Developing a value-added and evidence based approach to key skills
Or, measuring the un-measurable

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1. Introduction

My interest in developing a value-added and evidence based approach to key skills stems from a firm belief in the value of both. This is given a new impetus by the more flexible, unilised advanced level curriculum envisaged in the Qualifying for Success reforms (Duckett, 2001).

The need for evidence-based policies is clear. But there is an important difference between the kind of evidence that may justify advocating something as "good practice" and making greater claims on its behalf. Teachers can and do – make judgements about whether something is working in a classroom context and adapt it to be as effective as possible.

The twin approaches of developing students' strategies for writing and improving own performance which are alternative, but mutually supporting, cornerstones of key skills form part of my pedagogic belief system.

In this paper I intend to outline two approaches to raising achievement and to begin to develop an evaluation tool for measuring the value-added by these and other classroom initiatives, or more accurately, promote a dialogue with fellow practitioners about developing students' strategies for writing and improving own learning and performance.

Writing strategies and the improving own learning initiatives and the introduction of minimum target grades (MTG) is placed firmly within the context of value-added measures, target setting and performance indicators.

2. Argument

Wolf (1991) asked if "assessing key skills" was "wisdom or a wild goose chase"?

Measuring their effectiveness seems to be even more elusive.

The background to this paper is the furore in the British press epitomised by Dean and Thornton (2001) wrote that "The Government introduced key skills for sixth-formers ...as part of the new A-level curriculum" and claim that the "Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has made the key skills tests too hard and that the whole system is a shambles". But there has been no systematic attempt to measure the value and effectiveness of the key skills. I have a powerful feeling that those who reflect on their own learning processes and focus on problem solving (Duckett, 1998); have expert interventions made at crucial times (Duckett, 1997) and are actively involved in target-setting are more effective and successful learners than those who do not. But I do not have proof.

These are, therefore, the three themes of this paper: reflection on learning processes; interventions and target setting or, more accurately, the encouragement of each.

3. Reflection on learning processes and a focus on problem solving

What's the big idea? Firing student imagination with strategies for writing and the development of Key Skills was a project conducted with students at Barnet College in 1997-98 and revised and repeated several times since at Barnet College and East Berkshire College.

This section of the paper is about promoting a wide range of strategies aimed at enabling students to become more effective and accomplished writers. It is not my intention to offer a blueprint; neither am I presenting some kind of instruction manual. It is rather my belief that some approaches will work for some students, while others will prove useful in developing writing skills for others.
The most important thing is finding a topic which fires the imagination of the student and then hanging a variety of strategies for improving writing skills on the chosen subject.

The method is most effective when the ‘Big Idea’ is a real problem which means something to the student and genuinely fires his or her imagination. The problem, say race relations in the student common room, or lack of space in the home environment, is a real one and therefore more likely to fire the imagination and provide that crucial spark apparent in the work of many published writers but sadly lacking in much student work.

One way of getting started is by adopting multiple voices (this could be real or imagined). The real problems can then be discussed round the table by, for example, students adopting the roles of a published writer, self, co-team member, community member, mentor, etc. Once dissenting views come into play, a structure for the piece of student writing is more likely to emerge. One model is Model 1 (see appendix).

This model is not unlike the thesis – antithesis – synthesis approach. Another problem-solving approach is to divide a variety of activities into group and individual tasks, for example Model 2 (see appendix).

An assignment I have recently completed with GCSE students at Barnet College as part of their induction programme, entitled ‘What’s the Big Idea?’ is described below in Model 3. (see appendix).

The point of it all

The What’s the Big Idea? Project also involved the production of a portfolio approach to the accreditation of Key Skills. The rest of this article links the project with Key Skills and with development of student writing in general.

