

Case Study 1 – Student SJ and Student V (by Teacher B)

One student who I could pick out in terms of an improvement is SJ. When I asked her about how she felt about English, she explained that she had to do it so she thought she might as well have a go. That was already a lot more positive than some other students were. She now sees that she has improved and has a better mindset, a more positive way of talking about her work and is happy. She says that her motivation has improved through the activities in class and through seeing her grade improve in progress assessments.

Another student I teach, V, has improved the way they describe themselves and their work. They aren't as self-deprecating and can now talk about themselves positively. They don't see a wrong answer as a failure. They see it as a chance to have another go.

Some quotes from students:

"I've improved in the little time I have been here"

I have a good mind set. I want to revise and pass"

"my mindset towards education is good but I could care more about it"

Case Study 2 – Learner S and Learner AF (by Teacher F)

From my observations, learner S has made some positive improvements in regard to their attitude to GCSE English. In the first several lessons the learner showed a lack of interest in English. This has slowly started to change and he was especially motivated by setting targets after I returned their diagnostic assessments. He also responded well to the 5 year plan activity showing that he responds positively to having specific goals, which the OTLA project helps to highlight.

Another learner AF has had a very negative attitude to GCSE English since the beginning of the course. They have communicated on numerous occasions that English is a waste of time and it is pointless to make any effort in lessons as they are certain they will pass the exam. Despite engaging to some degree in the OTLA activities, the learner is still exhibiting a negative attitude. One positive change that I have noticed is that they did complete the progress assessment which was quite a surprise.

Case Study 3 – Under 16 student (by Teacher H)

I have an under 16 student who is attempting GCSE English for the very first time this year. During the Initial Assessment, she was so anxious and nervous that she had to leave the exam halfway through. After doing the 'In 5 Years' Time' mindset activity she had calmed down and asked to finish the 2nd half of the test.

Moving forward, she has recently just completed her Progress Assessment and was able to complete the entire assessment with no incidents. I feel that by talking through her progress over the year so far with a focus on growth and discussing mistakes as learning opportunities, this learner has really benefited from the growth mindset approach.

Whilst other learners in the same class haven't had the same dramatic change. I feel the project has helped each individual in the class feel more positive about GCSE English this year and has made them more secure in the knowledge that you can't learn anything unless you are willing to run the risk of making a mistake."

Case Study 4 – Teacher C

I attempted the initial assessment and the first mindset activity (where do you see yourself in 5 years?) with all my classes. After that I didn't return to any mindset activities with my 16-19 classes. I did start the process with my adult functional skills class after October half term. With them, we completed the initial assessment, where do you see yourself in 5 years, a discussion about mindfulness and a homework project where students completed a 5-minute mindfulness activity of their own and shared it with the class the following week.

Confidence is a huge problem for many of my students. 16-19 students often feel frustrated at the process of re-sitting, sometimes for the third or fourth time. They convince themselves that they are not able to 'pass' the exam and have a negative view of the process. I hoped that working explicitly on mindset would help them to feel more positive towards their learning and progress. I also hoped they would be able to focus more on the progress they had made rather than the grade at the end of the year.

For adults, confidence is still low but for different reasons. The majority of students in my class are ESOL students so lack confidence in their general English skills. They are also struggling with returning to education as adults. I hoped the mindset activities would help them build resilience and also to understand how important it is to reflect on their successes and remind themselves of why they are doing this qualification.

Overall, I did not find this process effective with my 16-19 year olds. This was not because of the activities but rather my delivery and the way the students responded. I found some resistance to the activities in the first couple of weeks from large groups of male students. They did not want to work on things like their

mindset, especially in classes of 20-28 other boys. There were many questions raised about why we were doing it and what the point was in every single class. I very quickly felt out of my depth and found it difficult to answer these questions. Although I believe a positive mindset and building resilience are essential to a successful education, I found I could not articulate this to a large group of plumbers or electrical engineers who didn't even know me yet. Rather than present more barriers between us, I chose to leave the mindset activities behind. I considered re-starting them again later in the year but have decided not to. The main reason for this is my own confidence. I do not feel qualified to talk about positive mindsets and resilience in a convincing and meaningful way to whole groups who are already resistant.

With my adult students, I have had more success. They are open to the activities and have used the discussions as a way to bond as a group. I will continue after Christmas to work on these activities and hopefully the class will continue to engage. As yet, I cannot say whether this has had an impact on their personal growth, resilience and approach to learning. We have only completed four activities and it would be too early to say. But based on student reactions, it is a part of the lesson that they enjoy and respond well to.

Case Study 5 – Learner MB (by Teacher E)

A student, MB, in the first few lessons of term demonstrated resistance towards learning and following a conversation with her I learned that, at school, she was on track to pass her GCSE with a 'high-grade' and due to family circumstances had not achieved. In her own words she said, "I am not meant to be here." and she felt that she was "too smart" to be in a resit class. Initially MB's behaviour appeared aloof as a consequence of her mindset towards attending English. This meant that she wasn't fully engaged in her work and didn't complete activities in the allotted time

Following a successful diagnostic assessment, I had a 1:1 with MB to discuss her mindset and why I thought the activities would be beneficial to her personally. MB confided in me about her anxiety and challenges in her home life relating to the ill health of her primary guardians. MB admitted that she often uses this as an excuse not to attend. I intentionally used positive language to affirm MB of her skills in English, particularly with her Reading component and how she should use this as an opportunity not just to pass her English GCSE but to exceed her target grade. MB showed pride when I discussed this with her. We discussed the Mindset activities that were scheduled half-term and how these would help her stay on-track and promote her attendance to achieve her goals.

Following on from this 1:1 and subsequent activities, MB's attitude both towards me and her learning underwent a shift. MB became fully engaged in her work and often completed challenge tasks or asked for feedback in response to what she had done. MB also went from sitting at the back of the classroom to the front, on

her own volition, and took opportunities to support other learners sitting around her. On one occasion, following the 'Metaphor for Life' activity, she stayed behind after the lesson to discuss her ambitions with me and what she wanted to achieve longer term. To me, this demonstrated she felt she could trust me with this information and even offer her support and validity. When MB was absent she emailed me asking for work and following on from that, brought her work to lesson for me to review and give her targets. Her Progress Assessment showed improvement also, as she was able to engage with the content of higher order tasks, it meant that her Writing skills had become more sophisticated and that she was able to structure her responses in a way which would allow the examiner to award marks.

Reviewing MB's progress on ProMonitor, it was apparent that she was on track to achieving her ambition of receiving a high grade in English however, when looking at the report for her main study programme it showed that MB was classified as 'at-risk'. Perhaps this shows the limitations of the English specific mindset activities in that they weren't translating to what was happening in other curriculum areas. Going forward, I feel it would be necessary to discuss this with MB and try to show her, explicitly, the relevance the activities have for her beyond my classroom. What seemed particularly important to MB, in order for her to grow her mindset, was the relationship of trust, respect and support which had been fostered in the conversations. It was typically from this that I would witness an improvement in her attitude towards her learning. It could be hypothesised that if this hasn't been explicitly addressed with other lecturers that M has found it challenging to instigate motivation and engagement. This could suggest that without the Mindset activities wrapping around the students' learning experiences as a whole, it cannot reach its full potential or impact.