Helping to untangle dyslexia
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Improving literacy skills is a vital focus for the ETF

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FE teachers are central to helping students develop verbal and written English skills, so they can cross the bridge confidently into wider society. By Alison Morris

The importance of supporting learners to develop their English skills is undisputed. But the essential nature of this is underlined by this quote by Kofi Annan: “Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society.”

Passing English qualifications provides a passport to employment and further study. But fundamentally, supporting learners to develop literacy and written communication is about helping people develop core skills they need to live well and thrive in our society.

The challenges around supporting people in post-16 education to develop their English skills are well-documented, whether in basic skills for adults, Functional Skills or GCSE resits. The challenges are complex, and GCSE results aren’t where we might perhaps want them to be. But the skills, encouragement, and creativity of practitioners across the sector who have taken on this task are substantial and should never be underestimated.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) delivers a comprehensive support offer for English practitioners undermined by the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers. This covers areas including Functional Skills, GCSE resits, use of phonics in post-16 provision, and how to embed English in vocational courses effectively. It includes collaborative projects and networks where people can work together on some of the thornier issues. There are also opportunities for more in-depth research.

Development of the offer is based on need and evolves over time. For example, we are in the process of developing a resource to embed maths and English skills in provision for learners with special educational needs and disabilities. It is perhaps helpful to consider the continuing professional development (CPD) available in the context of professional progression as well as development. Together with the benefits of SET (Society for Education and Training) membership, the support offered can help you not only become a more reflective, proficient practitioner, but also to progress through to the next stages of your career.

I’m delighted to welcome you to the second English intuitions supplement. As David Russell said in the first supplement last summer, we can’t hope to cover all the nuances and facets of this complex area, or to provide everything people are looking for. But we do hope that this supplement helps to showcase what other professionals are doing across the sector, and to spark ideas and debate to improve practices in this important area.

Alison Morris is executive director of programmes at the Education and Training Foundation.
LEARNERS SIT AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO

Why improving literacy skills for young people and adults is such a vital focus for the Education and Training Foundation. By Imke Djouadj

So what’s gangster then? ‘Cause I don’t really know if I’m honest
When we were young we had dreams of being bosses
Bailers, doctors, lawyers in an office
So how did that turn into dropping out of college
Snaps in a prison cell, bodies in a coffin?

Dave, the hugely popular London rapper and grime artist quoted at the start, who played Glastonbury this year, puts his transformation into these words (and yes, he attended an FE College!)
Picture me, a legend, worldwide or in Streatham, known for words in a sentence i put verbs in a sentence, there’s action in my letters
And I never compromise, nor follow what the trend is, i create my own style

This English supplement to InTUITION is the second in our dedicated maths and English series, bringing together the Society for Education and Training (SET) and ETF initiatives, and thoughts and ideas from across our work and the sector. This edition is packed with stories, thought-provoking articles, challenges and reflections that we hope will spark debate and ignite a few ideas of your own.

The case study is one of the Outstanding Teaching and Assessment (OTLA) projects funded by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). This project was managed and supported by Creative Education, a training and consultancy agency providing services for education and training providers.

IDEAS FOR ‘PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED’

How can teachers win over adult learners who have given up on learning English and reckon there’s no point trying? Samantha Hart has some suggestions.

Can’t wait till this course is over.

I hate English,” was the other, discouraging greeting from one of my students at the beginning of term last year. Although a little off-putting, this is an understandable and not uncommon sentiment among learners who may be tackling the subject for the second, third or even fourth time. It is 20 years since the late Claus Moser’s Fresh Start Report pointed out the links between poor educational attainment and poor literacy. (Claus Moser, 1999. A Fresh Start – Improving Literacy and Numeracy. HMSI). Many adult learners returning to education will have undergone learning difficulties or experience ill health, poor teaching, bullying or difficult home lives. Some will feel anxious or even downright hostile towards the subject and struggle to see the point of paragraphs, punctuation and pathetic fallacy.
In short, we are preaching to the unconverted. Such negative feelings are hardly the best basis for good quality learning and need to be addressed. The first week is vital in setting the right tone. Students who have been marginalised in the past need to feel they belong, so building connections within the group is vital. Trying to find and nurture common ground through group work, games and inclusive class discussions may be difficult to squeeze in to crowded curricula, but is time well spent. Reluctant learners need to be nurtured throughout the course, with good-quality, inclusive class discussion being the norm in all lessons. This dialogic teaching style is essential to learning and provides useful information about misunderstandings. For example, one class discussion revealed that some students only had the vaguest idea of the Victorian era, with one or two convinced that Shakespeare was a leading writer of that time.
A sense of purpose is also vital for adult learners and it would be worth asking students to spend some time thinking about how the course helps them reach their long-term goals. Reflective writing exercises should help identify why they are doing the course and to consider their past difficulties with it and how to move forward.