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### Communication

- Take part in discussion with a range of people on a range of matters
- Prepare written material on a range of matters
- Use images to illustrate points made in writing and in discussions with a range of people on a range of matters
- Read and respond to written material and images on a range of matters

### Improving Own Learning and Performance

- Identify strengths and weaknesses and contribute to the process of identifying short-term targets
- Seek and make use of feedback, follow given activities to learn and to improve performance

### Working with Others

- Work to given collective goals and contribute to the process of allocating individuals’ responsibilities
- Agree working methods and use them, and provide information to others on own progress

### Problem Solving

- Select procedures to clarify problems with a range of possible solutions
- Identify alternative solutions and select solutions to problems
Resources include a booklet on writing strategies and language skills from which the following are taken:

**Essay Writing**

**Presentation of Essays**

(i) **Planning your essays**

A. Spend plenty of time thinking. Time spent thinking rather than writing is just as valuable. Your ideas develop in this time.

B. Always read questions *carefully* and make sure that you understand the question and all its implications fully. Special attention should be paid to words like ‘discuss’, ‘compare’, ‘explain’, ‘consider’, and ‘contrast’. Always have a dictionary at hand where possible.

C. Read *purposefully trying to find the answers to questions*. If your teacher asks you to, read any books or articles in addition to the set text in preparation for the essay.

D. Use any information you have on the subject, such as notes from classes, films, videos, newspapers, magazines or TV programmes which might help you, and not just things you are specifically asked to use.

E. Make up questions that you can answer in the essay.

*For example:*

(i) What is the subject of the work of literature?
(ii) How do I know this?
(iii) What techniques is the writer using to achieve his / her aims?
(iv) Is the writer successful?
(v) Why do I like / dislike the poem, novel or play?

The example above relates to English Literature but a similar structure can be adopted for almost any subject.

F. Creative thinking does not happen automatically. Allow your mind to wander freely for some of the time, jotting things down as you think of them.

G. Outline your ideas in note form. There is no definite form your essay must take. Play around with your ideas until you find a suitable form.

H. You should be ready to begin writing your essay.
Study Skills for English Language and Literature

Skills and attitudes for success in 'A' Level English are:

b) comprehension

c) evaluation

d) appreciation

e) exploration

f) understanding

f) reflection

g) sensitivity

h) interaction

i) selection: knowing when each of the above is appropriate to the ‘A’ Level English Language and Literature Core.

It is crucial that you demonstrate all of the above in writing.

(ll) Writing your essays

A. Before starting, try and sum up in a few sentences what it is all about. You can then use this to judge whether everything you say in your essay is relevant. This is your checklist.

B. Introduction. Say what the essay is about and indicate what you will do in the remainder of the essay. This gives the reader a sense of direction.

C. Stick to the point. After each paragraph you write, ask yourself – is it clear, how does this idea link in with the title and the rest of the essay?

D. Do not make sweeping statements. Back up everything you say with relevant information and concrete examples. Never say: ‘I think Hamlet is mad’, without saying why.

E. Be clear. Use straightforward language and reasonably short sentences. Explain all the terms you use. You might understand them but your reader may not.

F. Include any appropriate quotations and acknowledge them at the end.

G. Conclusion. The final paragraph should sum up your main arguments or points and restate your view (which by now should be proven!).

It is recommended by some examination boards that a bibliography should be attached to the extended essay. This is, in any case, good practice.
Quick Guide to Writing an Essay

1. Start the essay well before you need to hand it in.
2. Always read the question carefully.
3. Get into the habit of questioning: think up questions which the title suggests to you.
4. Check any notes on the subject.
5. Read recommended books looking for answers to your questions.
6. Brainstorming – let your mind wander freely round the topic, jot down ideas.
7. Think about audience: decide who you are writing the essay for.
8. If time permits, take a break for a few days to allow your mind to explore for you.
9. Look back at your notes and jottings and decide how you will construct your essay.
10. Write a brief outline in note form.
11. Write your first draft. Then, if time permits, take another couple of days’ break.
12. Check your draft.
13. Write your final essay.
14. List your references.
Other Kinds of Writing

As well as writing traditional essays on Literature and linguistic analyses of literary and non-literary texts, this course will develop your writing skills in many different areas.

