Case study

Association of Colleges in Eastern Region (ACER)

Digital Approaches to English and Maths

- using technology to support learners on traineeships and apprenticeships

- Essex County Council Adult Community Learning

PROJECT LEAD

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1. About the Provider

Essex Adult Community Learning offer a wide range of leisure and vocational courses to over 30,000 learners across the county of Essex in both urban and outreach settings. They also have a Vocational Training Centre that delivers both accredited and non accredited programmes in areas such as Business Administration, Customer Services, Health and Social, Support Work in Schools, Team Leading and Management..

2. The Challenge

About the practitioners

Sam Butler offers Functional Maths and English support for groups of 16-18 learners on Traineeship Programmes. Their placements include libraries, childcare, sports and fitness venues and garages. Sam also offers English and maths support to learners on apprenticeship programmes in Business Administration, Management, Health and Social Care. Sam works in both Witham and Basildon and has access to an interactive whiteboard and PCs in her classes.

Ann Siveyer is both an Assessor and Functional Skills tutor on Business Administration and Health and Social Care Adult Apprenticeships. She works in Colchester and at County Hall in Chelmsford and generally is much more limited in her access to IT facilities.

Engaging and supporting learners

At the start of the project Sam and Ann met with their mentor, Bob Read, and highlighted different ways in which they felt digital technology might help them meet the challenges they faced in their teaching. They said they were keen to:

- make their teaching more interactive and motivating for all their learners but especially younger learners as the limit of 20 hrs support means that learners have to be engaged and focussed from the outset if they are to have a chance of passing the Functional Skills exam;

- find or create digital resources that learners might be able to access between sessions as many learners do not currently take an interest in any homework activities;

- use their Moodle more effectively to organise and share their teaching resources;

- develop and pilot an electronic ILP;

- explore remote support using video conferencing platforms such as Skype.

Engaging Employers and Senior Management

Sam and Ann were supported in their project activities by Jo Loss, Functional Skills Co-ordinator and Maria Neary, the Curriculum Manager for Quality, Workforce & Curriculum Development. Both Jo and Maria are involved in actively promoting the use of e learning across the service and are

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keen for Sam and Ann each to involve one of their apprenticeship employers in arranging for candidates to have remote support using learning technology e.g. video conferencing, screencasting. They also hope that the use of an electronic ILP might enable employers to become more involved in monitoring candidate progress and contributing to reviews.

3. Some Solutions

Online sticky boards

Quite early in the project Sam and Ann were excited by examples of digital learning resources created using online sticky boards that were demonstrated in the project workshops. They could see that they could be a quick and easy way to create blended learning tasks for learners to complete between class sessions.

Sam went on to create resources using the website called **Padlet** whilst Ann used a very similar tool offered by website called **Lino it.** They used their online sticky boards to curate and share different kinds of resources relating to key topics in English and maths such as identifying bias, using apostrophes, calculating area and volume. The boards contain a variety of digital resources such as screencasts, quizzes, flashcard activities, sample Functional Skills questions, model answers as well as links to other useful web-based banks of resources such as BBC Skillswise. These online sticky boards have been very popular with students as they could be accessed during the session or afterwards for revision. Sam also began to use and create quizzes and flashcard activities in both English and maths using the **GoConqr** website. These are resources that learners can use for self testing and revision.

Screencasting

Both Sam and Ann also enjoyed learning to create screencasts using the free **Screencast o matic** website. They used these screencasts in two different ways, either as video tutorials or as a way to give feedback on learners' written work.

Once they felt confident in recording screencasts both tutors could see that this would be an easy way to create video tutorials about some of the key English and maths topics that learners find difficult. Once the screencasts were uploaded to YouTube, learners could then access them either during or after a classroom session. When managing their large mixed ability groups, Sam and Ann could see that they could use their screencast tutorials to offer differentiated support. For example, during a busy class some learners who might only need a quick revision of a key topic could watch a screencast using a PC and headphones, thus allowing the tutors more time to work with those students who need more extensive support or who may be working on a different topic. For learners who missed a class Sam feels that the videos were also a way for them to catch up on the session content -

'With screencasting I've used it in conjunction with Padlet so I've created little tutorial videos so they've been topic based. I've been able to source materials, customise them by using the snipping tool and obviously add in resources from the internet. Then I've voiced over it so I can talk about the topic and tailor it to specific classes learners or whatever. I've used those in the classroom but I've also emailed the links so the learners can access them as additional resources or if they've missed a session then I can obviously email them the tutorial video.'

