MON: Embedding Functional Skills within Vocational Areas by means of an online database of resources.(Elizabeth Frost)

☆ **Favourite   1799 views   1 favourite**

Cloud created by:

Elizabeth Frost
13 January 2016

Embedding Functional Skills within Vocational Areas

English and maths are now the most important part of any student's education, whether in primary, secondary or further education. The government has set a goal that all students should either have achieved or be working towards a C grade in GCSE English and maths as part of their study programme when they join further education, if they are under the age of 19.

Students who have a grade D in either subject must resit GCSE, but what about the students who don't have a grade D – what happens to them? Functional skills are the answer.

One of the main issues with functional skills is that these are delivered or embedded within vocational areas and are generally from Entry level 3 to Level 2. Many vocational staff:

Are not confident that they have the expertise or ability to cover the necessary skills required by students to achieve a pass

- Feel that they are not proficient enough in English or maths
- Don't have time to create relevant resources
- Can't always see the links between English and maths and their vocational areas
- Are terrified at the thought of teaching Level 2 functional skills

I have spoken to many lecturers, some of whom are happy to cover English and maths and others who find one or other of the subjects completely alien. Construction lecturers often tell me that they are practically-minded, they can't spell, don't read much and find it difficult to write in an academic style.   I would agree that these are issues, but they don't have to be, again it is confidence and a lack of resources. My aim is to make it easy for lecturers to deliver the materials and to gain confidence in areas of weakness.

My project will involve creating resources. This will be an evolving project, with input from vocational areas, such as hairdressing, beauty, construction, IT and Art and Design. The resources will be relevant to the areas and based on the individual requirements. In essence I

Search

🔍

Log in ▾   **Sign up**

Username:

Password:

[Forgotten password](#)

Tags

➕ **Add a tag**

In Cloudscapes

☁ OU H818 'The Networked Practitioner' Online Conference 2016

➕ **Add to a Cloudscape**

will create a database of materials that will be easily accessible by both lecturers and students.

 My theme is inclusion and I will rely on the lecturers to advise me on the topics they will be covering. These will change from term to term, depending on the units being taught, but with a whole college approach it should be possible to create a catalogue of resources that can be added to on a regular basis.

 For the conference I will show how the materials are organised within the vocational areas, present some of these materials and demonstrate how they can be used successfully. I will also highlight the exam board website for past papers, together with answers. This will also be an opportunity to provide links to websites, such as TES, Teachit and other English educational sites.

 This will be an invaluable tool for new and existing lecturers.

References

Education and Training Foundation (2015), Making maths and English work for all. The review of what employers and learners need from the maths and English qualifications taken by young people and adults.

 Weller M., (2011). 'The Digital Scholar. How Technology is Transforming Scholarly Practice. London, Bloomsbury

Whittaker F., (2014) Exclusive: Functional skills handed lifeline. [Online] available at http://feweek.co.uk/2014/10/03/functional-skills-handed-lifeline/ (Accessed 4 January 2016)

 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-maths-and-english-condition-of-funding (accessed December 2015)

Extra content

+ Add extra content

Embedded Content

+ Add embedded content

Contribute

Discussion (12)   Links (0)   Academic References (0)

Anita Houghton
11:51am 16 January 2016 Permalink

Hi Elizabeth

I agree this will be invaluable for new and existing teachers and lecturers and it is definitely more difficult for some vocational areas to embed the skills as the lecturers (although highly competent in their area) struggle with the skills themselves.

I have been involved in embedding functional skills for several years and had many discussions about how to basically go about this – but it always remains an issue. One approach which seems to be working at the moment is to raise awareness of work-based assessors and learners of when they are using their skills and this often is drawn out in the feedback.

For example, a hairdresser may not connect that making up hair dye is ratio. This should be fed back using the correct terminology in the feedback e.g. "observed xxx reading and following the instructions for xxx . The candidate started to mix xxx with xx in proportion of 2:1. Thus demonstrating competency, reading and following instructions , mixing hair dye and using ratio." This highlights the English and math skills that are occurring naturally and helps learners make the connections .

So even though your database of materials is a huge task already a section on how to identify these skills through feedback may also be useful.

Anita.

Nicki Berry

12:07pm 16 January 2016 Permalink

This is something that my tutors find difficult as well. Some are better than others at seeing English and maths within their subject areas but it's always an area we are working on.

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of embedding English and maths functional skills, as opposed to having subject specialist teachers?

Anita Houghton

1:13pm 16 January 2016 Permalink

Personally I think a combination of both works well. Sometimes learners just don't have the basic skills and need input first, this is where the specialists are ideal to initially deliver some targeted content and then everybody else connected with the learners continuing to embed this.

I tried tutoring maths and English with work-based learners several years ago (good old key skills days). English really isn't my strength so I felt uncomfortable doing so. The learners who needed a lot of input I found took time away from the vocational content so it didn't work. Learners with a certain degree of self motivation and a base line of skills could be pointed in the right direction and progressed fine.

