

Teaching and learning issues

Developing professional practice through peer collaboration

Teaching and Learning Projects at City Lit

As Geoff Petty points out, in order to improve teaching we have to take risks and experiment with new approaches.

The difficulty is that new ideas often don't work first time and it is easy to give up. Teachers often need support from colleagues to keep going — reflecting and adjusting until the new approaches work.

At City Lit almost all of our tutors are part-time and often have very little opportunity to discuss their practice with colleagues.

City Lit has been running teaching and learning projects for three years and roughly 200 tutors have taken part. In these projects, tutors work together on improving teaching and learning over a period of time — usually peer visiting each other, meeting during the process to share ideas and sometimes having the support of a mentor.

Teaching and learning projects are a type of supported

Join a teaching and learning project in 17-18!

Projects will be running again this year at City Lit. If you would like to take part, contact your department to see if one is running, or contact: Wendy.Moss@citylit.ac.uk, Head of Teaching and Learning.

You receive a payment for taking part in the projects as recompense for your time in meetings and visiting.



'action research'. They enable tutors to

- Take risks — experiment with new ideas and approaches with the support of others.
- Visit and learn from colleagues and share good practice
- Feel part of a professional team of teachers rather than working in isolation
- Reflect on the success of experiments, with colleagues and students.

In this issue participants in projects describe their experience, what they have tried out and how they and their students have benefited.

Creative Writing peer exchange project

Brian Mullin: Playwriting tutor.

Anyone who's been teaching the same subject for a while will know that it's easy to fall into the same rhythms and rely on tried and tested familiar formats. The Peer Mentoring Scheme offered me a great opportunity to reflect on my practice as a teacher, a chance to vent and collectively solve problems — and, most helpfully, to poach ideas from other City Lit tutors.

The tutors met up at different points to bat around some of the issues we were each having with our classes and to brainstorm new strategies for managing them. This process alone was very useful as so often

we are working away on our own with no input from other professionals.

Tutors paired up to observe one another's classes and to offer feedback. In the last section we had detailed support from a mentor, including some helpful resources that I ended up adapting for my students.

I came up with new lesson plans and new ways to convey them including audiovisuals and handouts. I got helpful advice on my classroom manner which enabled me to refine how I spoke in class and defined terms. I think the students really benefited from getting clearer, more innovative and more confident lessons from me by the end of the project.

Visual Arts: Managing returning learners

Simon Burder: Printmaking tutor.

I joined this project as it was a chance to be with and learn from other teachers, and to be a 'fly on the wall' in classes to see if other teachers have the same issues as me. I hadn't seen anyone teach since I did my teacher training some years ago!

The project was about managing mixed level classes of beginners and returning learners. New learners must develop certain skills and processes and teaching is straightforward. With learners who keep coming back to the same class the issue is different — how to encourage them to go further and take risks with their work each time.

For my experiment, I stole a couple of ideas from one

of the peers I visited. She stopped her class for 5 minutes in the middle and got students to share what they were doing with each other. This made me think about how to get returning learners to engage more with each other and me. At the same time I was spending a lot of time writing notes at the end of each class. So I wanted something that would help students engage with the course, each other and me, and provide another way for students and myself to track learning.

For my project, I devised a do-it-yourself RARPA form. Students kept the form beside them throughout the class and responded to the first column 'My plan for the session - technical, image, research'. Then I asked them to reflect in pairs at the start of the following class on 2 further questions: 'What worked?' and 'How might I do it differently?'. Everyone took part in the reflection, including the beginners. It brought the group together and it enabled everyone to feel they had something to offer

By the end of the term, although some hadn't written much, a fair number had fully engaged with the form and some really liked it and wrote almost essays! I copied the forms and gave them back to students to take away. The next course some students returned with their form and they had them to refer back to.

