

# **OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT**

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT -  
IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT IN 16-19 STUDY PROGRAMMES**

**Havant and South Downs College**

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# Final Report - Improving engagement in 16-19 Study Programmes

## Havant and South Downs College



The aim of this project was to encourage and develop a culture of reading via two separate interventions with two distinct groups (BTEC Business and BTEC Performing Arts).

### Summary

Havant and South Downs College is made up of three campuses; South Downs, Havant and Alton with this study being completed at the South Downs Campus. The college has over 4000 FE learners and nearly 500 HE learners across level 1 to level 6, A-levels, BTEC, HND, FdA and BA (Hons) studying a vast array of subjects.

The idea for the project arose from our concern that many students simply do not see the value of reading; it is perceived as “uncool” by many and as a chore that is enforced by teachers and/or parents.

The business students had a presentation by a local author, Mark Legg, and were given a copy of his book *“The Business Builder”*. This book was chosen as it linked directly to their curriculum (Unit 36 – starting a small business). After reading the book and completing the relevant task from their assignment, the author came back in and spoke with the students about the book and his passion for reading.

The performing arts students watched the film Anna Karenina and were also given the book to read. The point here was to understand what students preferred and why (the differences between the two).

## Rationale

There is clear evidence that shows the impact that reading can have on vocabulary, emotional intelligence and exam success. A study completed by the OECD revealed that reading for pleasure had a demonstrable effect on social mobility and was, in fact, the most important indicator for the future success of the young person (Douglas, 2013).

The challenge we faced is that reading printed material simply is perceived as uncool by many, in particular, boys (Topping, 2018) and can also be perceived as an activity that is 'forced' upon students by their teachers. The percentage of students who read a book or a magazine every day declined from 60% in the late 1970s to 16% by 2016. The rapid adoption of digital media since the 2000s has displaced the consumption of legacy media.

Clearly, digital media use has increased considerably, with the average student in 2016 spending more than twice as much time online as in 2006, and with time online, texting, and on social media totalling around 6 hours a day. In addition, only half of students visited social media sites almost every day in 2008, compared with 82% who did by 2016 (Twenge et al, 2018). However, there is clear evidence that reading has a positive impact on students' emotional/social well-being, exam success and future careers. This means it is an issue that needs addressing.

## Approach

Culture or "The way things are done round here" (Schein, 1993) is something that clearly does not happen overnight but we hoped that with small, incremental changes to students' mindset and the embedding of reading activities within the curriculum this project would make a difference.

As we were looking predominantly at changes in mindset, we decided to use mainly case studies and focus groups to find out exactly what students thought about reading, their perceptions of the importance of it and how much they do actually read. There was some quantitative analysis as well which enabled us to see how much reading students undertake and also where and when they prefer to read.

## Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

*"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink"*

(Proverb)

The project itself provided some real insights into the behaviour of students and the rationales that motivate their behaviour. The two sides of the project, business and performing arts, could not have been more different.

*"I didn't want to read the book because I had been told to; I read what I want"*

(BTEC Business student)

Engaging the business studies students in reading was a real struggle; they were very reluctant to read the book. Although they eventually did and the sessions with the author were very positive, the process itself was difficult. A key learning point here is that enforcing extra activities on students can have a negative effect, even though the task was highly relevant as an understanding of the book's content was directly linked to the course grading criteria.

The performing arts students were fantastic. Not only did they read the book, they loved it, preferring it greatly to the film.

*"The book is so much better; you use your imagination and really lose yourself in it"*

(BTEC Performing Arts student)

The students loved the book so much they petitioned their lecturer to get them the screenplay and then performed the play based on the book.



Figure 3a-1: Performing Arts students

*"Some students who read regularly spoke of their joy of reading and this inspired those that do not read to consider it as a leisure activity. One student bought a book for the first time!"*

(Performing Arts Course Manager)

## Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

*“Learning new ways of working through mutual engagement opens up and shares practices with others”*

(Fielding et al, 2005)

Working as part of a larger group with Southend Adult Community College and Cambridge Regional College has enabled me to visit and see exactly what the projects look like in the other institutions and take back ideas to share at Havant and South Downs College.

Internally, developing a culture of curiosity at the college is a real passion of mine and something that this project has furthered. Staff across various areas that rarely speak with one another have been sharing examples of what they do and getting to know how students are taught in different subjects that are very different from the subjects they normally work in.

## Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Culture in itself is very hard to quantify and evidence. That being said, the feedback from the students, both business and performing arts, has been extremely positive.

