as a tool for 'synchronous chat', creating a text-based environment for the tutor and the observing trainees to share notes whilst the lesson is being observed. Traditionally, synchronous chat is used for distant participants to work together simultaneously from different physical locations. It may seem counter-intuitive to use this technology within a classroom setting, but there are advantages to sharing a physical location; for example, students are communicating with people that they know and the tutor is also present to monitor and guide the discussion (see figure 1). This text-based environment has similar affordances to that of synchronous video observations, providing an environment to develop professional learning through collaboratively focusing on a session and developing informed reflective practice. By establishing a peer community it encourages trainees and the tutor to raise and discuss questions or problems; to focus on the relationship between the tutor and ESOL students; to observe different strategies and to provide 'opportunities for reflection through analysis of observed situations, evaluation of the strategies and stimulation brought about by discussing the issues observed' (Marsh et al., 2010). Through utilising Yammer, 'while-observation' discussions take place in a text-based chat environment, providing a shared language to talk about teaching and learning through peer support and the insights of the tutor.



Figure 1 Transcript from Tee5's TP8 showing how two topics overlap

What does the literature say that trainee teachers learn from observing others and being observed? Learning from observing others is dependent on what is noticed; trainees have to be able to identify what is important or noteworthy about a classroom situation and trainee-teachers can struggle with this (Van Es and Sherin, 2002). When observed by others, you have to be able to reflect on your own practice and the feedback given. However, there is little consensus into the practicalities of how to teach reflective practice skills (Korthagen, 2017). Some research suggests that trainee teachers have weak reflective practice skills (Borg, 2002) although there is research

(Mackenzie, 2018) that found CELTA trainees were reflecting more critically. Some research into reflective practice derives from written reflections, and if these have been completed as an assessed part of the course, this can lead to strategic reflections, whereby trainees write what they think the trainer wants to hear (Hobbs, 2007). Discussion, including post-observation conversations, was the most common reflective tool identified in a literature review of research looking at practices to encourage reflection in TESOL teachers, with classroom observation being the third most common tool after journal writing (Farrell 2015). The research suggests that post-observation conversation can facilitate reflections on theory and practice for pre-service teachers, with a focus on classroom practice.

Building on this, the use of synchronised chat on the CELTA has raised the following questions for me about how trainees learn to teach ESOL through observing others. What is noticed and commented on by the trainees and the tutor in the 'while-' and 'post-observation' discussions? What strategies can I use during peer observation to support the development of observation and reflective practice skills?

Approach

To address these questions, I worked with five participants who formed one Teaching Practice (TP) group on a part time CELTA. Data was collected from the eighth teaching practice (TP8) which comprised five 40-minute TPs delivered to a low beginner/E1 ESOL group. Tee1 and Tee5 delivered lessons one week and Tee2, 3 and 4 delivered lessons the next. I studied the Yammer transcript created in the while-observation chat between the tutor and the observing trainees; this was complemented by a recording of our post-observation discussions together with documents from each trainee's portfolio (a lesson plan, resources, tutor written feedback and the trainee's self-evaluation). I also interviewed the group on the final day of the course.

For the first stage of analysis I became familiar with the data (Wellington, 2015). My field notes from this initial stage showed how I was viewing these both as a teacher and as a researcher. As their teacher, I was pleased with the engagement from the trainees, and appreciated their contributions to the post-observation discussions (the debriefing following the observed session). The first 7-10 minutes involved the trainees working collaboratively, but independently from me, while they reviewed topics which I had given them on post-it notes. The topics on each post-it covered points which had arisen during the while-observation chats or which I thought were key themes for each trainee. Common themes were instructions; monitoring; error correction; drilling; and use of the whiteboard and interactive whiteboard. This initial task gave the trainees time to think about each topic and make a choice about which they felt had been a key aspect of each of their own or their peers' practice. Following this initial task, each trainee who had taught that evening choose the topic they wanted to focus on in the group discussion. Stillwell (2009) suggests it is important that teachers take the lead in choosing topics of discussion in the post-observation meeting, and that it is OK if some things are 'overlooked' as there needs to be a balance between giving critical and positive feedback. Walsh et al (2020) suggest there is also a need for expert guidance

for beginner teachers in order to facilitate discussions of observed classroom activity. This post-it activity provided opportunity for both these aspects.