Writing to inform

You will probably be involved in writing autobiography and biography. People’s lives (including our own) are endlessly fascinating and the opportunity to reflect on and order your own experiences is often of great value.

Writing to Persuade

Persuasive writing of various kinds will be studied and practised. Many people use language to persuade us – to buy something, to join a club or group, think the same way that they do etc – and the art of rhetoric (using language to influence people) is alive and well on radio and television and in newspapers, magazines and on billboards.

Writing to Instruct / Advise

Practical kinds of writing also have a place on this course. If you’ve ever tried to follow an instruction manual on setting up a computer, using a video or other gadget, you’ll know how difficult writing to instruct can be. Similarly, ‘self-help’ writing (how to…) appears deceptively simple but requires high levels of clarity of language and empathy with your audience to be successful.

Writing to Entertain

Many students choose to do English because they enjoy ‘creative writing’ and this, of course, is an important part of the course. The short story is an obvious form but you will also be looking at, and trying your hand at, radio scripts, poetry, travel writing.
Resources

The following books represent a number of very useful resources and contain many suggested activities to supplement those outlined in this article:


The activities described in this paper support a portfolio approach to learning and promote the important and enabling Key Skills of communication, working with others, improving own learning and problem solving – and do so, I would argue, in a more organic way than the basic skills model which seems to be winning at present. This portfolio approach also supports the development of a valid Key Skills.

4. Interventions

Flexible Approaches to ‘A’ levels: a staff development programme for ‘A’ level English Literature in the wider context of teaching and learning styles and student achievement and core/key skills development.

This section describes a staff development process aimed at promoting flexible approaches to ‘A’ levels and places it in the wider context of student achievement and teaching and learning styles. In addition to a number of Barnet College English Literature team INSET activities, staff and curriculum development has also involved a Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) funded collaborative project with Ravenscroft School in Barnet and involvement with the London Six Consortium for the AEB’s ‘A’ level English Literature 660 Syllabus.

**Flexible approaches to ‘A’ levels in the light of the Dearing Review and beyond**

This paper is concerned with describing the teaching and learning styles, curriculum development and staff development surrounding a successful teaching programme for ‘A’ level English Literature. It could, however, equally apply to any ‘A’ level subject and is located very much within the context of core skills development.

Beath and core were two of the educational imperatives of the Dearing Review. A synthesis of general core skills and subject specific aims and assessment objectives can go a long way to achieving these desired outcomes. The Dearing Review of 16-19 qualifications has given this work a new impetus.

The Royal Society of Arts has published *14-19 Education and Training: Implementing a Unified System of Learning*. In it Richard Pring and others state:

The system of education and training is in a state of transition. Not long ago schools and colleges divided young people into those who could succeed academically, progress to university, and those who were not successful academically, and therefore move into vocational training or straight into unskilled employment. Economically, that made sense because there were many jobs for the unskilled, and on-the-job training, together with an apprenticeship system, would provide the necessary craft and technician skills in a relatively stable economic world. Only a minority were thought to need the broader and more advanced education necessary for the professional, scientific, technological and executive expertise essential for the running of society and its industries.
All that is now changed. More people are in need of education and training on economic grounds. But the economic imperative has raised broader educational and social questions. It is not just vocational training that people should receive. They have a right to be educated more broadly. Once again that might be seen purely in economic terms. A fast changing society facing an unpredictable future requires what Sir Christopher Ball refers to as a ‘learning society’. How else can society solve the problems which it is facing? How else can industry adapt to the increasingly competitive world market? How else can people experience fulfilment as human beings, when increased leisure opens up fresh opportunities? [Pring et al, 1994]

This, in my view, is significant in contextualizing trends in academic further education (FE) in the past two years.

