

# Embedding literacy and numeracy skills development into hairdressing courses

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Literacy and numeracy skills development are embedded into hairdressing courses

East Durham Houghall Community College (EDHCC) participated in the Skills for Life Improvement Programme support for embedding in 2007–08.

Amanda Tate, curriculum manager for key skills and Skills for Life led the college's participation in the project.

The college has been particularly successful in embedding literacy and numeracy skills development into hairdressing courses.

The importance of literacy and numeracy skills development is made evident to hairdressing students in all aspects and at all stages of their programme. The EDHCC prospectus clearly states that key skills are a part of the main programme of study, vital to the development of learners' vocational skills and professional practice.

This message is reiterated at recruitment. Skills tutors take a full part in the induction week, alongside the hairdressing lecturers. They deliver initial and diagnostic assessment and make their presence clear as full members of the hairdressing team. Learners know from day one that skills are part of hairdressing. Learner reviews

are carried out jointly by all team members including the skills team member.

## The embedding delivery model

The Skills for Life tutor, Carly, works closely with hairdressing lecturers, Anne and Kate. Skills teaching takes place through a combination of:

- **team teaching** where appropriate
- **mentoring** learners in the hairdressing suite
- **supplementary classroom work** as needed using contextualised materials.

Carly attends programme meetings and plans and reviews as part of the team. This buddy team has been so successful that they now demonstrate this type of working to colleagues.

## How is teaching and learning different with an embedded approach?

Through the presence of a skills specialist in hairdressing sessions, literacy and numeracy needs are picked up and addressed as they arise in practical situations. The skills specialist develops first-hand experience of how skills are used

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in hairdressing and uses this knowledge to enhance discrete skills sessions, making classroom work more relevant.

### An example of a team-taught embedded session

During a revision session in hairdressing, groups of learners were tasked with compiling review questions to use in a quiz. Carly worked with the learners to ensure their questions were grammatically correct and punctuated appropriately while Kate ensured coverage of the vocational syllabus. The learners benefited from having both lecturers using their specialist skills to promote learning. They also picked up the benefits of collaborative working — itself an employability (PLTS) skill and enjoyed the session, too!

### Making embedding work

**The practical support of managers** – This has been crucial to the success of embedding at EDHCC. Managers allocate time for curriculum team planning and staff development. Going forward, to further facilitate collaboration, hairdressing and skills teachers will share an office.

**Hairdressing lecturers leading change** – The Key Skills Support Programme delivered training to the hairdressing lecturers to help them achieve key skills qualifications. The whole department undertook to do so; their work and success helped them to value the relevance of key skills to hairdressers and the benefits for their learners.

**Vocational awareness of the skills teacher** – The starting point for embedding should be the immersion of the skills lecturer in the vocational area – their new home. The willingness of the hairdressing and skills teachers to work together has been the keystone to success. The college has undertaken training in collaborative working and joint vocational/skills working groups have been formed to develop and

refine models of collaborative working.

### Overcoming the challenges

Staff can be reluctant to try new approaches; some vocational teachers feared that they would be required to take responsibility for teaching literacy and numeracy skills. Many lacked confidence, especially in numeracy. Working together requires time and space.

Awareness raising sessions and planned opportunities for collaborative working between skills and vocational specialists have helped overcome initial barriers. Sharing effective practice sessions are now regular features of CPD and review; team planning time has been allocated; staff resources are used creatively to enable collaborative working.

### Achievements and impact

**Sharing and transferring practice** – During staff development sessions, the hairdressing team has shared its experiences and success in developing embedded approaches. As a result of these sessions, the care team has already begun to develop its embedded model supported by learning visits and mentoring from the hairdressing programme leader.

**Benefits to learners** – Learner consultations provided evidence of learner approval of the embedded approach to skills development. Explicit links from learning the skills to using them in the vocational setting have made learning more interesting. Learners felt they were being better prepared for the adult world of work rather than feeling patronised by learning they felt

they had covered in school. “It makes key skills make sense.”

The embedded approach has supported the achievement of high levels of learner retention and achievement in key skills:

- Level 1 Communications
  - 07-08 predicted 65% achievement, up from 57% in 06-07
  - 90% retention 06-07 and 07-08
- Level 2 Communications
  - 07-08 predicted 54 % achievement, up from 52% in 06-07
  - 94% retention 07-08 up from 89% in 06-07
- Level 1 Application of Number
  - 07-08 predicted 82% achievement
  - 89% retention 06-07 and 07-08
- Level 2 Application of Number
  - 07-08 predicted 65% achievement, up from 43% in 06-07
  - 88% retention 07-08

### Benefits of embedding for staff, managers and the organisation as a whole

– Teachers see the value of new ways of working and enjoy the team support approach. Managers benefit from using the best of each lecturer and watching the skills of these lecturers grow. Organisations run better on collaboration than on division; EDHCC is a happier place and models the collaborative approach required for functional skills application and transfer.

Carly Scott, Skills for Life lecturer (left) and Kate Huntley (right) hairdressing lecturer, with two of their pupils, Chelsea Price and Jamie Canning