A convincing body of research into ‘growth mindset’ shows that the right attitude to learning is vital for success. Adults with poor prior experiences do not necessarily come equipped with the belief that they are capable of completing the course, which can lead to the dropoutting out.

Explicit sessions on grit and persistence may seem superfluous or patronising, but they pay dividends. It’s important to drill home that making mistakes is a vital part of learning and that students should expect to get out of their comfort zone. Constant reminders of what has been achieved throughout the year and celebrating successes also help students to stay focused. Keeping adult learners motivated and inspired is challenging, but as Moser said, poor literacy “cramps the lives of millions of people. We owe it to them to remedy at public expense the shortcomings of the past.”
PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

WHY DOING RESEARCH CAN MAKE SUCH A DIFFERENCE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

English teachers risk losing ways to define themselves professionally, says Dr Sue Brindley. But by undertaking research they can become informed contributors to the debate on the future of education and society.

As English teachers, language is at the heart of all we do. We know that perceptions are shaped by it, realities constructed through it and truths made evident by it. But in a curious twist of events, as English teachers we have lost a version of language that defines our professional selves, and leaves us without a voice, adrift in a world of policy and compliance.

To illustrate, and as part of a research network I run, I interviewed 50 teachers on the notion of teacher knowledge. It is complex and complicated as a concept. But what was most disconcerting was that some 11 interviews (of 50) made me realize I was talking to (all highly qualified people whose professional views I respected) could not give me an answer to the question ‘What is teacher knowledge?’

In looking to solve this puzzle, I came across a concept which has become critical in my research – access to a professional discourse. Durkheim described two types of discourse – ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ (emotive terms these days but originally referring to the interpretation of religious texts). The profane discourse enables discussion about ideas in ways that non-experts can understand and take part in. The sacred is through the language of the profession, where English teachers who have never met one another can nevertheless immediately enter into meaningful discussion about, in our case, teaching and learning in English.

But this is being eroded. The centralisation of teaching through the national curriculum, assessment requirements and inspection regimes has led to a diminution of the sacred discourse – so much so that teachers’ voices and expertise go largely unheard outside of the profession.

The case of English teaching is perhaps even more painful than most – our subject has itself been changed. ‘How did you create the ideological and structural conditions necessary for teachers to write, research, and work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power?’

‘Through language we are able to communicate ideas; through professional language – the sacred – we can also communicate the values that underpin our belief about ourselves as English teachers, and the place of our subject in building a democratic society.

Teacher research is the way English teachers can become informed and powerful contributors to a debate about the future of education and society.

By Sarah Anderson

Kendal College was part of the OTLA (Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment) phase 3 project to develop effective Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches in resit GCSE maths and English classes.

The initial decision was to focus our action research on adopting these approaches within resit GCSE maths. The maths team incorporated assessment as learning into every lesson. This included an initial assessment and a personal progress record (PPR) for every learner.

Any termly assessments recorded in their PPR included setting targets and RAG (red, amber, green) rating their skills on individual topics. Reflective and independent learning time became part of every lesson, learners worked on their PPR targets.

This enabled learners to take ownership of their learning and lecturers noticed an increase in motivation and engagement during lessons. Attendance levels increased up to two per cent on the previous year. In 2017, GCSE maths results for those gaining grades A* - C increased from 21 per cent to 31 per cent, which we maintained in 2018.

In year two of the project, we focused on introducing the APL approach in resit GCSE English groups. Initially there was some resistance from the English team towards the inclusion of the APL strategy. Reasons included a lack of motivation linked to fears that the network I run is mean extra work.