To familiarise myself with the data from the Yammer transcript I created a table where I copied over each comment, making a note of who had made it, who had 'liked' it and whether it had been a reply to a previous comment. I then looked for broad themes within these comments, what Walsh et al. (2020) term 'meaningful chunks' or 'idea units'. At this stage I didn't categorise any 'stand-alone' comments, as I wanted to focus on where there had been some kind of dialogue or shared theme, as online discussions resemble spoken discourse (Farrell, 2016).

Once I had the transcript copied over with these initial themes I started to explore the data in more detail, to decide which themes are important and to build hierarchies of themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). For this I moved between the while- and post-observation transcripts, and the documents from their portfolio, such as my written feedback and their self-evaluations. In doing this, I was looking for common themes within and between each trainee.

Through this process I could feel the pull and push of my role as a CELTA tutor and as a researcher. First and foremost, I am a CELTA tutor. I want to help my trainees to learn to be ESOL teachers and therefore as a researcher I want to draw on the experiences and the voices of my trainees. The final day group interview mirrored the discussion space of the post-observation discussions and I was interested in the interactions between the trainees. This group interview also encouraged the trainees to respond to and build on each other's views. As their teacher, I needed to be able to hear and respond to their issues in order to address them for the next cohort. During this data analysis, I was making notes for ways to adapt my practice for the next CELTA course. Ideas have included providing guidance to look explicitly at their role during and after the peer observation; sharing the trainees' personal objectives on Yammer as they start their lesson; and adapting the self-evaluation sheet to provide different prompts to support their written reflections after the post-observation meeting. I discuss my findings and interpretations in more detail below. (I have anonymized the trainees through the use of Tee1, Tee2, etc. for the trainees)

Findings & discussion

The online environment: the dual purpose of the while-observation chat

In the group interview, Tee1 usefully highlighted some complementary benefits of Yammer: ostensibly, to give feedback to the person teaching.

... so this is what this person is doing in front of us. What do we want to give them as positive impact, positive criticism...

and then

...what we actually learned from it. It's got a dual purpose. It serves for the tutor to input whilst we're observing, what we should be looking at in our own

teaching as well, whilst also being able to give instantaneous constructive feedback to the actual person doing the TP.

It is helpful to explore this dual purpose a little more. Firstly, providing feedback to the person teaching. Tee1 describes the value of the transcript from her own lesson.

Sometimes I can be a bit overly reflective in a negative sense whereas, when you've got other people observing, giving you that feedback, you start realizing what you're doing that's really good.

She valued being able to read the transcript as soon as she had finished her lesson and Tee4 also read it straight away. Tee5 said Yammer was a starting point for reflecting on areas for development and gave an example of giving instructions,

As I try to improve, the comments in Yammer helped and guided me to say this could be a little bit clearer, maybe if I did this differently or, this is a point where I gave a clear instruction, I remember that and I remembered how I did it.

This affordance of Yammer can add an extra dimension to other peer observation or video observation schemes, as it creates and saves this collaboratively written transcript for the observed trainee to review and reflect upon. Marsh and Mitchell (2014) note that synchronous use of video enables reflection and evaluation of live classrooms, with real people in real situations, which includes the value of trainees to be able to see 'bad' or 'mediocre' practice, and the observation of real-life dilemmas and decisions. However, in their research there was no continuing relationship between the trainees observing and the tutor being observed and the observed tutor was not involved in the analysis of the lesson, and this would obviously influence the dynamics and nature of the observers' comments. The challenge I faced was how to encourage trainees to give honest feedback on these areas for development through this written chat function in a way that was useful for the observed trainee. If this written transcript was not to be viewed by the observed trainee, for example if it had the affordance of Snapchat, whereby once it was read by the observing trainees then it disappeared, might this change the nature of the comments? Is this permanency of written feedback a contributing factor to how the trainees engage in the while-observation discussions?

