

Partnership teaching to embed literacy, language and numeracy at Northampton College

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Buddy pair for Motor Vehicle, Alan (Motor Vehicle tutor) and Lisa (LLN tutor) identifying LLN skills in the scheme of work

‘Working this way is definitely the way forward.’

New for 2007–08 Embedding LLN

The 2007-08 Improvement Programme will further develop partnership working to embed LLN through in-house management consultancy, support for staff teams, professional development and regional networks.

Visit www.sflip.org.uk/07-08

*NRDC research report ‘You wouldn’t expect a maths teacher to teach plastering’. Download your free copy at www.nrdc.org.uk

The challenge for providers, especially large Further Education colleges like Northampton College, is how to successfully integrate literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills into the vocational programmes and to ensure they are taught effectively.

The College, operating across three centres, has just over 3000 full-time 16 to 18 year-old learners and over 7000 19+ learners, the majority of whom are part-time. An analysis of full-time learner entrants in September 2006 revealed that 61% had GCSE grade D or below in Maths and 51% GCSE grade D or below in English language. Clearly this had implications for how Northampton College approaches support for literacy and numeracy skills development.

Learners are prepared to develop literacy and numeracy skills if they can appreciate their relevance and understand that these skills are part of the professional identity they aspire to. For example, they may need to understand that writing concise and detailed reports is an essential element of the job they hope to gain. It sounds easy enough, but the implications in terms of resources, teacher skills and timetabling demands are complex and challenging.

Partnership Teaching Scheme

The Partnership Teaching Scheme (PTS), which forms a central element of developing a whole organisation approach to Skills for Life, was identified by David Henderson, PTS Manager as the way forward for Northampton College.

‘I was particularly motivated by the NRDC research. I wanted to see if Northampton College could get the same results if we embedded LLN into programmes using teachers who were keen and motivated. Could we improve LLN skills? If we can, this approach can be used across the college.’*

Involving senior management

Partnership working is a new and exciting development for the College. As ever, it doesn’t come without issues and challenges. One of the major challenges was obtaining the support of the senior management team, faculty heads and programme managers. David Henderson had spent some time prior to the commencement of the PTS talking to senior managers, faculty heads, governors and teachers about Skills for Life, raising the importance of the work and steadily moving it up the agenda. This was essential work, as any change has to be sustainable and

that meant senior managers had to be committed to this approach both strategically and in practical terms. This footwork proved to be invaluable and has enabled the PTS to move forward in a positive and dynamic way.

Working collaboratively

Finding vocational course leaders who were prepared to have a go, and sufficient specialist LLN staff willing to work with course teams in a vocational setting were further challenges. David identified colleagues who were interested, or had some existing practice in working collaboratively to embed LLN. With support from the Skills for Life Improvement Programme (SfLIP) Development Adviser a meeting was organised with this group to outline the project, its aims and outcomes.

Other issues were that of releasing LLN staff from other commitments, timetabling new arrangements, securing additional resource hours to support collaborative working, equalising rates of pay and paying part-time staff to attend additional sessions, and pairing up the buddies – getting the ‘chemistry’ right!

Early work focused on exploring and identifying the type of embedded model each pair would like to pilot:

- What would it look like on a timetable?
- How much time would each pair need and how would they work together in and out of the classroom?
- How would this additional time be resourced?
- Which skills are they hoping to focus on?

Armed with this information David Henderson negotiated additional teaching hours to support the pilots. A series of development sessions took place exploring the process of embedding, looking at teaching approaches and materials, and building a sound basis to work collaboratively.

Positive early indications

Early indications from the staff are positive. ‘Working this way is definitely the way forward – waiting for learners to come to us in the Learning Centre with their literacy and numeracy needs just doesn’t work. We need to take it to them,’ said one of the additional support tutors.

With help from the SfLIP Development Adviser, David drafted a framework to measure the impact of the pilots and evaluate the benefits to learners and teachers. This is an essential element if this approach is to be developed further across the college in the coming year.

To take this work forward the Partnership Teaching Scheme Manager identified five buddy pairs. Working with a Skills for Life Improvement Programme Development Adviser the pairs planned how to deliver an embedded programme to learners from September.

Initial pilots

The initial pilots involve buddy pairs comprising an LLN specialist and a vocational teacher, drawn from a range of programmes across the college and spanning skills from Entry 2 through to Level 3. They include two Early Years courses, Art and Design 1st Diploma, Motor Vehicle, and AS/2 level Critical Thinking.

David plans to keep up the momentum by working with programme managers across the college to agree timetabling requirements to support models of delivery. To ensure that the pilot projects stay on track and have a good chance of success, he plans to draw up a programme of development sessions and meetings to support the buddy pairs over the coming year. He will also firm up the monitoring and reporting requirements to evaluate the pilots with a view to transferring practice across the College.

Partnership Teaching Scheme

The Partnership Teaching Scheme (PTS) is designed to bring together Skills for Life and vocational specialists to explore ways in which innovative practice can be used to promote improved teaching and learning practice.

Together practitioners, known as ‘buddy pairs’, explore opportunities to teach and develop learners’ language, literacy and numeracy skills within the context of the vocational or ‘host’ curriculum. Effective partnership working between Skills for Life and vocational practitioners has been identified through research undertaken by the NRDC to be a key factor in successful embedding (November 2006). The quality of the relationship between the ‘buddies’ is believed to be more important than the model of delivery used in the classroom.

Practitioners have developed a range of models in response to the cohort of learners, the curriculum, staff skills and experience and the time available to support partnership working within organisations. A key element of embedded delivery is the collaboration between partners outside the classroom, to plan how they will deliver within the teaching sessions and evaluate and refine practice. Practitioners learn from each other and in this way the partnership teaching scheme is an excellent continuing professional development tool.

The PTS is supported by a PTS Manager from within the organisation and a Skills for Life Development Adviser from the Skills for Improvement Programme.