Open and honest dialogues were held with the English team, which included the maths team and a member of the leadership team. These discussions allowed concerns and issues to be addressed. The results from the GCSE maths project provided positive encouragement in developing an effective APL strategy for GCSE English.

Embedding APL was slow at first. The first term’s audit showed little not great uptake from learners; PPRs and patchy setting.

But there was ongoing dialogue, guidance and support for staff. And, in subsequent audits, there was a clear increase in PPR completion, setting learning targets, marked work and feedback/feedforward.

After implementing the APL strategies in 2018, the higher grade results at GCSE English improved from 20 per cent to 41 per cent.

GCSE English scores, where APL strategies had not yet been implemented successfully, were lower and showed significantly less increase on 2017.

There have been challenges in embedding the APL strategy in both English and maths, and continued monitoring and audits are crucial to ensuring continued success. However, with the teaching teams now on board, this approach is now part of every English and maths lesson. We are into our third year of the project, which now includes Functional Skills.

Sarah Anderson is head of English and maths at Kendal College.

CASE STUDY

COLLEGE TAKES STOCK OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING APPROACH TO GCSE ENGLISH RESITS

CASE STUDY

FINDING A GOOD WAY TO DEVELOP APPRENTICES’ TECHNICAL SKILLS

The London College of Apprenticeship Training (LOCAT) established a Technical Skills Development project (to enhance teacher training, and training on construction and business administration apprenticeships) in collaboration with employers, LCOAT developed new curriculum models, implemented a system to track skill development, and supported the flexible delivery of English and maths Functional Skills.

• Create employer-influenced technical training models delivering improved retention, satisfaction and outcomes

• Effectively measure learners’ skill development over the course of an apprenticeship programme

• Identify whether English and maths can be delivered, and achieve better results, through a flexible online programme that meets employer needs.

The college ran focus groups with employers and partner organisations to explore potential new curriculum models, in line with the new apprenticeship standards.

Six steps

A six-step process was introduced to track students’ skills development, including a ‘skills scan’, individual learning plans, learner feedback, and input from learners and employers on the skills gained.

Employers needed a solution that allowed apprentices to study outside normal working hours. So the college created a 12-week online programme of English and/or maths across Levels 1 and 2 to enable apprentices to learn more flexibly.

• Based on their diagnostic results, and through discussions with an apprentice skills coach/apprenticeships advisor, employers were able to choose which, if not all, of the 12 sessions met their needs. Webinars were made available, providing the flexibility that employers and apprentices required. Sixteen of the sessions included remote tasks and group work online.

Project outcomes

Almost all (99 per cent) of the 910 LCOAT learners who took part in the technical delivery sessions said that they had developed new skills and 96 per cent of employers said that students’ skills had improved.

Apprentices’ English and maths pass rate was 78 per cent, which was 17 per cent higher than 2016/17 (nearly 25 per cent higher for maths).

In addition, students welcomed the flexibility of the webinars, and recommended the format as an effective way to learn.

This project was part of the Education and Training Foundation’s (ETF) Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA) programme. Full detail of the project are available at: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2993
DYSLEXIA AND EDUCATION

DYSLEXIA SHOULD NOT BE A BARRIER TO FULFILMENT FOR YOUR STUDENTS

People with dyslexia who may have slipped through the net at school can be helped in FE, especially with assistive technology, says Professor Maggie Snowling.

Most children learn to read proficiently although their engagement with texts varies according to both psychological and demographic factors. Nonetheless, reading represents a significant challenge for some, not because they are taught badly, or are not motivated, but because they have a learning difficulty known as dyslexia.

While the utility of the label ‘dyslexia’ has been debated since the condition was first described more than a century ago, anyone who has a family member with dyslexia will not doubt the problem. Rather they will recognise that dyslexia causes educational underachievement and also, if not treated, it can affect career opportunities and have a negative impact on mental health and well-being.

Dyslexia is a difficulty in acquiring reading and spelling fluency. At one time it was thought that the diagnosis should be restricted to persons of above average ability. This was a mistake. Although it is certainly easier to recognise dyslexia in someone who has no other cognitive difficulties, and who is learning to read in their native language, we now know that it can occur at all levels of ability. It also often co-occurs with other problems, such as oral language disorders (DLD), coordination (dyspraxia) or attention difficulties (ADHD).