The second purpose of Yammer which Tee1 had identified was my tutor input, guiding the observing trainees in what to be looking for. The trainees spoke about how the discussions in Yammer helped them notice what is important, although Tee4 worried that Yammer could also become a distraction:

We're all praising Yammer but the only slightly negative thing I would say about it is, when you are concentrating on what to write it takes you away from the classroom. It distracts me a bit and you might miss a valuable teaching tool or something really valuable.

As their teacher, this resonated with me. I reflected often during the course on my role during TP. My concern, as I was engaged in the while-observation discussion and

thinking about ways to question, prompt and guide the observing trainees, was that this distracted me from observing and completing the written feedback for the trainee teaching, which forms a significant part of their assessed portfolio. Prior to using Yammer this was not a concern because the trainees would be observing in silence, having been provided with a guided handout, so my focus is on the trainee teaching. The introduction of Yammer shifted focus toward the observing trainees as it provided a chat-based learning environment in which I needed to notice the salient features of the classroom and to notice trainees' thinking in order to use this to inform learning opportunities. I was also mindful that what I was writing ought to be useful to all parties, the trainee being observed and the observing trainees.

I identified two key themes from my tutor comments and questions on Yammer. Firstly, comments to support trainees to make links between theory and practice; and secondly, a focus on the ESOL students, their engagement in the lesson and how the students' experiences are referenced by trainees to justify their noticing a specific aspect of the lesson. For example, while observing Tee4's teaching, I posed a question on choral and individual drilling. Each trainee posted a reply, drawing on what they knew about the principles of this strategy to develop ESOL students' pronunciation. I concluded the discussion by pointing out the importance of repeated practice through choral drilling and error correction during individual drilling, thereby making connections between specific events and broader principles of teaching and learning, encouraging trainees to link theory and practice. Farrell (2016) found that most studies into the practices of encouraging TESOL teachers to engage in reflective practice focused on reflecting on theory and practice, usually through feedback on pre- or post-observation discussions. In the example above, I believe that the use of synchronized chat created an environment for while-observation discussions on the principles of a specific strategy, encouraging them to consider more deeply what they may want to keep or avoid in their own future practice (Liu, 2012).

Many of my questions directed the trainees to notice the ESOL students' engagement as a prompt to evaluate the teaching strategy, and trainees also use the ESOL students as a justification when critiquing the observed trainee's lesson. When the trainees highlighted the ESOL students' experiences to justify a particular approach, this suggests the trainees are engaging in 'dialogic reflection,' the third level on the Ward and McCotter (2004) reflection rubric. The first level is routine reflection, which focuses on self-centred concerns; and the second level is technical reflection, which focuses on managing specific situations but without a focus on student learning. At the level of dialogic reflection with a focus on students, particularly struggling students, questions are asked with others, drawing on the perspectives of peers, the students and others, in this case myself as the CELTA tutor. Larsen et al's review (2018) of how learning is captured through using observation as a tool in lesson study in ITE found there was a limited focus on pupil learning compared with the learning of the trainees. One study which did focus on student experience compared what pre-service teachers and knowledgeable others notice during lesson study (Amador and Weiland, 2015). In order to address the issue that novice teachers have difficulties in identifying important

aspects of a lesson and therefore not fully meeting the needs of the students, they structured a Lesson Observation Form and a post-observation meeting between trainee maths teachers, a maths tutor and a university facilitator, to focus on students' mathematical thinking. They found that the scaffolding provided by these activities developed the preservice maths tutors' noticing of students' thinking. Similarly, my prompts in the while-observation chat and trainee's justification for areas for development contributes to the field to suggest that given appropriate strategies and guidance, CELTA trainees can improve their noticings of ESOL students' learning.