I drew the conclusion a while ago that to meet Ofsted requirments its not just embedding maths and English which is important but everything. For our classroom based activities I used to print off topically newspaper articles and leave on tables for discussion before the session started. The articles quite often covered the equality and diversity aspect as well as recognising English skills in reading, absorbing information and being able to discuss it and respect others views. If the articles were chosen carefully it invovled maths as well I once found one regarding women in Leadership and pay outcomes. Ticked all the Ofsted boxes and was relevant to a Management course. I am guessing that the resource created for this project will have a bank of such resources and also how they can be used and this will be brilliant. I will be excited to see.

Elizabeth Frost
3:10pm 22 January 2016 Permalink

Thank you for your comments and it is really heartening to see that there is a definite need for this resource, particularly now that IET has been given the remit of looking into the FS provision.

Elizabeth Frost
5:07pm 31 January 2016 Permalink

I have been discussing the best way forward with my colleagues and they are all agreed that they would like me to develop this further. The plumbing and construction lecturers are on board and have agreed to help me to devise some of the resources that are needed.

IET has been given a remit to review FS and views have been sent from the college which will contribute to the consultation process. It is all very exciting and I hope to see that FS will be seen as a more vaulable tool for the more practical students.

Anita, I really like your idea of printing off topical newspaper articles and giving to students for discussion. I set a task for my students to come in to class with a piece of up-to-date news and I then choose someone at random to begin the discussion. Some are slightly more 'racey' than others but at least the discussions begin. Some definite 'E&D' discussions to be had.

Nikki, I don't think that you can get students through FS just by embedding - there have to be discrete sessions, possibly by subject specialists but everyone has to be consistent and work together. Vocational staff are actually better at FS than they realise, some are just scared to teach FS as it is out of their comfort zone, particularly as the exams are now more difficult.

I have suggested to one of the plumbing lecturers that he access some 'magic whiteboard' paper and has this on the walls of the construction building so that students can build up a glossary of terms. That way the students can see this all the time and can add words as and when they want to. Also easy to peel off and move around the building. This is one of the suggestions I would like to have on my site as he was quite surprised by how easy it would be just to create the glossary and allow the students to populate - thus fostering independent learning to some extent.

Anita, as far as the maths skills are concerned, I used an example such as your hairdressing example last week. We had a maths resilience day with all of the maths staff and we were discussing factorising and how this comes in to every day life. I suggested exactly what you have said about ratio; that we could allow the students to work out timings for hair dyes, top takes longer than the ends etc. The first thing the maths staff said was that they would need to know the exact timings in order to make sure the answer

was correct. I questioned how much hairdressing knowledge they actually needed because I didn't feel this was necessary at all as maths is all about the process. It didn't matter about the 'real' timings, provided the students recognised this process.

Nikki, this could probably fit into your question about vocational v specialists. The vocational staff would know the exact timings and may fixate on this element and the specialist staff may fixate on the answer. Very difficult to know the best way to go.

I am considering putting this resource on our Moodle site but we are in the process of migrating over to O365 so I'm going to build up my bank of resources for when the process is completed.

[Laila Burton](#)
10:03pm 1 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Elizabeth

This is a really interesting topic. I originally trained as a primary school teacher, but decided to pursue another career as I didn't think the National Curriculum catered to the diverse range of talents and learning styles of children (I also found some of the behaviour in the classroom a headache!) I think that's why the first sentence of your abstract made me stop and think; these may be the subjects given greatest priority by education providers, policy makers and employers, but are they necessarily the most important subjects for the individual? If someone wants to be a dancer these subjects will still be important, but perhaps they won't be the **most** important. It also made me wonder if there was ever a time when English and maths weren't given the greatest priority in the curriculum.

I also wondered if there were any audit tools that lecturers could use to identify any gaps.

Best wishes,
Laila

[Elizabeth Frost](#)
7:45pm 2 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

I completely agree that the perceptions of what is the most important part of a student's study varies from student to student, but for funding purposes it is all about English and maths and now it isn't just the students who have a D or below, but the A* to C students are very much in scope with OFSTED. A lot of colleges have been 'caught out' a little with the new funding rules and are trying to find ways to make sure that students with a grade D are now resitting GCSE English and maths. On top of this we are moving to the 1-9 GCSE specification. Lots of changes and lots of pressure.

This has had an affect on FS as students are more restricted on the route they take with English and maths. There is no longer the flexibility to allow the more vocational students to do FS. A real shame, but hopefully the upcoming review will show some common sense and provide a more suitable route for the more practical students.

Every student completes a BKSB initial diagnostic on enrolment. BKSB resources are then targetted to each student's individual needs and the students work through the exercises in workshops. This is a really good tool and one that lecturers can use to chart

progress. This helps to identify any gaps.

Lesley Hamilton
10:08pm 8 February 2016 Permalink

Hi Elizabeth,

Very interesting abstract and although I'm not aware of the specific issues related to Engliash and Math in English institituions I am very interested in seeing how you intend to collate, organise and make available the materials to staff within your institution.

Are you developing or using an existing content management system that staff can search for materials? Not unlike how Jorum and other OER repositories work.