Dyslexia runs in families, and a family history of poor reading is perhaps the strongest risk factor for the condition, especially during the preschool years. From this early stage onwards, children with dyslexia experience verbal (but not visual) processing difficulties. These difficulties primarily affect phonological (speech-based) aspects of language: children with dyslexia are often late talkers, they have difficulty in learning sequences, such as days of the week, and they are not tuned in to the sounds of language (rhyme and alliteration).

When reading instruction begins, they have difficulty learning letter sounds and phonics. Furthermore, spelling typically creates more problems than reading, because of difficulties with the sound segmentation and sequencing of spoken words, and, as older students, they often have difficulty learning foreign languages. Indeed, the characteristic phonological deficits in dyslexia are observed across the lifespan. They also appear to be universal – even in languages such as Chinese which, in the writing system, maps symbols directly to meaning. Its impact can be seen in aspects of naming and in limitations of verbal short-term memory.

The longer term outcomes of dyslexia are less well studied. Many people have overcome their word-reading difficulties but reading fluency tends to remain compromised, for most, spelling is an enduring problem which affects writing fluency. Problems can be compounded if poor language affects grammatical and narrative skills, if there are fine-motor difficulties affecting handwriting or limited attentional span affecting the ability to check and monitor written work. It is perhaps, then, not unusual for people with dyslexia to choose school subjects with fewer literacy demands, such as design and technology, drama or sports science. Many go on to excel and choose careers in the creative arts, establish successful businesses or become skilled craftspeople.

In further and higher education, many young people who have slipped through the net at school seek assessment for specific learning difficulties. They may not have disclosed their difficulties, because of pride or fear of peer rejection, and they may still try to hide the ‘telltale’ signs (see the table above). Yet it is crucial for them to be assessed so that appropriate arrangements can be put in place. Many supports are available. Although it takes some persistence to learn how to use assistive technology, people with dyslexia can be freed of their reading and writing difficulties through e-readers, text to speech devices, voice recognition software and devices to help them plan and organise their work. While early intervention is preferable, it is never too late to gain access to literacy.

MAGGIE SNOWLING

SIGNES OF DYSLEXIA IN YOUNG ADULTS

• A discrepancy between (good) spoken and (poor) written communication (commonly a paucity of written work).
• Spelling errors including non-phonetic ones (e.g. lectrisidy for electricity).
• Unable to read unfamiliar, long words.
• Tendency to forget instructions or people’s names.
• Difficulties pronouncing polysyllabic words (e.g. preliminary).
• Difficulties with organisation, particularly of written work.
• Signs of frustration or unexpected anger outbursts, usually self-directed.

Dyslexia is a difficulty in acquiring reading and spelling fluency.

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The following ideas are included in Post-16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit, which can be downloaded for free from the Education and Training Foundation’s (ETF) Excellence Gateway.

The Functional Skills reforms came into effect in September, including spelling tests at each of the Entry Levels. 10 words chosen from long lists which are meant to be learnt via phonics approaches. Teachers doing Post-16 Phonics training have found building words with sticky notes a very helpful new strategy for both spelling and reading. Using sticky notes to explore words as puzzles is pure linguistic phonics in action.

• Start with saying the word syllable by syllable.
• Then match each puzzle piece to the sound it represents.

As they move the puzzle pieces, say the sounds and write each word, they gain power over three visually similar signs of (the essence of post-16 phonics) emphasises the differences.

Beyond Basic Code Plus, learners work with the concept that there are many ways to spell some sounds (toolkit chapter 7.2). A learner might be tempted to write Thursday because they can hear an /er/ sound. Avoid this type of error by being explicit about the many ways to spell a sound (Toolkit, page 66) and using puzzle pieces to limit choice.

Once they’ve built the word and written it, ask each learner to identify the bit of the word they need to remember.

If learners mix up Tuesday and Thursday when reading, puzzles are a great way of exploring their differences.

• AUTUMN 2019

Professor Maggie Snowling is president of St John’s College, University of Oxford. She is an internationally-recognized expert in reading and language and served as a member of Sir Jim Rose’s Expert Advisory Group on literacy and language and served as a member of Sir Jim Rose’s Expert Advisory Group on literacy and language and served as a member of Sir Jim Rose’s Expert Advisory Group on literacy and language and served as a member of Sir Jim Rose’s Expert Advisory Group on literacy and language.

