Appendix 6: Shifting the focus from Curriculum to Skills Building Post-Covid

In my experience teaching GCSE English at two FE colleges, it struck me as odd how much emphasis is placed on the business-like and technical terms of the curriculum. Although I found our staunch allegiance to the curriculum odd, I got on board with it, feeling very much like ‘a good soldier.’ Nevertheless, at times I have strayed because I felt I had to.

At the start of teacher training, we learn all about Bloom’s Taxonomy. In short, we can’t walk if we haven’t learned to crawl. So, there have been times where I felt justified in taking my class off on a little tangent. Yet, underneath the surface, I have also struggled with this, knowing that what I was doing was right, but at the same time I hoped I wasn’t doing learners a disservice because I didn’t cover questions 5 and 6 again that day.

This year was different. It seemed the whole world was facing the same challenges in education: we all had to recover from a skills gap instigated by the conditions of teaching and learning in the Covid 19 pandemic. We couldn’t carry on as we were, even if we tried. The skills and behaviours were just not there. Instinctually, I picked up on this whilst planning over summer and even though I planned for both the curriculum and skills building, I had my doubts. As I suspected, I felt unprepared when the learners appeared in my classroom in September. Within two weeks I realised they needed something different and focused my lessons on skills building. In fact, my colleagues and I all seemed to realise this around the same time; a meeting was called and it was agreed that our performance targets would be revised. We were no longer aiming for our learners to ‘pass the exam.’ Our objective had become to build their skills and ensure progress over the course of the year. We recognised that this would look different and feel different, but it was what our learners needed.