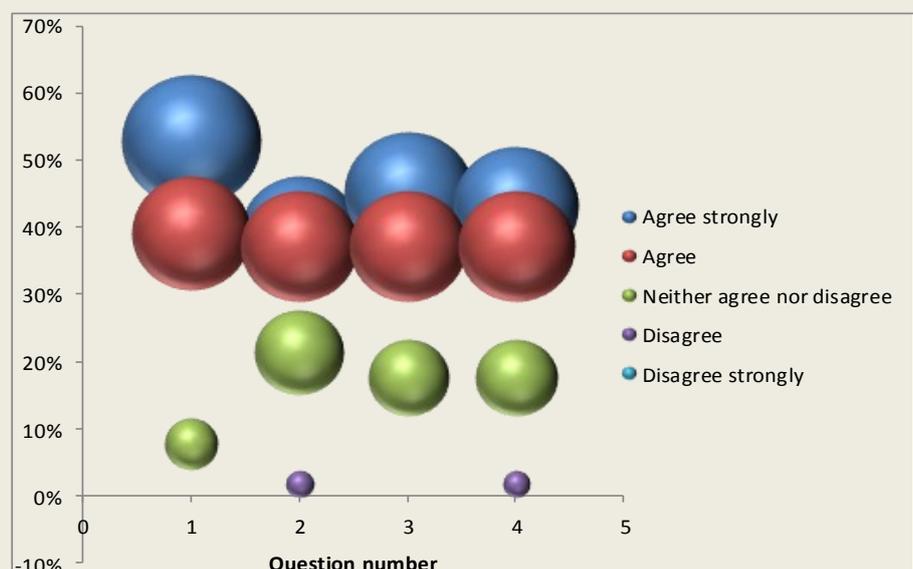
I continue to use the form on longer courses. It helps me understand where learners are, and gives a sense of purpose to the class. Because they have the key learning on the forms, I know what I and they are doing — and I don't have to write! I make it clear that

How teaching and learning projects impact on participants as employees.

Questions

1. I felt respected as a professional with expertise to share
2. I felt more valued by City Lit
3. It helped me feel less isolated/ more part of a team
4. I felt more secure about my current classroom practice

Survey Sept 2016. 52 responses.



the form is for me too, not just them. I might jot down 'think about this or that...' so it becomes a repository for everything related to that student's learning.

Visual Arts—Research into effective tutorials

Ute Kreyman: Tutor, Foundation Dip in Art and Design

This project was very helpful. I learnt a lot about supporting learners to take responsibility for evaluating their learning.

I developed my idea from something I had seen on one of our peer visits. Often I have 14 students and not a lot of time to get round them all. I wanted to improve the quality of the one to one tutorials. So I asked students at the beginning of the class to write down one question they really wanted answering. As a result, we were jointly much more focussed on their work and in trying to find an answer to their question.

These one-to-one sessions also became more successful as in most cases we had more time to find a way forward in their research. It also helped with time management, enabling me to give a more equitable division of tutorial time between individuals and allowed students to take much more responsibility for their learning. The students responded very positively.

What I also found beneficial from my peer visits was seeing that some tutors gave much more responsibility to students and it worked wonderfully. Seeing this led me to feel I could risk it more too. I thought it was what I was doing already, but now felt confident I could go further. It was also an exchange — other people benefited from things they saw in my classes.

The project brought the team together very well — I would not normally have talked to colleagues about our teaching. As a result, I felt I was standing on more solid ground.

Developing listening in advanced language classes

Chika Nakagawa, Amaia Ibarquen, Juan Mario Diaz (Language tutors), Analia Tolone (Mentor)

The tutors on this project experimented with a range of ways to help students improve their listening skills — understanding real life people speaking the language. The participants tried different pre- and post- listening activities and also extended the types of listening they offered. For instance, Chika tried *'dialogues and scripts more linked to what students might hear being in Japan'*.

Tutors asked their students regularly for feedback. Chika reported her students were *'much more motivated and excited to try new approaches even when they were more challenging for them... It really had a positive impact on them'*. Amaia felt the feedback had changed her belief that listening was always difficult for students — *'the students are able to learn and feel better towards listening, something that usually they are scared about.'*

Not everything worked first time. Juan realised the importance of feedback when he tried asking his students to do a 'dictagloss' where they had to make 7 sentences from key words they heard. The students told him they couldn't remember so many words, and the recording was too fast - they needed to listen at least three times. Juan adapted the exercise accordingly and it worked much better.

The tutors visited each other, and had an experienced colleague as a mentor. Analia, one mentor, felt she had also benefited from the project. It made *'mentors and mentees work collaboratively in the development of strategies so we were learning from each other.'*

The three tutors felt they had benefited from the project in a variety of ways. Juan felt *'it motivated us to experiment, to use new approaches and be more creative...I learnt a lot and totally enjoyed it'*. Amaia particularly valued *'having the chance to discuss with a colleague the results of different activities, particularly when there is not a hierarchical judgement about it but only constructive feedback and self reflection on practice'*. Chika summed it up: *'Although the project consumed a lot of time and effort over 5 months.... I would certainly recommend it to others. As teachers, we can never stop learning.'*

Health, Wellbeing and Digital Learning Project

Yvonne Chisholm Morley: Voice tutor

(This project was part of the London Professional Exchange Programme run by the Education and Training Foundation and led by Staff Development)

It was a privilege and fun to be involved in a research project for City Lit. It was an opportunity for professional development and to add to the resources and approaches I use as a teacher (I've been teaching for 35 years).