Staff Development and Flexible Learning

Threats, be they funding related ones from the FEFC or the demand of College management for greater flexibility (both of course claim that what they want is not ‘more for less’ but rather something ‘different’), sometimes provide opportunities. These changes need not (though it would be dangerous to think they never should) be viewed in entirely negative terms. In this article I will outline the response by one subject team to management calls for a flexible curriculum.

To be modular, flexible and integrated is not necessarily a bad thing. This opportunity to enhance the curriculum must, I believe, despite the additional work both in and out of the classroom, be seized with both hands. In order to construct a coherent post-16 curriculum there are, it seems to me, four pre-requisites: it must be fully understood; it must be planned; it must be enabling; and it must be about progression. A pre- or early heavy dose of core, or to avoid confusion what I will call central or key, study skills relating to a subject is, therefore, highly desirable, if not essential. The skills I am writing about in this article are the ones which unlock the Pandora’s Box of literary study, those skills central to doing well in the subject at ‘A’ level. Similar skills can, and have been, identified in the core of any subject.

The first staff development activity aimed at promoting more flexible approaches to ‘A’ levels involved identifying key, or central, study skills relating to a subject: in this case, ‘A’ level English Literature, more specifically ‘A’ level English Literature (AEB 660). Staff development and curriculum development are often about change. Recent syllabus rewrites and alterations to funding methodology have created (to borrow the insidious market parlance so prevalent in post-Thatcherite FE and continued in New Labour’s education agenda) a demand for flexible approaches to ‘A’ levels.

The identification of skills and attitudes is a pre-requisite. In this case, comprehension; evaluation; appreciation; exploration; understanding; reflection; sensitivity; interaction and all of the above at appropriate times.

It is then necessary to relate these to the aims of the syllabus. This is best achieved through a mapping exercise. These examples relate to the Practical Criticism and Comprehension Paper of the 660 Syllabus: appreciation of the wide variety of responses which literature evokes; exploration of texts in order to discover fresh insights; understanding of themselves and others; reflection on what has been read; an awareness of ambiguities and an expression of this awareness, where necessary; sensitivity to signs of mood and feeling; and response in formats other than the traditional discursive or critical essay.

Assessment Objectives and Key Skills

Assessment objectives then need to be matched with both the appropriate skills and attitudes and the syllabus aims and objectives:

- see meanings beneath the surface of a text;
- understand the nature and interplay of characters;
- show appreciation of an author’s style;
- make a well-considered personal response to a text;
- show how texts excite emotions in readers or audiences;
• make interested and informed conjectures when asked, about the intentions of a writer;
• explore works written for a different kind of society and in a different idiom from the candidate’s own; and
• write effectively, and appropriately, in response to texts studied.

Armed with the results of our ‘Skills Audit’ we were able to produce an Introductory Skills-based module including, for example, an Identification of Skills and Attitudes. These skills must, furthermore, be transferable, meaningful, necessary and, to some extent, naturally arising, and the Aims of Syllabus relating to Practical Criticism and Comprehension.

Students’ Attitudes

Examination results have been good and the student learning enhanced. A selection of student comments on the introductory package reflect this:

It was an interesting way of introducing the subject of English Literature by giving passages from various texts.

and

It was very enjoyable to read. It’s been a great and different experience studying this text, I’ve even showed it to a few of my friends and they say they liked it.

and

I liked the different extracts from the novels that were all combined together in this module. I thought that it was a very good idea because it highlighted all the different types of writings.

The staff development aspect has grown largely out of teachers working together on something that enhances the student learning experience, impacts on teaching and learning styles and develops the curriculum in its broadest sense.

Teaching and Learning Styles

Developments have been seen, by students, teachers and managers alike, as successful and there have been moves not only to set up an English INSET Group, which involves teachers across all the ‘A’ level syllabuses offered, but also common approaches through the GCE (‘A’ level) Subject Leaders’ Forum, including a Core Skills Audit across ‘A’ level subjects.