*“Reading increases your vocabulary; it means you can find out more things and then use them when you need to”*

(BTEC Business student)

*“The book shows the characters ‘personal viewpoint’ so you go through ‘their story’. On the film, you don’t get what’s inside their minds.”*

(BTEC Performing Arts student)

*“I personally think it helps with your brain and staying focused, when you read you have to use your brain and keep your concentration, as well as learning new words.”*

(BTEC Performing Arts student)

## Learning from this project

Culture will not change overnight and, when encouraging students to read, it will take even longer. However, small shifts and a greater focus on reading via the adoption of initiatives such as this could have a positive impact on learners. As stated previously, the benefits of reading are huge. However, trying to win the “hearts and minds” of students when it comes to this proves difficult.

Personally, a key learning point for me was the comments made by the business student who didn’t read the book because he was told to. When looking at future

projects it will be a key part of the inception stage to consult more closely with students before making decisions about what intervention to complete.

The opportunity for staff to collaborate and be involved in action research as part of this project has been fantastic.

*"It was great to have the time to try something out. It (the project) wasn't perfect but it was fun!"*

(Performing Arts Course Manager)

*If this project, or something similar, was repeated, then I would be interested in being involved again"*

(Business Lecturer)

As always, this is just the starting point - the business workroom is now discussing ideas for embedding reading within their own sessions – that is a result in itself!

## Appendix 1 – Staff Case Study (Performing Arts)

Being involved in the Culture of Reading project has been a rewarding experience for the students in my Performing Arts cohort. The students engaged with reading the Anna Karenina playtext in a way that was thoughtful and considered, evidenced in discussions regarding plot, character and style; we read parts of the text together as a whole group which encouraged interest and debate. The students were keen to watch the film adaptation of the same title and made some good observations regarding character interpretation and differences or similarities between the two versions. The students demonstrated a keen interest often revisiting particular scenes in the text to explore the sub-text. Some students were inspired to read the full novel version also, as their interests had been sparked. Some students who read regularly spoke of their joy of reading and this inspired those that do not read to consider it as a leisure activity. One student bought a book for the first time! The cohort also had regular sessions with the Librarian manager who triggered their interests in particular poets, reading poems and sharing some analysis of a particular work which involved student activities and responses which were at times passionate.

The librarian also introduced novelists and drew attention to a number of classic books by reading the first few lines to propose a 'hook' and discussion on what was interesting about the introduction. The students were all engaged and motivated by the varied sessions which reminded them of the library resources and I believe the project detail has resulted in a positive viewpoint from students who may not have previously considered reading as something they would do for fun. The drawbacks may be that it could take time for students to find a genre of their individual interest, perhaps a student led group session focus to discuss favourite books to read might be useful. It was great to have the time to try something out. It (the project) wasn't perfect but it was fun!

## **Appendix 2 – Staff Case Study (Business Studies)**

My involvement with the project was as lecturer of the two Business classes that were participating in the project so visits by the author Mark Legg and sessions by Sarah Reed took place in my lessons for each class. I also attended the 'mop up' session with Mark Legg at the end of the session.

My view of the project was that it was overall successful and had a positive effect on the students. I know that several students have increased their reading and lending from the library as a result of the project.

Both the visits by Mark and the sessions by Sarah on different aspects of books were well received by the students and there was good interaction in both classes. Group C seemed to respond better to the author visit and Group B responded better to the sessions by Sarah Reed.

The main issue with the project was the students being asked to read two chapters each week and then discuss in a lesson. This proved to be difficult as most of the students were not reading the chapters. However, by the end of the project most students had read the book in their own time.

A possible solution may have been to have supplied the book electronically as an eBook.

Mark Legg was a good presenter and seemed to capture the student's attention and imagination in the sessions.

Sarah delivered a good range of sessions with good subjects such as cost of first editions, opening lines and banned books.

If this project was repeated, then I would be interested in being involved again.

# Appendix 3 – Questionnaire 1

## Developing a culture of reading – case study

*The aim of this research is to further understand what/why students read and what the barriers to reading are. The information that you complete under each question will be anonymised and used to further enhance and encourage a culture of reading at this college and at other colleges nationally.*

*Please answer the questions as fully as you can:*

- 1. What do you think the benefits of reading are? (in your own personal life and also at college)**

I personally think it helps with your brain and staying focused, when you read you have to use your brain and keep your concentration, as well as learning new words.

It helps you to relax and to calm down after a busy day as I feel you do other things while watching tv and the tv doesn't help me to relax but a calm quiet room and a book really does help.

- 2. What do you believe are the barriers to reading? What might make you not read? And what do you think the barriers to reading are for other students?**

My son struggles with his spellings and I know that has a big part in him not wanting to read books as he struggles and the books, he can read he finds babyish.

If you haven't been brought up around books or your parents don't read books then you can unintentionally not read because of your environment. Some students may find it uncool to read books or their friends say their a geek or loser if they read them and it would put them off from wanting to read.