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In one of the early workshops offered by the ACER project tutors were shown how they could create screencasts to give feedback to learners on pieces of written work. Tutors soon realised that there were numerous advantages to providing feedback in this way as it was often quicker and easier for the tutor to explain a mistake orally rather provide a written explanation. More importantly, learners said they actually preferred this kind of feedback as they found the screencasts more friendly and much more motivating than written comments. Ann commented -

'I've found it a really useful way of giving feedback. I think learners would say you can be much more positive. You can give the 'feedback sandwich' much better than if you mark something and send it back. I've never found giving feedback that way very good but if you do it in a screen cast, you're able to highlight the good points. And also rather than just correcting it you can actually say, 'have a look at this bit again' or 'I think your sentences are a bit 'long' and get the learners to actually think about how they need to correct it.'

Microsoft Lync

When supporting her workplace candidates at Essex County Council, Ann has also used Microsoft Lync which is the in house instant messaging system and screensharing facility that County Council workers can use. Ann has found that this has been really useful as a way to stay in touch with her students when they need help with particular topics or questions from sample Functional Maths papers. As they were familiar with using Microsoft Lync at work, they felt confident to use it as a way to have remote support from Ann with their English and maths studies. Ann commented -

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'Most of my learners are in Essex County Council and so they have access to the Lync system and everyone uses it. It's great for instant messaging. So, for example, I've had a learner who said 'I can't come to your session today. I've been told I've got to work from home today.' It's part of the new Essex County Council way of flexible working and sometimes there aren't enough desks. So after my session I've been able to contact them via Lync. I've been able to share my screen with them and then go through what we covered in the lesson and ask them to do the work that they've missed. Also, in between sessions I might have given someone a mock paper to complete for example. They might just Lync me and say they are stuck on task 2 and I can bring it up on my screen and share it and just give them the prompts that they can get on with it so that they don't have to wait until the next session.'

Developing confidence with YouTube

As noted above, Sam and Ann both found screencasting a really valuable tool to use in preparing video tutorials and giving feedback to learners. In order to share these resources with learners they had to learn how to set up and use a YouTube account, They found that this helped them understand how video material could be combined with other e learning tools like Padlet and Lino it to create multi-media resources. During one of the project workshops they attended a session in which they learned how to set up and use a **YouTube** account, how to manage privacy settings, edit videos, insert title slides and captions. Sam feels that learning to use Youtube been a key factor in developing her digital skills –

'It's brought everything together really. I've put all my screencasts, video tutorials and exemplar materials on there…. It's something students know and

use and feel quite happy to go there. I've just started to put up my videos of exemplar Speaking and Listening presentations. Youtube was really easy to use and it has helped me see how I can share video material with my learners.'

Converting pdfs into e books

During the project Ann began to use the **Yudu** website to create digital versions of key resource booklets that she and her colleagues use on their apprenticeship programmes. Having an electronic version of a document clearly saves on the cost of photocopying but Ann also saw that having them in a 'flippable' e book format offered many other advantages too. For example, the Yudu digital format enables learners to enlarge the page for easier reading and also offers an internal hyperlink and bookmarking feature which learners can use to quickly find and return to key sections. Sam has found that converting the **Core Curriculum** pdf documents into Yudu publications has been popular with tutors as they then become much more accessible and readable resources.

4. Reflections

Impact on the tutors and learners

In reviewing her progress on the project Ann commented on her general growth in skills and confidence, particularly in the use of learning technology to stay in touch with her learners between sessions –

'The project has given me the confidence to use new technologies and make the most of ECC technologies. I have delivered remote one to one lessons via the ECC Lync system using the instant messaging, the on-line whiteboard and

screen-share facility. I am using screencast regularly to give feedback to learners. I also use screencasting as a teaching tool to differentiate in lessons or to send a recorded lesson to a learner who has missed a session. I have had a very positive response from learners to the screencasts. For them and me, it's like having two teachers in the room!'

Sam also feels that the project has been of great benefit to her and her learners in meeting the challenges she faces in her teaching –

'This project has greatly improved my practice as it has allowed differentiation needs to be met in the classroom, as well as providing valuable resources that learners can access at home or in the workplace. I have also been able to use Padlets for whole class teaching and interaction. Using learning technologies has inspired me to continue to develop professionally, particularly in the area of creating resources and giving feedback to learners.'

This growth in confidence was noted by Jo Loss, their line manager -

'In many ways Sam and Ann were reluctant IT users - they thought using IT was bit of BBC Skillswise and that was it by way of IT! So for them to have just been able to embrace it and change their practice has been great. They've really, really thought about how they see learners and what they can do for learners and you know I think for them, it's the confidence to try different things. They've both used Padlet and one prefers Lino it because she likes the colours. It's good they found their own differences and screencasting has been the biggest, biggest new thing for both of them and they are both using it in so many different ways in terms of one to ones but also Sam's been using it to make group teaching more effective. Ann is using it to communicate with her learners in between lessons and I also

know she's using Appear in to have online meetings with learners. Whereas before, she thought that as they don't work for Essex County Council she couldn't talk to them in between sessions so that's been really, really good as well.''