There has been a good deal of two-way traffic between staff development activities and teaching and learning styles, which is briefly outlined below.

The most important thing people learn through studying any written or spoken material, whether classed as ‘literature’ or not, is how to ‘read between the lines’ – that is, to grasp the context and subtext as well as what is openly stated. In the current situation, where the details of curricula are being more and more tightly specified by official diktat, it is becoming necessary for teachers who want to help students develop this capacity to learn, as it were, how to write ‘between the lines’ of those official curricula – in other words, to utilize the spaces within them to foster broader skills of critical reading.

From this perspective, we may be able to turn developments which would otherwise be threats to valid teaching and learning, for example, the pressure towards modularization and flexible learning produced by outcome-related funding, into opportunities for it. Since curricula must be rewritten, there is a chance for us, through participating in that rewriting, to insert valid elements.

We should grasp this opportunity. In order to do so we need our own concept of what a coherent post-16 curriculum would look like. Such a curriculum should be based on four underlying criteria: it must be capable of being fully understood by all concerned; it must be planned; it must be enabling; and it must be about progression. For these criteria to be satisfied, all curricula would have to contain at their centre a large element of study skills. This element of study skills should be subject-related, and it should be concentrated at or towards the beginning of any given programme. In the field of ‘A’ Level English Literature, it should be called ‘key study skills’ or ‘central study skills’, because the skills it would develop are those which unlock the process of studying literature and which are central to doing well in it. (Equivalent skills can be identified within all subjects.) Without such skills, no curriculum can be truly flexible.
Taking the AEB 'A' Level English Literature syllabus, the course team has, as previously noted, identified as crucial the following skills: comprehension; evaluation; appreciation; exploration; understanding; reflection; interaction; and sensitivity (although this might more correctly be termed an attitude). A further skill – that of applying these at the appropriate time – is also necessary.

These broad skills can then be linked with, in this case the AEB’s syllabus aims and assessment objectives, enabling us to say, for example, that for students to do well on the Practical Criticism and Comprehension paper, they need to learn to develop all the appropriate skills.

Finally, on this basis, teaching and learning modules incorporating the central or key skills can be devised. The example shown (see appendix) is an introductory skills-based module which has grown out of teachers working together, which enhances the learning experience for students, which impacts on both teaching and learning styles, which develops the curriculum and which has proved popular with students.

**Student Achievement**

The three strands of the article, namely staff development, student achievement and attitudes and teaching and learning styles are, I believe, drawn together in the current year’s ‘A’ level Information Service (ALIS) Report and Subject Review for English Literature which provided extremely positive feedback on perceived learning activities, especially in relation to items relating to communication, working with others, improving own learning, research skills and teacher presentation of topics.

It might be useful to examine some statistical information relating to this approach.

(1) Examination Statistics

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students taking the examination (June 1995)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students passing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass rate</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students gaining A-C grades</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comparison with FE pass rates and of 97 colleges taking part in the ALIS report; Barnet College came 22nd out of 97 using average GCSEs at entry.

Barnet College ‘A’ Level English Literature Students

Comparison with previous years: 100% past three years.

(2) Other Statistics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Applying to course, specifying ‘A’ Level English Literature:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) ALIS Results

(a) Examinations

| No. of students two or more grades above predicted | 8 |
| No. of students one or more grades above predicted | 3 |
| No. of students achieving predicted grade | 2 |
| No. of students one grade below predicted | 5 |
| No. of students two or more grades below predicted | 2 |

The student who failed should not really have been supported in her entry. She did not complete all of the coursework which meant that she was in effect being marked out of 80 rather than 100.