- 3. What do you believe the biggest impact on your reading is and why? E.g. school, friends, parents etc.**

My mum always read to me as a child before bedtime and I also read a lot at school and had books to take home from school so I could read at home.

I also remember having some books on a tape and id listen to story's as I was going to sleep as a child.

- 4. Do you think there is anything more that colleges could do to encourage you and other students to read?**

I think the college does well at encouraging us to read, they could offer a sign with most recommended books or this week's top books because sometimes I fancy a change and it would be nice to read some reconditions from others.

**5. Is there anything more you would like to add?**

I feel our college does a lot to offer reading to its students and set a good example as we have a huge library where we can borrow books and the librarians are really helpful.

On one of our first days we got an induction in the library on the computers and a lot was explained about how you could use the library and their systems.

## Appendix 4 – Questionnaire 2

### Developing a culture of reading – case study

*The aim of this research is to further understand what/why students read and what the barriers to reading are. The information that you complete under each question will be anonymised and used to further enhance and encourage a culture of reading at this college and at other colleges nationally.*

*Please answer the questions as fully as you can:*

- 1. What do you think the benefits of reading are? (in your own personal life and also at college)**

Reading daily or weekly has a large impact on young people's opinion as it exposes them to other people's ideas and thoughts. I think this is a good thing as it means they are exposed to not only their parent's and peer's thought processes, but writes too. I also think it will help them in the long run with school as reading is a vital part to any lesson in the curriculum. Another advantage is that it opens up your vocabulary and creates a more rounded student.

- 2. What do you believe are the barriers to reading? What might make you not read? And what do you think the barriers to reading are for other students?**

One of the main barriers I believe to students and adults not reading is social media and television. People would much rather not have to concentrate and just sit in front of the tv or scroll through Facebook and Instagram then actually engage in a book. I think lots of people also say they don't have time when they do, they are just using the time on different things. Something else that may be a disadvantage to reading is how easily influenced young people are. Although this can be good because they are being opened up to new ideas and thoughts, the opinions the author gives could be toxic and the child could think it's okay.

- 3. What do you believe the biggest impact on your reading is and why? E.g. school, friends, parents etc.**

I think my biggest influence to read is my parents. They had always read with me when I was young and it's stuck with me into my teen years too. Because I've done it from such a young age, it's almost second nature to read at least once a day because it's just what I've grown up doing. However, I don't think it's a nature vs nurture debate as some children might grow up reading but hate it as an adult.

- 4. Do you think there is anything more that colleges could do to encourage you and other students to read?**

I think by the time you get to college, if you don't want to read it shouldn't be forced upon you. You wouldn't be forced to watch tv or look on social media.

16/17/18-year olds can make their own decisions and shouldn't be forced to do it if they don't want to.

**5. Is there anything more you would like to add?**

## Appendix 5 – Questionnaire 3

### Developing a culture of reading – case study

*The aim of this research is to further understand what/why students read and what the barriers to reading are. The information that you complete under each question will be anonymised and used to further enhance and encourage a culture of reading at this college and at other colleges nationally.*

*Please answer the questions as fully as you can:*

**1. What do you think the benefits of reading are? (in your own personal life and also at college)**

One benefit of reading would be the escape from real life. Many of us have trouble that makes us want to be free from the thoughts of the life we are living and wish to understand how other people live. With the help of books we can have time away from social media, troubles of real life and the time out we need to make sure we are taking care of ourselves.

At college reading can benefit our grades and our studies. Reading books that relate to the course or courses we are taking can increase our understanding of the subject we are studying. If the book is about something we are going to study and you find time to read ahead it gives you the chance to read ahead even more allowing yourself to not fall behind and help other people struggling on the course.

**2. What do you believe are the barriers to reading? What might make you not read?**

Modern day technology allows us to be open with the idea of social media and videos but we forget that the most wonderful thing is a simple paperback book, with stories from beyond. Social media seems more interacting and more fun than reading a book as a phone offers more than a book shall ever offer. There are very few people who like the idea of reading because it takes patience and knowledge and so only few invest their time and money getting and reading books.

**3. What do you believe the biggest impact on your reading is and why? E.g. school, friends, parents etc.**

School opens you up to see books as something fun and helpful and with a whole school library at your fingertips you can experience the start of books. I was taught to read at school and it is a lesson I always enjoyed because of the fun stories and new words I would get to read. My parents wouldn't read with me often as a child as my mother was bringing up my new baby sister and my father was away at work but me and my older sister both loved to read and so it was her that gave me old books and encouraged me to read. I read many books before I even stepped into Junior School, like Charlotte's Web. If it wasn't for anyone

opening me up to free books, I wouldn't of ever got the chance to enjoy the stories.