The value of Yammer in the post-observation discussion

The first 10 minutes of the post-observation session attempted to reconcile the needs of observed and observing trainees and to provide a space for collaborative discussion about the observed lesson. This aimed to encourage all trainees to reflect on their own and their peers' teaching, with the tutor providing a choice of topics to focus on, but ultimately the choice is given to the trainees for what they would like to discuss. This initial task gives an insight into the observed trainees' reflections on their own TP, their planning decisions and also highlights how supportive the group is with each other. This environment encouraged trainees to be able to talk about their own practice, to be able to 'think aloud' as they listen and prompt each other to encourage this reflective thinking. Walsh and Mann (2015) argue for more data-led and collaborative approaches to reflective practice, 'which involves a "Speaker" and an "Understander" and where the goal is for the Understander to reflect back to the Speaker what they consider to be the main issues' (p356). The trainees take on both roles here, and the Understander role is supported by the discussions that have taken place within the Yammer chat. There is evidence that the ESOL students continue to be central to the trainees and there was a collective focus on the ESOL students' learning and well-being, further evidence of dialogic reflection (Ward and McCotter, 2004). They talked about how the students had been progressing over the weeks, they showed concern about the lower level students' reliance on the stronger students to complete tasks, and discussed how the positioning of the observing trainees in the room could impact on the ESOL student learning.

On reflection, I see how the synchronous chat has enabled me to encourage this discussion time to be more trainee-led. Before using Yammer, there would be aspects of the lesson I, as the tutor, would want to highlight to the group. Here we see an influence of the while-observation chat, freeing up space in the post-observation discussion to encourage the trainees to take the lead in what they want to discuss. Drilling was on one of the post-its which was picked up by Tee4 as an area for development in her own teaching. She acknowledged that she skipped choral drilling and focused on individual drilling and then explained her own insecurities with pronunciation as a language learner herself. Tee3 picked up this theme and reflected on her own struggles in trying to use the audio CD for choral drilling.

It was hard to get them to be in sync, in a rhythm with the CD, then they're like it's too hard, they didn't know when to go even though I was trying to sort of give them a signal when to start going but they all just went at their own times.

I took this opportunity to direct the discussion to broader principles of drilling and materials design and asked what was the purpose of a course book providing this audio for drilling. This links with the discussions between the observers on the theory and practice of drilling that had happened in the synchronous chat. These tools, the synchronous while-observation text-based chat and supported trainee-led post-observation discussions, complement each other, helping to foster reflection in a structured way. The trainees were reflecting through the dialogue, with prompts from the tutor. The use of the CD had already been discussed in the Yammer chat so hearing Tee3's reflections on this was not a surprise, whereas Tee4 sharing her own pronunciation anxieties and the impact these had on her TP was unexpected. The Yammer experience had enabled me to use these reflections to create a learning opportunity.

Conclusion

My interest in this research came from a desire to explore the use of technology within a classroom environment to support trainee teacher learning. The trainees recognised the benefits the technology provides for the observers and for the observee, and also appreciated the strategies being used by the tutor. I was able to select salient features during the observation to focus trainees and to support their learning about their own practice and broader principles of teaching. As well as recognising *my trainees'* thinking, I was observing the *ESOL students'* learning and directing the trainees to focus on them. However, managing the Yammer dialogue did create tensions in my role. Whilst engaging in the while-observation chat with the observing trainees, I needed to include the trainee who was teaching, making comments on their lesson plan and writing feedback, all the while considering how to manage the post-observation discussion. The while- observation and post-observation discussions both contain examples where the observers and the teachers are conscious of the ESOL students' engagement and learning, and reflections on how their own planning or activity might impact on this, showing that beginner teachers can focus beyond their immediate practical concerns, such as classroom management issues (Watts and Lawson, 2009). Yammer is an important tool to accelerate this development, and the trainees appeared to value the guidance provided by the tutor in the while-observation chat.

The findings of this case study suggest that using these tools and strategies supports the development of noticing skills and creates an environment to promote reflective practice. The Yammer chat provides a space for the tutor to pose questions to the observing trainees, to raise their awareness of what they should be looking for in their own practice, and to make links between theory and practice whilst focusing more closely on the ESOL students' experience.