The high number of students gaining higher than predicted grades (11) stems from:

- support in class;
- supported self-study packages to supplement classwork;
- activities enhancing studies, (e.g. student conferences, theatre visits and trips such as one to Haworth in connection with our study of *Wuthering Heights*);
- teacher enthusiasm for the subject;
- skills-based approach throughout; and
- heavy early course (induction) dose of study skills for literature.
Other observations worth recording include:

Student ability 78th out of 97; when parent occupation is taken into account 52nd. The raw grades show Barnet College 56th, when GCSE results are taken into account Barnet College students come 22nd and if gender is taken into account it is 21st. This is up a remarkable 56 places when ALIS statistics are considered. Given GCSEs at intake and in terms of higher education (HE) progression we were top of the ALIS table.

It is also worth noting that 15 students (63%) performed better than expected, on average the students achieved half a grade higher than expected and 11 students (48%) achieved one or more grades higher than expected.

The average residual of 0.7 is considered to be very good indeed.

(b) Student Attitudes

Students' attitude to the college 10th out of 98
Students' attitude to the subject 12th out of 97
Advising others to come to the college 47th out of 97.

Student attitudes were extremely positive and our students were 1st out of the 97 colleges in the ALIS report, a very important added factor, when the GCSE's at entry were taken into account with regard to HE progression.

Most students liked both the subject and the college. Reasons included enjoying the way topics were presented by teachers and emphasis on collaborative working in class.

Conclusions for 'A' Level English Literature

(1) The syllabus is popular with students and teachers alike and this is reflected in very good results and ALIS statistics. The fact that a 96% pass rate is our lowest for four years would suggest that the subject is both interesting and delivered effectively.
(2) There are no plans at present to change either the syllabus or the way the subject is taught, but this will, of course, be subject to annual review by the Subject Leader and Subject Team.
(3) Subject-specific entry requirements are appropriate. The team would object to them being raised on both practical and ideological grounds.
(4) The syllabus is appropriate in every respect.
(5) A published scheme of work was piloted this year and is considered a useful addition to subject organization and delivery.
(6) Teaching & Learning Styles are effective, appropriate and well-thought of. (See paper given at London Borough of Barnet (LBB) TVEI Conference, February 1995.)
(7) The subject induction contains an injection of core learning skills appropriate to the subject. The team lay great store on this approach and support it with student-centred and supported self-study approaches to teaching and learning. It received a very good response from students.
(8) INSET is offered on a regular basis and covers curriculum development, teaching methods and assessment. Take-up is high and attendance at external courses is also regular.
(9) Other activities worth highlighting include:
   • active involvement in the AEB's 'London Six' English Literature consortium, including a working party which produced a study guide;
   • a TVEI Collaborative Project with Ravenscroft School which bore fruit in the form of an induction package;
   • a detailed response to the AEB's 'Better Syllabuses' paper;
   • sending materials to the FEU for a research project on Modular 'A' levels; and
   • the effective use of the Subject handbook and introductory study packs.
(10) Inputs at conferences at North London TEC, on 'Flexible Approaches to 'A' Levels' (March 1994) Barnet TVEI on 'Assignment Based Learning' (February 1995), 'LBB on Core Skills Across the Curriculum' (January 1996) and the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) 'Spotlight on Learning: English and communications' (April 1997) have been well received.

The value of staff development exercises, the early course injection of key study skills and teaching and learning styles in general
all need, of course, to be measured in some way.

**Some Generalizable Conclusions**

In this article I have described developments that have, I believe, been enhanced by the TVEI initiative in relation to two different kinds of ‘core skills’, that is those learning skills that are core to a student’s whole learning programme and those who study skills that are core, or central to a specific subject. The pilot scheme described below (see appendix ) is intended to contribute to a more unified post-16 curriculum.

**Core skills**

The general core skills, those defined by the NCVQ, in Communication, Working with Others, Improving own Learning and Problem Solving, have been approached through a college TVEI-driven ‘A’ Level Core Skills pilot which consists of two stages, the first, involving a taster assignment has just been completed. It covered 256 students.

