

# **LSIS Support for Literacy, Language and Numeracy**

- ◉ **Action Research Project 2011 – 2012**
- ◉ **City and Islington College, London**
- ◉ **Centre for Lifelong Learning Basic Skills Department**
- ◉ **Supported by LSIS, SUNCETT and IOE**

# Research theme, title and context

- ◉ Improving writing for adults with the title – What Works With Writing and How?
- ◉ Teaching and learning about writing is under researched
- ◉ Writing skills crucial for adult learners in view of the requirements for assessments in functional English and adult literacy
- ◉ Multiple choice questions do not assess writing
- ◉ Many students present with ESOL needs
- ◉ Develop and evaluate existing and new classroom approaches
- ◉ Understand more about learners' perceptions of the writing

# Supporting current organisational development and quality

- Improve understanding of how to increase retention and internal progression
- Deliver targets already set with quality framework and SAR
- 80% success rate
- Students struggle with writing assessments and their writing is weak

# Research participants and approach

- ⦿ Adults attending classes in functional English or adult literacy and a Pre-Access course for young adults at E3, L1 and L2
- ⦿ Action research cycle to engage, motivate and promote progression
- ⦿ Linked to learners lives using and developing authentic materials
- ⦿ Literature research to include existing strategies and teaching approaches – “a standing on shoulders approach”

# Research questions

- ⦿ What are the most effective strategies for teaching writing?
- ⦿ Subsidiary question: How can teachers of functional English and adult literacy develop their practice in order to best meet the needs of a wide range of within their classes?

# What did we hope to change, improve ?

- ⦿ Develop approaches and materials for dissemination within the college e.g. VLE and self-study
- ⦿ Offer guidance for teachers within the department through CPD and PDD
- ⦿ Understand more about learner perceptions about the writing process
- ⦿ Address some of the clear difficulties around students presenting with ESOL needs

# Desk Research and Literature Review

- ◉ <http://www.brendenisteaching.com>
- ◉ <http://www.helpingwithwriting.com/Lessons/SentenceOpenersners01.htm>
- ◉ <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/english/englishC1.htm>
- ◉ <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4818397-teaching-poetry-in-the-primary-school>
- ◉ <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/adult-teaching.html>
- ◉ <http://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/mxtsch/storytelling>
- ◉ <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/conference/2010Conference/Workshops2010.htm>
- ◉ <http://ahea.org/files/pro2005harris.pdf>
- ◉ [http://www.annburnett.co.uk/hot\\_penning.html](http://www.annburnett.co.uk/hot_penning.html)
- ◉ <http://shop.niace.org.uk/grammar-sentence.html>
- ◉ <http://grammar.about.com/od/tests/a/introsc.htm>
- ◉ <http://grammar.about.com/od/grammarfaq/f/faqsentcomb.htm>
- ◉ <http://mrsdell.org/combining-sentences/>
- ◉ <http://www.niace.org.uk/news/grammar-for-sentence-combining> - Maxine Burton
- ◉ <http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Fiction-Primary-School-Approaches> - Dennis Carter

# What We Did?

- ◉ The research team discussed the issues which impacted on students writing and their achievement
- ◉ Approaches and strategies were discussed - some of which came from tutor experience and the desk research and literature review
- ◉ Key issues were identified
- ◉ Tutors agreed to use 1 or 2 interventions in class
- ◉ Students completed a questionnaire and were involved in a brief discussion about their writing practice and experience
- ◉ Students and tutors evaluated the interventions



# Some of our interventions

- ◉ Hot penning - 5 minutes of judgement free writing
- ◉ Using stimuli e.g. pictures, sounds, smells
- ◉ Telling a story - before writing anything
- ◉ Talking about words we use in descriptions
- ◉ Self correction - Improvement Sheet
- ◉ Traffic lights for planning essays, exemplars, models
- ◉ Creative writing and using literature - “Cider with Rosie”
- ◉ Focused writing - “a moment in time” to develop more accurate descriptive writing
- ◉ Collaborative writing
- ◉ Functional letter writing in response to a visit

# WHAT WORKS WITH WRITING AND HOW? How can teachers of FS English and adult literacy develop their practice to best meet the needs of a wide range of learners within their classes?

## Why this research question?

Effective writing skills are crucial for students studying functional skills and adult literacy.

Many of our students struggle with writing and find progression difficult.

Many of our students have English as a second language. How can we best support these students in the context of basic skills provision?

## Aims

To develop and evaluate classroom approaches and methods of delivery that help students improve their writing in the context of functional skills and adult literacy.

To more fully understand learners' perceptions of the writing process and identify how they engage with this.

## Participants and Method

70 students from Entry 3, Level 1, Level 2 and Pre-Access classes plus 7 Literacy / English tutors undertook a brief action research project over a period of four weeks in March 2012.

The research consisted of a survey, structured interview, classroom interventions and regular feedback data collected from students and tutors. Students gave informed consent to the research in line with research ethics.

