

Appendix 9 – Writing skills

Research project

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Aims

The aim of this project is to improve learners' engagement with writing. Learners will be observed throughout sessions in particular looking at and assessing their attitudes and barriers towards writing (looking at avoidance strategies and delay tactics), their level of engagement throughout writing tasks (looking at their levels of concentration and the time they commit to a writing task), the quality of their written work and their emotional journey throughout the writing process.

The quality of their work will be assessed fairly and will coincide with the level they are working towards, the number of weeks/session they have been on programme (have attended English sessions) and the topics they have previously covered (for example if a learner has not covered a session on punctuation then it would be unfair to assess punctuation for that particular learner compared to a learner who has covered two or three sessions on punctuation). For the purpose of this research it is mainly the **engagement, participation and emotional well-being with the writing task** that will be monitored but other factors will also be observed (as outlined).

Make-up of learners and programme

The learner who will be observed and used as a subject for this research attends a construction study programme and is working towards E2 English. The learner is under the age of 18. The programme is a roll on roll off so learners start and finish throughout the year at different times. Many of the learners are from disadvantaged areas of the community and have very turbulent personal/home-lives.

Learners who attend this programme usually have a very negative pre-conception of learning, a lot of this negativity stems from hostile and unsuccessful relationships with school and many learners have left school with little or no qualifications (especially in the core subjects). With encouragement learners often engage with the practical aspects of the programme (construction) but are hostile towards maths and English. This is usually a reflection of low confidence with these core subjects.

Research, part 1

The initial writing task was observed: the learner was given a writing task to write about himself. There was little discussion before this task and no scaffolded activities. No examples of texts or writing frames were given but topics to consider were discussed to give learner scope on varied aspects of his life which he could potentially write about. A linear list was highlighted on the board: family, friends, pets, hobbies, work/work experience. Due to many having very disjointed home lives it was important to highlight that writing about them did not necessarily mean they had to write about families but aspects of their lives that they were comfortable sharing and aspects that were significant to them.

The learner who was being observed (who is particularly disengaged with writing tasks) became very hostile as the paper and pens were handed out: 'I don't want to do this, can I do it next week?'

he said. 'Can I do this after break?' he continued. **These responses are very typical of delay strategies and avoidance techniques.** This reflects his low confidence approaching a written task. His behaviour also changed, he began to swing on their chairs, look out of the window, and chat to peers and proceeded to go on his phone. With some verbal encouragement he did attempt and completed the task. The information given was limited and it was very matter of fact, there was not any emotion throughout this written task nor did he give any opinions.

His emotional state throughout the task was negative; he was disengaged and showed signs of some anxiety. He became very disengaged with the task before he engaged with it and completed it. Even when he did engage he was not fully focused (engaged) and **he completed it robotically. He completed it with the reward of a break.**

Research, part two

The learner on week two of the research project was given a writing task with some scaffolding to give him support and encouragement. The **scaffolding was implemented to reduce stress and anxiety** whilst completing the written task and to build confidence with writing. The scaffolding was also implemented to secure the learner in his own learning and help to raise his awareness of his existing skills: **to give him the confidence to not only apply these skills but also to explore further and to ease him into his zone of proximal development** to explore new skills.

The learner was first given a reading task, this learner is confident with reading and his reading skills are stronger than his written skills. The topic was online safety. There were also structured and learner led discussions on online safety. Learners were asked to consider a minimum of 3 ways to stay safe online, this learner's responses included:

Not to add people you don't know (whilst discussion social networking)

To activate privacy settings

Not to talk to strangers online (through Q and As the learner was stretched and challenged to elaborate on this)

Not to give out personal information such as name, DOB, bank details, passwords, address or share photos which could include any of these details. A banking advert was referred to by this learner to support his point of view and prompted us to watch it with the class.

To only access safe sites to decrease the risk of viruses

To report suspicious site

To report bullying or inappropriate belabour online

Not to access sites which have an age restriction (if you're under said age)

Learner was confident throughout the discussion and promoted a lot of valuable content. Learner appeared at ease and very engaged he was on task throughout the discussion and was engaged; he shared his own opinions and respectfully listened to others'.

Learner completed the reading task independently and with confidence. The reading task was to read an online BBC article on social media and social networking. The reading task stretched his

application of reading strategies and knowledge of purpose and features. **Learner was happy to share his answers during group feedback; this is very significant** for this learner as he usually becomes anxious during group feedback.