This taster, built around the Working with Others performance criteria, has led to a bigger project which is based on a community action assignment designed within the framework of ASDAN’s FE Award Scheme. Students who have undertaken the scheme have subsequently been enrolled in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) FE Award Scheme at Level 3 and have been working on a community-based assignment and a project based around their work experience.

It is too early to report on the outcomes of part two of the Core Skills pilot, but I will tentatively assert that it has at the very least raised awareness among students, beyond the bland acceptance that study skills are a meaningless hoop to be jumped through in tutorial time and begin to demonstrate that an injection of core skills or central study skills can have some impact on a student’s learning programme. The documents outlined above have been influential in core/key skills development across the College GCE Programme.

Reading between the lines

Assessment objective: Write effectively and appropriately, in response to text studied. The class is divided into pairs or small groups and asked to apply the following 17 steps to any text.

1. Empty your mind of any preconceptions about writing.
2. Without reading the text, write down three things that its title suggests to you as an individual.
3. Agree on the two or three best suggestions in your pair or group.
4. Now read the text once, to yourself, quickly.
5. One member of your pair or group reads the text aloud.
6. Re-read the text individually, twice.
7. List, individually, all the things about the text that interest you for any reason, for example, unusual words, words you like the sound of, repetition, patterns, contrasts, anything else.
8. Agree a list of interesting features.
9. Now take a detailed look at the following aspects of the language: presence or absence of adverbs and adjectives; tenses; are verbs active or passive?
10. Find groups of words that contain a similar theme. (Don’t worry about whether this makes any sense at this stage.)
11. Discuss whether or not any pattern is emerging yet.
12. Read the text again. Does what you have said about it make sense.
13. Answer the following structured questions.
   - Who is speaking? The writer or someone else? If someone else, who?
   - Who is it addressed to? A particular person? The writer him/herself? Everyone?
   - Why is the text put down on the paper the way it is?
     (Describe how it is organized.)
   - What effect does it all have on you?
14. Give another pair or group your text to read.
15. Talk them through it and answer any questions they might have.
16. Swap.
17. Choose either your text or the text you have just heard and write about it, taking all the above into consideration and saying whether or not you like it and why.

Students are then asked to read a piece of criticism as a model and discuss the way it is constructed.
Taster assignment – working with others

Element 3.1 Work to given collective goals and contribute to the process of allocating individuals’ responsibilities.

Performance criteria

(1) The accuracy of own understanding of collective goals is confirmed with the person(s) setting them.
(2) The accuracy of own understanding of responsibilities and working arrangements is confirmed with others.
(3) Own activities are directed towards achieving collective goals and meeting own responsibilities.
(4) Information relevant to allocating responsibilities is fed into discussions at appropriate points and provided on request.
(5) Information provided is based on appropriate evidence.
(6) Offers to undertake specific responsibilities are appropriate.

Activity

(1) In your groups identify a social or environmental problem you have noticed in the College.
(2) In the half an hour or so allocated you should write a memo outlining a plan of action aimed at dealing with the problem you have identified.
(3) Members of your group must perform the following roles: (a) Leader, (b) Scribe, (c) Researchers x 2.
At the end of the activity spend 5 minutes reflecting upon and identifying which of the performance criteria you have met.
5. Target-setting

Minimum target grades

The method used at East Berkshire College is provided by Greenhead College, one of the leading Beacon sixth form colleges, and is widely used throughout the sector. The purpose is twofold:

1 To involve students in setting themselves realistic but demanding targets for their own achievement
2 To provide a means by which we can judge the value we are adding to the students’ achievement when the final results are known.

But this is only one of many versions of target setting.

The method

1 Distribute copies of a proforma, and example sheet, to each student. The proforma calls for their GCSE grades, shows how to calculate a GCSE point score from them, and indicates the appropriate target. Talk through the proforma, aims and method, then give the students time to complete it. Go round helping them with the calculations (which are very straightforward).
2 Collect the proformas when complete and attach to students’ learning plans so that they can be referred to in one-to-ones during the course.