Maggie runs a research hub with fellow Oxford academic Charles Hulme, offering information and resources relating to language and literacy development.

https://languageintervention.com

The Dyslexia Association has advice on assistive technologies, and other support at www.dyslexia.uk.net

Tricia Millar is the creator of That Reading Thing and That Spelling Thing, linguistic phonics approaches for teens and adults upon which the Post-16 Phonics resource is based.

Some Practical Tips for Using Phonics with Post-16 Learners

You can also ask questions on Twitter with the hashtag #Post16Phonics.

Training is available too via the ETF (normally subsidised for SET members).

Search for maths and English courses on the website.

The Dyslexia Association has advice on assistive technologies, and other support at www.dyslexia.uk.net.

Phonics and the ‘aha’ moments it generates, you can download and explore Post-16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit from the ETF’s Excellence Gateway. If you are reading your digital version of the English supplement (available to SET members who log in) then simply click on this link bit.ly/ETFPhonicsToolkit.

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POOling Good Ideas To Make English Teaching and Learning First Class

On these pages we invited three leading educators and authors to share their ideas and tips for teaching English successfully. Their contributions range across the spectrum of English teaching and are as inspiring as they are useful. inTuition is grateful for their contributions.

SEE CHALLENGING TEXTS AS AN OPPORTUNITY

By Terry Sharrock

Show an interest in words, their origins and make-up. Talk about words as they arise and how they are spelt. Is there anything peculiar about the word or its spelling? (‘Peculiar’ derives from Latin, meaning belonging to one person. Originally referring to cattle, it comes to English ‘something unique or belonging to that object!’)

In marking written work, decide which words or phrases to concentrate on. Build a progress plan for spelling and grammar with each learner. Let them lead on it. When you return marked work, ask students to think about three spellings they will agree to learn for their next piece of work. Ask them to indicate on that piece of work where they have used the words correctly.

Embedding the word is what we all use. What should lead to its development of English skills? If your learners are not improving their English skills then your embedding is not working.

Encourage learners to keep a personal dictionary or glossary and, most importantly, ask them to find ways to remember spellings that they have trouble with. Telling them ‘separate has ‘a rat’ in it’ is your way of remembering, not theirs. They’re far more likely to remember a method they have created rather than one given to them.

Terry Sharrock is a teacher, Ofsted inspector, author and consultant specialising in staff training on embedding maths and English.

WORDS’ WORTH

By Terry Sharrock

- Introduce just a single key word, phrase or sliver of text and start to teach spelling?
- A visual, illustration or diagram which invites students to ask questions;
- An experience of the text which may be connected, to be mysterious, enticing or engaging, making the language exploration seem worthwhile to the pupils.

So, what kinds of access strategies can open doors to a higher level of engagement in writing?

Firstly, make sure you are aware of any text you choose to be mysterious, enticing or engaging, making the language exploration seem worthwhile to the pupils.

MEMBER OFFER

SET members are entitled to 20 per cent off the RRP for all Bob’s books when ordering direct from Crown House Publishing. Use discount code SET20 when prompted. The offer is valid until 31 December 2019.

THE WRITE DIRECTION

By David Didau

If you want to improve the likelihood that students do well at GCSE English, two good bets are available to you. The first is to read aloud far more than you might think reasonable. Most of the time typically spent on endless analysis and inferences is largely wasted.

What makes students better readers is the possession of vocabulary knowledge and a broad collection of networked knowledge of the world. The best way to acquire these two kinds of knowledge is through reading. But how do you get reluctant students to read independently?

Far better – and fairer – to read, with all the prosody and panache of an experienced reader, challenging novels at a rapid pace interspersed with skilful questioning. A recent study suggests that this approach yields impressive gains for all, but with disadvantaged students making roughly twice the rate of progress of their more advantaged peers.

The second tip is to get students to write less. Many students have spent far too long practising writing badly. And what does practice make? Permanent. Getting students to write badly simply makes them bad at writing. Instead, we should look to the kind of interval training used to improve physical fitness. If you want someone to be able to run for 5 km, the worst thing to do is to tell them to try running for 5 km. All they’ll learn is that they can’t do it. Instead, get them to run for a very short distance and slowly build up their stamina over time.