Use of e ILP

Sam and Ann have both piloted the use of an e ILP and have become aware of a variety of benefits for tutors, learners and employers of using an electronic document. When interviewed about the benefits of piloting the e ILP Jo commented -

'The e ILP was something we wanted to trial for a while but it was really having the push of the project to make us do it and apart from the obvious cost saving advantage of no paper, it has linked our learners to our resources on our VLE already. And for us in terms of apprenticeships it's been really useful because if they are doing more than one functional skill, the ILP is linked so that the assessors and tutors can see the overall picture where they are. And because we can 'RAG' rate our ILPs, that leads back to the monthly reporting we have to do on our apprenticeships anyway so all that has helped support the overall picture. Sometimes the assessors only look at their main aim but now they've got that overall view, where they are with their whole apprenticeship and in terms of rolling it out. I know that when Ofsted came, they looked at the online ILP that we had for our learning disabilities programme and wanted to see something like that in Foundation Learning so it's given us the opportunity to trial it and we've done it. Now we're going to tweak some of the topic areas and questions because they haven't quite met the criteria we wanted and it's given us the opportunity to reflect on it for 6 months and now we'll have it ready for September with the questions we want.'

Benefits for Employers

As noted in the earlier sections of this case study Sam and Ann have explored the use of learning technology to develop a more blended approach to the delivery of their programme. They have developed web-based resources that learners can access between face to face sessions and have explored the use of screencasting to give feedback to learners on their apprenticeship assignments.In this way they have found ways to encourage in their learners a positive attitude towards digital technology and independent learning that can be a vital factor in working effectively and developing your career prospects within a modern workplace. Jo commented -

'I think it's made our tutors more accessible and I also think that in terms of learners resources, it's given learners the opportunity to work a bit more independently because they aren't waiting for a tutor to come back or if they can't make a session it's not been so bad because they can send them work or send them a screencast of an example question they've been stuck on. So I think it's really developed our learners' skills and independent learning. I know for our employers, especially those in health & social care where they work shifts that blended learning approach has worked. Where Sam has given feedback through screencasting or Skype sessions with learners, it has meant that it hasn't had a negative impact on their work schedule because obviously some of our level 3 apprentices are employed. So that has really been beneficial because we haven't been asking the employers to have them for more than 2 hours a week out of the work time which has obviously been beneficial."

Wider impact on provision within Essex ACL

Maria Neary, Manager for Quality, Workforce and Curriculum Development, has worked closely with Jo to support Sam and Ann in their project activities and is keen to put in place new policies and practices that build on the examples of innovative delivery models that they have pioneered –

'Following the work undertaken by staff during this project, a new Digital Technologies strategy will be undertaken during August/September 2015 which will incorporate the use of online resources for teaching and learning, as well as assessment. Our staff development offer for tutors/assessors will include sessions delivered by those who took part in the project to cascade information learned and resources created. A digital skills review will be undertaken for all staff to ensure they have the skills required to embed the use of technology in their teaching and learning to support and motivate learners.'

'…leaders and managers have seen the impact of effective use of technologies on learner retention and the measurable increase in tutor/assessor confidence in using new digital skills. The organisation will be investing further in touch screen monitors, tablets and the use of BYOD. More accessible WiFi has been rolled out across our centres to promote the use of the internet.'

Maria, Jo, Sam and Ann are planning to work together in running some workshops to share the benefits of their use of digital technology in a series of staff conferences in September 2015. Jo summarises their plans -

'We've got conferences for each of our sectors later in the year - so one for the Employability, Enterprise and Apprenticeship section, one for the Foundation

Learning and one for our Community Learning. Something is going to be delivered with Maria, myself, Sam and Ann at at least 2 of those. The Community Learning one we haven't had confirmed yet but they're very interested. We already have our online course for English and maths and the person who's running it is going to use some screencasting. And the online ILP that we've trialled as part of this project is going to be rolled out on to that online course and we're going to try it with GCSE English as well. And that's all come about because we've had that opportunity to trial it and see how it's worked and the benefits of it.'

5. Next Steps

Towards the end of the project, as Sam reflected on her progress on the project, she decided to update the scheme of work she uses for one of her programmes to indicate the way she intends to use digital technology on future courses. The course is delivered as a blended learning programme consisting of 10 x 2 hour face to face workshop sessions. Sam plans to use digital technology to improve the delivery of three key aspects of her course:

- course administration
- classroom interaction
- distance learning opportunities

Course administration

During the course induction session Sam plans to set up and use a Padlet board for learners which will contain electronic copies of course information leaflets about accreditation, equality and diversity, complaints procedures, etc, that they may find useful during the programme. It will also contain a sample copy of the electronic ILP that Sam had piloted as part of her action research

activities on the Learning Futures project and which will now be used more extensively on courses offered by the Vocational Learning Centre.