The following (Duckett 2001) is a list of points to consider (not an exhaustive one), when reflecting and drawing up action plans.

- Recruitment: Are students on the right course for them? Are students receiving guidance on taking appropriate combinations of subjects, which support each other?
- Syllabus: Is syllabus appropriate for the intake? Are we as educators completing the syllabus in time for plenty of revision?
- Induction: Is there an argument for taking the first term more slowly to build basic skills, so enabling students to achieve success and improve confidence and self esteem?
- Failing students: Are we as practitioners identifying problems at an early enough stage? Do we follow through?
- Able students: Are we stretching the more able students? Are we encouraging these students to support others?
- Tracking: Is behaviour, punctuality, attendance and class/homework completion a problem?
- Homework: Is enough homework set? Do we ensure standard of homework is high? Do we ensure early supportive feedback?
- Classes: Is there a spread of different teaching styles to reach different types of learners? Are styles appropriate?
- Classes: Is the time in classes used most effectively? Do lessons contain a number of different activities?
- Classes: Are the textbooks/language we use appropriate for the intake?
- Exams: Are there enough short tests and exam practice on the course?
- Parents: Do we enlist parents/guardians to support us? Is it done early enough?
- IT: Are we encouraging the proper use of IT? Are we aware of what IT learning materials the learning resource centre has? Are we making bids for monies to buy such materials? Are we then encouraging their effective use?
- Additional learning support (ALS), ESOL Workshops: Are we identifying and tracking students that need support?
- MTGs: How can we make further use of MTGs to monitor progress?
- A ‘Shared Agenda’ :
  - How can curriculum co-ordinators support you?
  - How can Heads of Year support you?
  - How can the management team support you? (within the given resource constraints)
- Key Skills: what is the role of Key Skills, especially Improving own Learning and Performance?
6. Conclusions

If my interest in developing value-added and evidence-based approach to key skills is to be more than simply a firm belief that young people who are effective communicators, good team workers and problem solvers and value reflecting on their own learning processes, then the need for further evidence-based research should be apparent. There are no real conclusions drawn in this paper. My purpose for writing and presenting it is to test my assumptions that the encouragement reflection on learning processes, interventions and target-setting are significant factors in improving learning.

I am keen to join with other practitioners in an attempt at measuring what, to many, appears to be un-measurable:

- the impact of reflection on learning processes;
- the success of interventions;
- the effectiveness of target setting.

References


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Appendix: Three models employed in the ‘What’s the big idea’ project
**Model 2**

**Group Activity**

- Role play with chair, secretary etc
- Definition: What is the problem?
- Analysis of the problem / Identifying the causes of the problem

**Individual Activity**

- Specific objectives
- Solution of problem
- Writing of report, essay, article etc
Model 3

Learning Points

1. Clarify the problem that needs addressing.
2. Share and explain the problem you have identified to others.
3. Convince others that the problem and solutions are valid.
4. Argue your case, making use of any relevant data.
5. Develop appropriate presentation skills.

Activities

15. Brainstorm.
16. Discuss.
18. Assess your objectives – state your idea in 50 words. If you cannot do it in 50 words you do not know it well enough yet.
19. Select point of view – find original and interesting angle.
20. Select reader – define evidence and find a person to collaborate with.
21. Assess proposal – write proposal as if to an editor of a magazine (write it as a memo).
23. Revise.

10. Draft 2 – this is where a critical friend advises on language. (Note: language and grammar etc are the responsibility of the student.)

Support Systems

1. Writing logs: responses, free writing, diary.
3. Research: library, Learning Resource Centre, interviews, surveys etc.
5. Textual analysis exercise.
6. Log of work on assignment to be handed in.
7. Development of Key Skills:

- Problem Solving
- Communication
- Improving Own Learning and Performance (Study Skills)
- Working with Others.

Conclusion for Model 3

Think about the content, context and importance of collaboration.