Similarly, instead of getting students to write terrible pieces of extended writing, get them to practise thinking in, and writing, excellent sentences. Then, as the sentence is mastered, build up to excellent paragraphs. Only when a student can write a fabulous paragraph is it worth getting them to write anything longer.

David Didau is an educator, author and conference speaker. He is the author of The Learning Spy blog and co-author of The Learning Spy: How to Respond to Students’ Needs. He has published a number of books, including The Secret of Literacy and What It Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong.

MEETING ENGLISH LEARNERS’ VITAL NEEDS VERY EARLY ON

Help is at hand for teachers of students new to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), such as refugees. Alex Stevenson discusses the strategies.

E ffective approaches to meeting the needs of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners at the earliest stages of language and literacy learning – often referred to as ‘pre-Entry’ – have long been hot topics for discussion among ESOL practitioners.

Recently, the ESOL needs of refugees on the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme have highlighted a requirement for support to the professional learning and development of practitioners working with learners as ‘pre-Entry’. Home Office data suggests that around 60 per cent of ESOL needs in this group is at ‘pre-Entry’ or Entry Level 1. And as most provision is given for Entry Level, effective teaching and learning at these levels is crucial in supporting learners to develop a solid foundation of language and literacy skills.

The Government’s Integrated Communities Action Plan has recognised this, with the Department for Education and the Home Office commissioning new resources. This project, funded by the Learning and Work Institute and Home Office data suggests, has created a suite of teaching and learning materials and practitioner guidance. The resources support teachers working in colleges, adult community education and even society organisations supporting refugee resettlement.

ESOL practitioners have been involved in the development process through workshops and feedback. More than 300 ESOL teachers responded to our survey to tell us about ‘pre-Entry’ ESOL, with over 50 teachers attending focus groups to explore issues in depth.

Practitioners highlighted a lack of formal training in teaching basic literacy to adult ESOL learners, and a shortage of professional development opportunities to address this. They reported highly diverse learning needs in many ‘pre-Entry’ classes. This creates additional challenges for teachers, for instance the need for increased preparation time compared with teaching other ESOL levels.

Practitioners also questioned the term ‘pre-Entry’ ESOL, so we refer to learners ‘new to ESOL and literacy learning’.

The ‘New to ESOL’ resources set out to respond to these findings, and include features that practitioners identified as particularly helpful. The resources aim to:

- provide adult-orientated content, adaptable to local settings and drawing upon learners’ lives, skills and experiences;
- develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, with a focus on supporting learners to run for a very short distance and slowly build up their stamina over time.
- help reduce lesson preparation with time-saving ideas, adaptable activities and templates;
- provide short, accessible summaries of the essential elements of relevant literacy approaches, in series of key tips and knowledge.

The resources can be accessed on the ETF’s Excellence Gateway by searching for Learners new to ESOL. https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/learners-new-esol

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WHY READING IS VITAL FOR LANGUAGE SKILLS

Literal texts give learners a springboard for discussion and insights, as well as sparking their creativity, says Professor Janice Bland.

Why is reading literary texts so helpful for learning language skills? First, there is a wealth of appealing formats to choose from – no need to choose a dusty canonical novel when students can learn just as many skills from more accessible and cleverly composed graphic novels, verse novels or even picture books for teenagers.

Second, there’s the opportunity for oral interaction when talking around the texts. For instance, discussing how graphics, colours, headings and different fonts, with bold or italics, are important for setting the tone, changing the mood, and adding emphasis while the images, layout and captions are right there in front of the students to ponder over as they share their thoughts.

Your students can learn about irony and how to read between the lines (and between the pages), while learning how the presentational features influence the reader, and create yet more meanings.

Third, literary texts offer opportunities for motivating and collaborative creative writing activities – the best way for students to learn about alliteration, metaphors, similes, rhetorical questions and the rule of three is for them to try it for themselves.