Following the discussions and the reading task was the writing task: write an article aimed at young people with information on how to stay safe online. The learner had a break before this task. Learner returned from his break happy and ready to work, he knew he was returning to a writing task. Learner engaged with this task although he did initially mutter: **'I can't do this' and 'I can't write.'**

Learner worked independently throughout the written task. He applied a lot of the information from the discussion and information from the article. Care was taken to complete the written task as there is **evidence of proof reading** and correcting errors he'd identified. He offered opinions and advice and the article had a suitable tone for his target audience. Furthermore **he pushed himself to apply features to his writing** and to his article such as: headings, sub-headings and paragraphs.

Once on track with the task **the emotional state of the learner throughout this task was calm and very much in control** of the task. He was focused, unlike the first writing task he did not distract peers or display behaviour that would suggest he was trying to avoid the task. Above all, he did not allow peers to distract him.

Research part three

As demonstrated throughout research part one and two the **learner responded much better to a writing task with scaffolding and support before the task**. There was still an initial 'I can't do this' and self-doubt. **The third task aimed to dissolve that initial self-doubt so that the learner did not have these negative conflicts**. A range of kinaesthetic resources were used during the scaffolding process.

The topic was bullying; the starter activity looked at banter vs bullying cards. Learner worked with a peer to discuss and decide whether the words on each of the cards would be defined as bullying or banter. Initially learner said that all of the words were 'just a bit of fun; a bit of banter.' The cards included words such as: geek, stuck up and tramp. After watching an anti-bullying video, where these same words were used repeatedly to target an individual, the learner and his partner consider the word cards in depth. This provoked a lot of discussion and the **learner took an active role in this often leading the discussion**: 'I guess it depends on who you say it to.' he concluded.

The discussion moved forward to consider bullying and harassment in the workplace. **Learner was happy to verbally share his opinions even when he was not always confident/lacked understanding with the topics**, for example: protected characteristics and Workers' Rights. Learner used the internet to research unfamiliar terminology and shared this with peers. **Learner was actively engaged throughout the discussions and the research**, which promoted and relied on the learner's reading skills to read for detail and understanding.

The learner was presented with two reading tasks: reading and researching information online and reading to identify slang words/phrases in a text message. Learner did not complete a reading comprehension to avoid becoming too reliant on this mode and method. **It was important to keep the type of scaffolding varied by using a range of resources and by using a range of learning styles**: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. The scaffolding used throughout research three was multi-sensory.

The writing task was quite complexed as it was an unfamiliar scenario. Learner was asked to write his response to a text message. **The content of the text message linked to the content of the discussions and reading tasks: bullying.** For the purpose of the task the text message was sent from a fictional colleague and the colleague was trying to promote bullying against another staff member. Learner was asked to reply and was reminded to consider the information and opinions shared on bullying and harassment (in and out of the workplace). **The learner responded to this writing task very positively. He set to task right away and confidently shared his opinions throughout the message.**

This piece of writing was significantly shorter than the Online Safety article but that was to be expected given the nature of the two very different tasks and reflects his knowledge of target audience and format. His engagement with the second and third written research tasks were similar but **with the third task learner set to task straight away and did not display any self-doubt.** His emotional state was positive; he appeared confident and happy.

There is **evidence of proof reading throughout his reply to the text message, which demonstrates the time and care he spent on this task.** He has replied using some slang language, the task was to reply using informal language, so this is something that will be developed. Considering the purpose of this research and looking at his engagement with the written task **he displayed a greater awareness of his own abilities and the confidence to apply them.**

Conclusion

In conclusion the learner engaged more with written tasks when the tasks were scaffolded. By scaffolding task this enabled the learner to focus on the content and the topic, to become confident with the topic and give him the opportunity to verbally share his own ideas and opinions in a relaxed environment. **The learner did not have a spike of anxiety when presented with the written tasks, when tasks were scaffolded using multi-sensory resources.**

Learner appeared more confident when the scaffolded tasks were multi-sensory (as in the third research example). It could be argued that the learners' confidence was naturally progressing by week three and his self-doubt was already beginning to decrease. But, **it is important to keep scaffolded tasks varied and these examples prove that by doing so learner remains engaged after the multi-sensory tasks have finished.**

Through observing the learning and through marking his written work (attached) there is a clear correlation between scaffolding and engagement. Although the learners' behaviour did hugely improve as the scaffolding was implemented next it would be lovely to hear him say some positive comments about writing. **Looking at the learners' comments in his ILP they do show that his enjoyment and emotional well-being in class improved** but does not specifically make a comment about writing. Week one he writes: 'Not good like, should do it by myself.' Week two he writes: 'Was okay' and week three he writes: 'Understood today.'

This research set out to improve engagement, confidence and emotional well-being with written tasks but it has surpassed this and **has proven to raise his overall self-esteem.**