**4. Do you think there is anything more that colleges could do to encourage you and other students to read?**

A competition for whoever can say the most book names every month or ask people what books they would like in the college could make more people want to read more books they like. A Giveaway at the end of the month, so every book you take out equals an entry into the giveaway. Having people like Sarah encouraging and talking about certain books that stand out makes people want to check them out and see what she means.

**5. Is there anything more you would like to add?**

The library is a very calm and relaxing space and I can find everything I need in there and I so would just like to say thank you.

## Appendix 6 – Questionnaire 4

### Developing a culture of reading – case study

*The aim of this research is to further understand what/why students read and what the barriers to reading are. The information that you complete under each question will be anonymised and used to further enhance and encourage a culture of reading at this college and at other colleges nationally.*

*Please answer the questions as fully as you can:*

- 1. What do you think the benefits of reading are? (in your own personal life and also at college)**

Reading can allow people to further their knowledge and understanding of almost everything and for me personally it's very good at keeping me relaxed in times of stress.

- 2. What do you believe are the barriers to reading? What might make you not read? And what do you think the barriers to reading are for other students?**

One barrier for reading is that it's not as easy to do as watching a movie or tv show. And for other students it might be because books are very long and sometimes rather slow. They may rather sit down and watch the hobbit for 3 hours than read it for 8 or more.

- 3. What do you believe the biggest impact on your reading is and why? E.g. school, friends, parents etc.**

School has a huge impact on reading because they force you to do it. Because your made to read rather than wanting to read it can give young people a dislike for books as they associate them with stressful times such as GCSEs.

- 4. Do you think there is anything more that colleges could do to encourage you and other students to read?**

I think the college could show students the massive amount of different genres and styles of books that are out there as many students only pick up a book to study and not for their own personal enjoyment. The college should show them that there is a genre or style for everyone and they shouldn't read because they have to but because they want to.

- 5. Is there anything more you would like to add?**

## **Appendix 7 – Focus Group notes**

### **5/11/2019: Focus group notes: Developing a culture of reading**

#### **What did you think of the play?**

“pretty cool”

“confusing”

“pretty old”

Clarify? – Russian names made it difficult to read.

#### **Did you prefer the play (book) or film?**

Preferred the book as the film was different to the book and I am ‘more of a book person’

Majority agreed that the book was better.

“The film cut part out of it”.

A few disagreed and preferred the film

“every now and then” (reads)

#### **When do you read?**

Evening before bed, it helps me to ‘switch off’

Try to read in the evening but don’t have ‘the focus’. Is easier to look at a screen.

Read on holiday

#### **Do you find reading enjoyable?**

“love it”

Yes - majority

“yes, if I like the book”

#### **How many pages do you give it?**

“80”

Others mentioned they gave it less

#### **Do you read books or online/kindle?**

Books - all

“Love a book”

“Love the new book smell”

All agreed they prefer a ‘physical’ book not online. Especially with a script/ play as is easier to rehearse.

### **Do you think that this has increased your propensity to read?**

Majority - yes’

“everyone is interested as they want to do well so everyone is engaging with the book”

No – “I don’t really read; it hurts my eyes!” I’d rather watch something, it’s less effort.

“I connect more with seeing the actors and visuals” I feel like I can connect with characters.

### **Do you have more connection with characters on the screen or in the book?**

Majority - connected more with book:

The book shows the characters ‘personal viewpoint’ so you go through ‘their story’. “On the film you don’t get what’s inside their minds”.

Book allows you to use your imagination to build up the characters. The book also spends more time on character development.

One or two disagreed and felt that you can develop a connection with a TV series.

### **Is imagination important when reading a book?**

Yes – all

You have to focus and cannot get distracted as you can do if you are watching something on a screen.

Quite often the film is a ‘short story’ version of the book.

### **Is there anything that would encourage you to read more?**

Studying it in class (having a purpose).

It being something I am interested in.

Those that were less interested in reading: enjoyed reading poems as they were short and engaging. Having time to read it (e.g. in class) as at home I might find other things I would rather do.

Depends on the book. I found a fantasy book that was really fast paced, and this was the first time I had been interested in reading. I now enjoy reading.

If a teacher ‘told me to do it’ at school I wouldn’t but if I knew I needed to do it to support my course I would.

My parents read to me and that encouraged me

**Influence of parents** (topic brought up by students)..

“I was brought up reading (my dad’s a proof-reader) and I love reading now”

One student then countered this: “I was brought up reading and since my parents have stopped putting books in my hand I have stopped reading!”

“I am a mother and have 2 kids, 1 loves reading and 1 hates it and I have read with both of them. I think it is more ‘natural instincts’”.

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