Here is an example of a younger student’s descriptive writing, inspired by the fairy tale, The Magic Porridge Pot. “The dense porridge developed enormous strength. It was as strong as a torrent. Windows were shattering with an ear-piercing sound. The house began to move, to tremble, to shake. It got bigger and bigger, rounder and rounder. It looked like a giant ball leaking everywhere, shaking and shivering. The porridge was now filling up the chimney and then… BOOOOOOOM. With a huge explosion the porridge burst out of the chimney, shooting into the sky like fireworks.”

Janice Bland is professor of English education at Nord University.

‘BOOKS UNLOCKED’ OPENS THE DOOR FOR PRISONERS TO ENJOY READING

By Rebecca Perry

The National Literacy Trust’s Books Unlocked programme, now in its sixth year, is funded by the Booker Prize Foundation and encourages those in prison and young offenders institutions to read for enjoyment more often.

More than half of people (54 per cent) in prison have a reading age at or below the expected level of an 11-year-old. Reading for enjoyment can often be the first step in re-engaging prisoners in education.

Participants report that the reading they do through the programme helps them expand their minds beyond their reality and improves their well-being. Our evaluation has shown that nearly half of participants read more often for enjoyment after taking part in Books Unlocked.

The programme is delivered through three key activities:

• We work with publishing partners to provide prison reading groups with copies of books that have been longlisted and shortlisted for The Booker Prize – the UK’s most prestigious annual literary award.
• National Prison Radio serialises audiobook versions of the Booker Prize titles, which enables prisoners who aren’t in the reading groups or who have a lower reading level to engage with high-quality literature.
• We organise up to 12 author visits a year where prisoners get the chance to learn more about an author’s career, what motivated them to write the book that the prison group have been reading, and participate in discussions. Our evaluations have also shown that prisoners find these visits extremely valuable. We are very fortunate to have several authors who support our work, such as Stephen Kelman, Patrick deWitt, Yann Martel, Monica Ali and Rachel Seiffert, who have had a prison group or been interviewed on National Prison Radio this year.

Many prisoners are sceptical about the programme at first, as they may not have read a book for a long time and might struggle with their reading, but we try to provide a variety of books that will appeal to a broad range of interests. The most popular books include: A.D. Miller’s Snowdrops and Stephen Kelman’s Pigeon English.

In its first year, the programme was piloted in three prisons. Today we are working with over 70. This year we have already donated more than 1,500 books to participating prison reading groups, surrounding around 700 prisoners, and we hope to reach more next year.

To find out more, visit literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/books-unlocked

Rebecca Perry is policy and programme manager, criminal justice, at the National Literacy Trust.

‘READING AHEAD’ CREATES A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

More than 300,000 young people and adults have so far been reached by a programme that expands horizons through reading. By Debbie Hicks

Reading Ahead supports young people and adults by changing their perception of reading, opening up opportunities and building their confidence.

Research shows that when we inspire people to read for pleasure they benefit from far greater opportunities in everyday life, education and employment. Reading Ahead, run by the Reading Agency, is the gateway to these opportunities. The programme is designed to help people improve their reading skills and develop a love of reading.

Reading Ahead is run through public libraries, adult learning organisations, colleges, workplaces and prisons. The project invites participants to pick six reads and record, rate and review them in a personal reading diary. After completing their diary they receive a certificate and can enter a national prize draw.

Since launching in 2008, Reading Ahead has reached well over 300,000 people. In 2017-18 it reached 38,500 young people and adults – 6,500 through public libraries working with local partners, 18,500 in adult learning organisations, further education and sixth form colleges, 12,000 in prisons and 1,500 in workplaces, mainly led by unions under the Trades Union Congress’s unionlearn banner.

A round 100 prisons across the UK take part in Reading Ahead each year. We produce materials specifically suited for use in prisons and the charity, Give a Book, provides a free pocket dictionary to prisoners who complete the challenge.

The programme isn’t just about books – it’s about newspapers, magazines and websites too. The aim is for participants to challenge themselves to try something new and discover that reading can be a pleasure in the process.

Our evaluation shows that Reading Ahead:

• Boosts confidence in reading;
• Increases enjoyment in reading;
• Increases future use;
• Results in people reading more.

If you’d like to take part in Reading Ahead or run it in your organisation, get in touch by emailing info@readagency.org.uk

By Debbie Hicks MBE is creative director at The Reading Agency.