These tools highlight the role an experienced teacher can play in stimulating reflective thinking both while and after observing a peer, and it also indicates how I might

maximise the benefit of the written transcript for the observed trainee. For the next cycle of action research, I am considering the expectations of trainees' contributions in the while-observation chat and identifying what additional scaffolds need to be incorporated into the course to further support the development of noticing and reflective practice. For the graduating CELTA trainees in this study, I shall try to track how they engage in professional learning in their first jobs and the role that future observation plays in this and whether it helps them develop their noticing and reflective skills in their first post. In the UK context this is particularly important, as ESOL teaching in the UK FE sector is seeing a shift in focus of observation from 'graded' to 'non-graded and developmental' observation, although all these models still see observation as focused on providing feedback to the observee, rather than a peer observation scheme that focuses on the development of the observer. I hope that this case-study might contribute to consideration of how peer observation might continue to productively develop newly qualified ESOL teachers' noticings of learners' experience.

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News from the sector

Tara Furlong

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Wishing you all a festive lockdown season, and looking forward to 2021.

This raised interest in learning during lockdown is great news

Fiona Aldridge argues that Learning and Work's '...annual Adult Participation in Learning survey repeatedly shows that the best way to create lifelong learners is to focus on getting people started in the first place - often by learning something that particularly interests them or helps them to achieve their work or wider life goals. We were encouraged to see nearly two-thirds of those who tried online learning during lockdown say that they were very likely to continue with online learning in the future; and one in five lockdown learners said their experience had made them more likely to take up work-related training.' More here <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/lessons-from-learning-through-lockdown/>

Adult literacies learning during COVID-19

Provisional figures show participation across Further Education and Skills reduced by 20% across the 19/20 academic year overall, and halved during lockdown (Camden, 2020). In 20% of institutions, a third or more of courses weren't delivered at all over the summer term (Camden, 2020b). I haven't yet seen figures for the impact on adult literacies (English, maths and digital learning), post-19 in particular, which can be difficult to obtain at the best of times. Mims (2020) posits that improving literacy and numeracy skills, and improving digital access, is potentially life-changing for those most vulnerable and at risk of exclusion due to the social upheaval of pending economic recession. As Evans (2020) indicates, 'Unemployment is forecast to be much higher for years to come, and our analysis suggests more than a million people may be long-term unemployed in the next year, the highest since the 1990s.'

Meanwhile, OFSTED have observed that, 'Some learners find online education more convenient and easier than face-to-face communication. Indeed, some learners who were previously anxious about attending college have re-engaged... Generally speaking, learners at levels 1 and 2 have engaged less well than those at level 3' (OFSTED, 2020). According to a range of grey literature, the challenge is greater still for entry level learners, 'in no small part due to technological and digital access barriers, a lack of familiarity, and slow adaptation of teaching and learning to an online format' (Furlong, 2020). However, as contributors to RaPAL's last journal edition show (Clarke, 2020; Moore, 2020; Gardner, 2020) adult literacies learners, including at entry level, have participated successfully over lockdown.

A significant number of apprenticeship learners are reportedly overdue receipt of their results, even to be assessed; while calls for an extension to teacher-calculated assessment have been rejected by OFQUAL (The Office of Qualifications and

Examinations Regulation), who insist on mitigation of risk in exam conditions (Camden, 2020c). Many learners cannot achieve their main qualification without the examined English and maths components which are so critical to their lifelong learning agenda.

RaPAL are keen to hear from practitioners on the impact of coronavirus and lockdown on adult literacies teaching and learning: please email info@rapal.org.uk.

PhD Colloquia

We've held two virtual PhD Colloquia this autumn, where members discussed their own research in the adult literacies field, and themes of particular interest. Toni Lambe, University College Dublin, discussed *The Role of the Adult Literacy Tutor in navigating a rapidly changing FET landscape and its associated activation agenda*; and Denise De Pauw, Lancaster University, her work on *Looking for Work Online*.

Questions and comments have incorporated philosophical and methodological approaches and tools; interpretation and application grounded in the experience of the group; and practical facets of PhD candidature. We will be arranging further sessions in the new year. If you may be interested in participating, please email Tara on webweaver@rapal.org.uk.