My big focus was digital learning. I tried Google Classroom for the first time. Students could access:

- Resources posted on the site

- Links to professional practice in the industry
- Recordings of their work uploaded after each session
- Enjoy the interactive forum

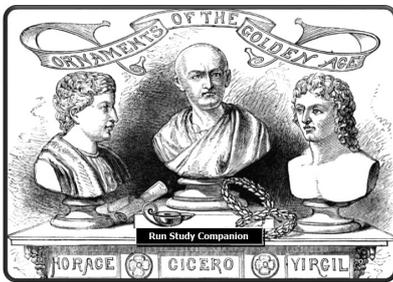
The new site was very popular. Some students needed a little time to get on board with using it, but Luke Mullender (Digital Learning) helped them to do just that.

As part of the project I asked two students to keep journals — 1 written and 1 video — documenting their experience. They were really thrilled with the skills learned, how they could apply these in practice and how Google Classroom facilitated their learning.

For me as a teacher, after initial trepidation about using digital learning which was a first for me, I loved it — particularly that they could listen to their recordings done in class each week — and I was really thrilled that that helped students speed their progress. It also enabled me to ‘talk’ to them between classes, ask questions and give updates. It kept the buzz going. I had felt like a dinosaur and now I feel like a reclaimed digitally modified teacher who is absolutely hooked on it. I learned it’s never too old to learn.

Classics Quality Improvement Project

Ian Murray: Tutor, Latin and Greek



This was an Action Research project - the principle was Action, Reflection, Change. One aim was to include more pair/group activities in classical language

classes. You were to watch what happened in your class, reflect on what was needed and make a change — but change only one thing at a time. Then begin the process afresh. It struck me as simple as well as intelligent, but.....

I have a handful of quite mature and knowledgeable people in some classes. Such students can be, well, quirky and set in their ways. Put simply, they don’t like pair work. So here I was with a clear brief to develop pair work i.e. set them something that they didn’t want to do.

Let’s see what happens. It can only go wrong. Well, it did go wrong - some didn’t like it all that much, and others blatantly weren’t having any of it. Now, usually, I would blame myself for a lesson not going smoothly (a familiar part of being a conscientious teacher), but the

reflection showed that in this class the non-compliant students were left conspicuous and isolated; and not happy.

So, perhaps a different class; perhaps a change of approach. I had sat in on an excellent lesson of another tutor, who had the class going over, in pairs, their answers to the previous week’s homework. Let’s try that, with a translation of ten sentences from the previous week. Reflection showed three things, all valuable: it was easier for the students, working in pairs, to find differences than see just where the error was; second, the person who has translated correctly might not be confident they are right; then again, the partner/neighbour might be so strong-willed that the student wouldn’t *dare* suggest a variant (someone actually told me this).

Then, one day I walked into another class where the students were, quite spontaneously, comparing results of a translation exercise done at home. All I had to do was - nothing, just let it run. This was seriously counter-intuitive (‘If I’m not doing anything, what am I being paid for?’). But the exercise worked well, and I heard one student say: ‘I like working with Mary, because it means I don’t have to ask in front of the whole class.’ And this came from a PhD student, herself responsible for checking undergraduates’ essays. She appreciated not having to feel vulnerable and exposed.

Back to the class of cantankerous eccentrics. Away from the building I happened to bump into the student who was probably one of the more resistant of all to change and variation. I suggested lunch, and we discussed the problem. I asked the student what we, as the City Lit, ought to do, and how the student could help. I was very surprised to hear: ‘*Well, you could always give us a Latin unseen to translate together, in pairs.*’ I seemed to have got Smart on my side, and yes, it did indeed work. The student had sold the idea to the others.

To conclude: where there’s a will, there’s a way; collaboration can be made to work well, especially in small doses; and it provides a useful change in dynamic. But students still need confirmation from the teacher.

Credit also to project leaders — Chris Hough, Jayne Kaye (Visual Arts), Estelle Hérouin (Languages), Katell Pinchon, (Creative Writing) Trevor England, Lorraine Enstone, Luke Mullender (Staff Development), Francesco Bucciol (Classics).

Teaching and Learning issues is edited by Wendy Moss. For past Issues, go to www.citylit.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning-newsletter-archive