CASE STUDY

HOW NINA’S LIFE WAS TURNED AROUND

Nina Morrison (pictured above), a student at Warrington & Vale Royal College, found reading intimidating before starting Reading Ahead.

“I often just pretended to read,” she says. “I have always struggled to read as I have dyslexia. I struggled with stories as I didn’t understand what I’d read.”

Encouraged to find books that were dyslexia-friendly as part of the Reading Ahead challenge, Nina’s confidence grew. “For the first time I actually enjoyed reading,” she explains.

Reading Ahead has also benefited Nina in exams. “I am more confident because I can focus for 15 to 20 minutes close reading the source texts, and this has helped me make sense of the texts and the exam questions and given me more confidence to answer the questions,” she says.

Reading Ahead has even helped Nina outside college. “I’ve just got a better part-time job, and this is because I’m better able to deal with things I have to read.”

CASE STUDY

STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM A GOOD READ

Clare Melhado is an English teacher at Warrington & Vale Royal College, which runs Reading Ahead in partnership with Livewire public libraries. The college caters for students aged 16 to 18 and adults. All English teachers deliver Reading Ahead; they use it for students taking GCSEs and Functional Skills courses.

“Many students tell us they enjoy the quiet time when they can sit and read. We’ve seen improvements in coursework and GCSE work,” Clare explains.

“Reading has contributed to calming learners down and promotes readiness to learn, especially when run at the start of the lessons. Students enjoy choosing books and not being forced to read something they don’t want to.”

In the coming year Clare plans to build on the success of Reading Ahead at her college by including all adults taking Improve your English classes. She says the college is also looking at starting a book club.
Students’ English abilities in technical education and training need to be up to scratch. But help is at hand for them and their teachers. **By Claire Collins**

This is embedding in its ‘pure’ sense. It’s not about merging English, maths and digital learning aims (for Functional Skills or GCSE, for example) with technical aims. It is about developing English, maths and digital skills already present in technical practices. T Level learners will need to have Level 2 Functional Skills or grade 4+ GCSEs in English and maths as exit requirements. Our job is to develop CPD for teachers so that they can confidently support English, maths and digital aspects of technical practices.

As a way of framing the embedded aspects of technical practices, the Department for Education (DfE) is developing a set of ‘General English Competencies’ (GECs) – as well as maths and digital – that arise from technical practices. The GECs (and General Mathematical Competences and General Digital Competencies) are present to a greater or lesser degree in all T Levels.

In real technical practices, GECs usually interconnect with each other. For example, an interaction with a client at a software design company could include “Convey technical information to different audiences” (an oral or written interaction), alongside, for example, “Summarise information/ideas” and “Create texts for different purposes and audiences”.

Critically, the learner is not able to undertake this technical practice effectively without being able to undertake the embedded English elements. Each GEC will be accompanied by guidance from the DfE on the type of knowledge and skills that could be developed and applied to support improved performance in the technical specialist.

**Will the GECs be assessed?**

The competencies will not be formal standards for assessment or an additional set of achievement. Instead, the GECs should help learners and teachers to identify opportunities for developing English embedded within a technical programme of study.

It’s also important to note that GECs (as well as General Mathematical/Digital Competencies) will form part of the assessed elements of T Levels, so teachers need to ensure that their development is included in T Level curriculum planning.

Continuous professional development courses, aimed at technical specialists, have been developed. To find out more visit the ETF website or, if reading the digital version of this supplement, simply click on the following live link: bit.ly/TeacherDevelopmentProgramme

**REFERENCES**

- ETF (2019) T Levels Teacher Development Programme www.etfoundation.co.uk/supporting/technical-education/t-levels/teacher-development-programme

Claire Collins is a director of ccConsultancy. She leads literacies and learning programmes for the ETF and other national international bodies.

**RESOURCES**

**SHAPING SUCCESS IN ENGLISH AND MATHS**

The ETF offers a comprehensive range of professional development courses and resources under Shaping Success to support effective teaching of English and maths for teachers of GCSE, Functional Skills, apprenticeships and study programmes. Successful teaching of English and maths is a driver of improved performance in the technical practice, so teachers need to ensure their teaching and assessment approaches in English and maths match those in T Levels.

**By Claire Collins**

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