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Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

We invite contributions from anyone involved in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education to write and share ideas, practice and research with RaPAL readers. This can be writing from learners, ideas linking research and practice, comments about teaching, training or observations about policy. Our journal is now produced online and so we welcome articles, reviews, reports, commentaries, images or video that will stimulate interest and discussion.

The journal is published three times a year and represents an independent space, which allows critical reflection and comment linking research with practice in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL nationally and internationally.

The RaPAL network includes learners, managers, practitioners, researchers, tutors, teacher trainers, and librarians in adult, further and higher education in the UK. It also has an international membership that covers Ireland, Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Europe and Africa.

Guidelines for contributors

All contributions should be written in an accessible way for a wide and international readership.

- Writing should be readable, avoiding jargon. Where acronyms are used these should be clearly explained.
- Ethical guidelines should be followed particularly when writing about individuals or groups. Permission must be gained from those being represented and they should be represented fairly.
- We are interested in linking research and practice; you may have something you wish to contribute but are not sure it will fit. If this is the case, please contact the editors to discuss this.
- Writing should encourage debate and reflection, challenging dominant and taken for granted assumption about literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics. We aim to have three different kinds of articles in the journal plus a reviews section; these are slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustration and graphics for any of the sections and now have the facility to embed audio and video files into the journal. The journal has a different theme for each edition but we welcome general contributions too.

Below you will see more details about the different themes and topics:

1. Ideas for teaching

This section is for descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning. It is a good place to have a first go at writing for publication and can be based on experiences of learners and teachers in a range of settings. Pieces can be up to 1,000 words long.

2. Developing Research and Practice

This section covers a range of contributions from research and practice. In terms of research this could be experience of practitioner research, of taking part in research projects, commenting on research findings or of trying out ideas from research in practice. In terms of practice this could be about trying out new ideas and pushing back boundaries. Contributions should include reflection and critique. Pieces for this section should be between 1,000 - 2,000 words long including references.

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 4,000 words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

- Relate to the practices of learning and teaching adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL
- Link to research by describing and analysing new research findings relating this and any critical discussion to existing research studies
- Provide critical informed analysis of the topic including reference to theoretical underpinning
- Write coherently and accessibly avoiding impenetrable language and assumed meanings. The piece should have a clear structure and layout using the Harvard referencing system and notes where applicable. All terminology should be explained, particularly for an international readership.

Reviews

Reviews and reports of books, articles and materials (including online materials) should be between 50 to 800 words long. They should clearly state the name of the piece being reviewed, the author, year of publication, name and location of publisher and cost. You should also include your name, a short 2 to 3 line biography and your contact details. You can write the review based on your experience of using the book, article or materials in your role as practitioner, teacher trainer, and researcher or as a student.

Submitting your work

1. If you are responding to a call for articles via the RaPAL email list or directly by an editor you will have been given the email address of the editor(s) for submitting your work, together with a deadline date and the theme of the journal.
2. If you are submitting a piece of work that you would like RaPAL to consider for publication that has not been written as a result of a call for articles, please send it to journal@rapal.org.uk in the first instance. The journal coordinator will then let you know what the next steps will be.
3. All contributions should have the name of the author(s), a title and contact email address and telephone number. You should also include a short 2 to 3 line biography. Sections, sub-sections and any images should be clearly indicated or labelled (further guidance on image size is on the website www.rapal.org.uk).
4. All referencing should follow the Harvard system.
5. Articles should be word processed in a sans serif font, double-spaced with clearly numbered pages.
6. The article should be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk

What happens next?

1. Editors are appointed for each edition of the journal. They review all contributions and will offer feedback, constructive comment and suggestions for developing the piece as appropriate.
2. Articles submitted for the third category 'Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives' will be peer-reviewed by an experienced academic, research or practitioner in the field in addition to being edited.
3. The editor(s) will let you know whether your article has been accepted and will send you a final copy before publication.

If you have any questions, please contact the journal coordinator by emailing journal@rapal.org.uk

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