To make course documentation more accessible Sam will be converting some of the paperwork and booklets into e books using the Yudu website. In this digital format learners can browse material easily by flipping through pages, bookmarking sections or enlarging text where necessary.

For those learners who would like 1:1 support and have access to the internet either in the workplace or at home, Sam will continue to offer Skype tutorials between sessions. As programmes continue to include an increasing element of blended support Sam feels that confidence in using a video conferencing option like Skype will become a valuable teaching skill to have acquired -

"The last Skype call I had was with one of the Health and Social Care apprentices and I got her to share her screen and to complete an activity on ratio on the BKSB website. So as she was doing it, I said 'yeah' or 'no, don't do that'. So I was giving her a little bit of advice as she did it. So that was quite handy. That kind of gave her a bit of an input whilst she was learning, so, yes, I'd like to carry that on. As we go further along the route of having to work more remotely, that's when it will become more useful as well which is probably going to happen. I think that will be the nature of work next year. Possibly you might only see someone once every two or three weeks so I think it will be useful to promote that a little bit more.'

Classroom interaction

In order to facilitate classroom discussion activities Sam has explored the use of **Padlet** and she will continue to use this online sticky board format whenever

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she wants to support learners in sharing and capturing their ideas on a particular topic. Sam is also keen to use **X mind** to model the way ideas can be generated and captured easily using mind mapping software. For example, she regularly has to review the different types of text learners may be asked to produce in their Level 2 assessment. To structure a classroom discussion about the different language features of each type of text Sam is already considering using X mind on the interactive whiteboard to produce a clear summary that they can then print out and use for revision -

'With Level 2 learners you could do an overview of the different writing tasks they might be expected to do and then have a little bit of information about each one. For example, they are not very familiar with writing reports or speeches so you could cover all the basics. Then they would have a little hand out with all the key points on - reports, maybe, subheadings and title and so one and formal letters, don't forget about 'Your sincerely' and 'Yours faithfully' which way round it is. So, maybe doing some kind of overview for the writing that gets them thinking about, well, not just the writing, but also the word count, lay out and all that sort of thing. So they get to create it with me and then that's something that we could print off that looks clear and useful. We tend to do that already but a bit more informally - we might all sit and have a chat about things like that but they make their own notes on it and some make better notes than others. So this would be a group effort making a kind of group presentation.'

Earlier this year Sam used an i Pad to video learners when they gave their presentations for the Speaking and Listening units and as some were happy for Sam to upload their clips to her Youtube account, she will now be able to use them as exemplars with future groups.

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To develop formative assessment tasks in sessions about punctuation and grammar Sam has begun to explore the use of **Socrative** quizzes to create 'exit tickets' -

'I think that Socrative quizzes will be quite useful with punctuation, possibly with grammar, with language. The language content has got a little bit harder on the reading paper. I do an activity on language features already but it is more of a hands on activity so something like Socrative you could use more as a summative tool to a do a little quiz after a few weeks after you have done a little bit of work on language features. Or the same applies really to punctuation after they have spent a couple of weeks on a topic and then do a quiz at the end of a session. I have used it once before. It was punctuation so it was commas and apostrophes, I think. And they did quite like that. They liked the fact that they got the results printed out as well. And it's obviously useful for your teaching because you get a nice overview of the whole class and their scores. So I think that will definitely be useful.'

Distance learning

As the service looks to increase the blended learning element of their programmes, Sam is reviewing the different content creation tools and websites that she can use to develop suitable material that learners can complete between sessions. She will continue to create **Padlet** boards to collate open learning materials on a particular Level 2 topic e.g. identifying bias, using apostrophes. Some of the video tutorials on the Padlet boards could be converted into interactive tasks by using the **Edpuzzle** website which enables tutors to embed multiple choice quizzes and short answer questions at

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different points in a video, providing detailed data on each learner's performance.

And finally Sam is very keen to continue to use **Screencast o matic** to create short videos that give feedback to learners on their written work. Learners have really welcomed this kind of feedback and so it will continue to be a key feature of the way she works with her learners.

6. Project website

A multi-media version of this case study is available on the ACER project website. It contains:

- clips from audio interviews with the staff from Essex ACL who took part in the project;
- a selection of the digital resources they created;
- links to all the e learning tools they used;
- short instructional videos on how to use the tools.

To visit the case study on the project website click this link - http://tinyurl.com/ngu6lrm

If you would like to contact the staff from Essex Adult Community Learning who were involved in the Learning Futures project, please e mail the project manager, Mark Barnsley - mark.barnsley@acer.ac.uk

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