Elizabeth Frost
10:14pm 8 February 2016 Permalink

Hi Lesley

I will be using Office 365 as a VLE. We are currently developing our Hub and all resources will be uploaded onto this. At the moment the FS resources are on Moodle but we will be moving away from this next year. It is quite an exciting prospect.

Elizabeth

Dr Simon Ball
11:41am 16 February 2016 Permalink

Hi Elizabeth

Here is a summary of the questions/comments from your presentation - please respond as you wish:

> I taught Functional Skills ICT in FE and could see that English and Maths were also embedded within the ICT curriculum and this was a foundation for all further study. I linked and embedded at all opportunities.
> I taught in Construction, Engineering and Hairdressing too

> So all the functional skills lessons would relate very specifically to a certain vocational area! Or is there a certain amount of generalisation? This sounds fascinating.
> How exactly can we ensure that something is 'admired'? It's tricky to overcome some of the snobbery, I think.

> Do you think funtional skills should be embedded by all teachers when necessary or should they be taught in specific functional skills classes?

> I contexutalised all of my lessons to leaners' core subjects and tried to give them an answer to 'why should I?' There is some excellent content in Functional Skills.

> interesting to say 'wired differently' there has been a recent move in industry to move away from skills and competencies to 'capabilities' identifying what abilities your students have and focusing on those abilities to support learning

- This echoes some of the problems we have in EAP (English for Academic Purposes). We're not quite sure whether to have kangyage specialists present in the actual academic classes, or have the provision somewhere entirely different.
- Do you just put up a lot of resources OR is there a focus on more resources for those topcs where they are specifically needed by most students
- I attended an awarding body input re functional skills when they were first proposed to take over from key skills. From memory I think it was always the intention that they should be taught in context. Practically, however, not always that easy to do so – scheduling and tutor expertise issues leads to FS being tagged on.
- Did you look at Office 365 'Class Notebook'
- I think Jisc undertook a project a few years ago creating FS resources. My FS skill colleague created some resources for the project.
- Permission for wider sharing - will that be problematic?
- I used BKSB too at the college I worked at - but I worked with each individual department to contexualise learning. Exhausting but rewarding :)

[Elizabeth Frost](#)
3:44pm 25 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

So all the functional skills lessons would relate very specifically to a certain vocational area! Or is there a certain amount of generalisation? This sounds fascinating. *My ideal would be to link to vocational areas, but there will be an overlap due to the very nature of FS. Letter layout for example will be the same regardless of the vocational subject.*
How exactly can we ensure that something is 'admired'? It's tricky to overcome some of the snobbery, I think. *My experience is that employers are happy with FS qualifications in some cases, although the C Grade GCSE is the 'holy grail' for others. Progression is the sticky point if students decide at a later date they wish to go to university then they will need the GCSE. Some students just aren't equipped to do the more academic study that others do. FS might be the way forward for them.*

- Do you think funtional skills should be embedded by all teachers when necessary or should they be taught in specific functional skills classes? *Definitely embedded by all teachers at every opportunity - but the students won't be able to sit the exam on embedding alone - there has to be discrete lessons offered too.*
- interesting to say 'wired differently' there has been a recent move in industry to move away from skills and competencies to 'capabilities' identifying what abilities your students have and focusing on those abilities to support learning *I really don't like this phrase. Students still need to have some form of assessment - difficult decision on how to assess - would this be down to the employer? Do employers have the expertise to assess students - I'm not sure they do.*
- This echoes some of the problems we have in EAP (English for Academic Purposes). We're not quite sure whether to have kangyage specialists present in the actual academic classes, or have the provision somewhere entirely different.
- Do you just put up a lot of resources OR is there a focus on more resources for those topcs where they are specifically needed by most students *This is interesting. We have the BKSB software that we have literally just purchased and are using with the students. It will be interesting to see if this improves student's individual abilities as the software is supposed to be targetted at the individual weaknesses..*
- I attended an awarding body input re functional skills when they were first

proposed to take over from key skills. From memory I think it was always the intention that they should be taught in context. Practically, however, not always that easy to do so – scheduling and tutor expertise issues leads to FS being tagged on. *Lots of my colleagues are in grievig that key skills have been turned into FS. I don't have experience of key skills but understand from the more nostalgic members of the team that this was a better system.*

▶ Did you look at Office 365 'Class Notebook'. *Not yet, but I will investigate.*

▶ I think Jisc undertook a project a few years ago creating FS resources. My FS skill colleague created some resources for the project.

▶ Permission for wider sharing - will that be problematic? *This may be as it is finding a platform that is accessible by all. Not a problem college-wide with O365 but could be across a wider audience.*

▶ I used BKSB too at the college I worked at - but I worked with each individual department to contexualise learning. Exhausting but rewarding :) *Rewards are great - students gain confidence and feel that what they are doing is relevant.*

[Ivy Harris](#)

12:30pm 17 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

of course English and math are quite essential subjects but still based on what i read in all papers I rated for http://essay-grader.com I can tell that generally student excel either at English or math and quite a few students excell at both

Contribute to the discussion

Please [log in](#) to post a comment. [Register here](#) if you haven't signed up yet.