## Initial Findings

-students engaged with the research - willing to try new things - enjoyed the collaborative work - gained confidence as writers - initially wary about hot penning, finished beaming and relaxed, fired up to write - "I find it relaxing like a massage on my mind" - weaker FS writers showed clear strengths in descriptive writing - stronger FS writers struggled with both hot penning and descriptive writing - explicit link between intervention and improved assessment - students felt a sense of ownership of their writing - noticed impact their choice of words had on the reader - empowering to be able to hold up the writing of a generally weaker student as models of good text - peer criticism and feedback important - need to expose students to wide range of writing - offer challenges and high expectations - students took vocabulary risks.  
[hot penning - http://www.annburnett.co.uk/hot\\_penning.html](http://www.annburnett.co.uk/hot_penning.html)

Thanks to Tutors and Students from City and Islington College London - Mary Browne, Geraldine Timlin, Catherine Richins, Joanne Robinson, Nina Weiss, Mary Dakin, Eamonn Leddy and Lester Moses. For more information email [mary.browne@candi.ac.uk](mailto:mary.browne@candi.ac.uk)

**Issue:** Students kept making the same spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in their writing but when the tutor went over their work the errors were not unfamiliar to them. With minimal prompting, they could see and correct.

**Issue:** Trying to raise students' confidence and encourage them to use language more creatively. Working at generating more ideas and supporting learners to be more adventurous with their use of language.

**Issue:** Students struggle with structuring persuasive essays. Pragmatic approach focus taken due to the constraints of the GCSE syllabus.

**Interventions:** The class visited a local library and then collaboratively wrote a thank you letter to the guide. Writing collaboratively, sentence combining and exploring similes and metaphors in a piece of descriptive writing.

**Intervention:** A range of approaches used in class - modelling, breaking up essays, exemplar essays, scaffolding etc. Peer comments and restructuring of texts encouraged and positively used in class.

**Intervention:** An improvement sheet (IS) designed for students. Tutor marked a piece of writing, showed students how to use the IS and asked them to correct and redraft. This continued over a series of classes with gradually less support from the tutor and until the students were able to work more independently.

**Issue:** Students were tending to become locked into "the comfort zone" of functional writing, relying on stock phrases "I am writing to complain about..." and finding it difficult to write more creatively or respond to different stimuli or situations when asked for.

**Interventions:** "Hot penning"\* a short burst of totally product-free writing, owned by the student - an opportunity for thoughts to go straight on to paper. Descriptive writing based on a "moment in time". Resources included a multi-sensory presentation, oral story telling using stimuli and discussion around the text "Cider with Rosie".

## The Next Stage

Additional funding from LSIS has meant that some of the recommendations from the research will be possible to implement.

Schemes of work for each level are being designed which will include work on functional as well as creative writing, introducing learners to literature and teaching literacy and meta-language. at an earlier stage.

Research findings and resources will be disseminated during the Professional Development Day and also at a cross-college Language in the Curriculum session in July.

An exhibition and booklet celebrating students writing and part of Adult Learners Week has been well received and on show since May.

Comments from a recent literacy health check. "The research project, which encourages collaborative work in creative writing, includes very good strategies to develop the drafting process. Evaluation of the What Works With Writing and How research project needs to inform general practice."

## Recommendations

Ensure that lesson planning /Schemes of work explicitly cover writing in terms of its functional and creative power.

More thoroughly embed ideas about developing students' independence as writers in the classroom and use interventions trialled in this research.

Encourage peer feedback and comments from students about each other's writing.

Explicitly teach literary language and meta-language early on in the year and to all levels.

**Limitations of this research:** short timescale, many variables, qualitative data vs. quantitative

# Findings

- ◎ students engaged with the research and willing to try new things
- ◎ enjoyed the collaborative work
- ◎ gained confidence as writers - initially wary about hot penning, finished beaming and relaxed, fired up to write - “I find it relaxing like a massage on my mind”
- ◎ weaker FS writers showed clear strengths in descriptive writing
- ◎ stronger FS writers struggled with both hot penning and descriptive writing

# Findings

- ⦿ explicit link between intervention and improved assessment
- ⦿ students felt a sense of ownership of their writing
- ⦿ noticed impact their choice of words had on the reader
- ⦿ empowering to be able to hold up the writing of a generally weaker student as models of good text
- ⦿ peer criticism and feedback important
- ⦿ need to expose students to wide range of writing
- ⦿ students enjoyed challenges and high expectations
- ⦿ students took risks with their vocabulary

# Recommendations

- ◎ Ensure that lesson planning /schemes of work explicitly cover writing in terms of its functional and creative power
- ◎ More thoroughly embed ideas about developing students' independence as writers in the classroom and use interventions trialled in this research.
- ◎ Encourage peer feedback and comments from students about each other's writing.
- ◎ Explicitly teach literary language and meta-language early on in the year and to all levels.