

# Skills for Life Support for World Class Skills



## Action research and development projects funded by LSIS

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Total fund: £5000

Project title: Using Targeted Observation sessions as a replacement for micro teaching sessions on a PTLLS ESOL course

### Background:

Evaluation of the last PTLLS ESOL course revealed that trainees did not find the micro teaching sessions very useful. Many felt that these sessions did not provide the opportunity for them to fruitfully engage with some of the issues they had been introduced to in teaching and learning theories. As this was an assessment requirement, the course team decided that there is the need to explore an alternative approach which will not only meet our assessment requirement, but will also enhance the learning of our trainees. We were, therefore, clear that we needed a tool that will:

- Promote learning through reflection
- Focus our learners on specific aspects of teaching and learning
- Provide opportunities for our trainees to observe theory in action.

We therefore decided to replace the existing micro teaching sessions as a component of our assessment with:

1. One targeted observation of a teaching session focusing on one of the following areas. Candidates will be asked to prepare a short report to feedback to the group:
  - relevant approaches to teaching in subject specialist area
  - lesson planning & evaluation
  - delivering inclusive sessions
  - use of different assessment methods
  - use of resources

Preliminary feedback from trainees suggests that they see it as a useful way to enrich and enhance teaching delivery. One commented that by watching others in the classroom you can learn from them, adapt their methods and see the downfalls. "Theory is very good, but practical gives you a wider viewpoint." Another participant observed that it will broaden her outlook on "professional delivery"

In principle, this seems to be an approach that will work with the target audience. However, there are some issues that have made it difficult to implement. Essentially, this has to do with the varying roles and work locations of the trainees on this programme. Some of the participants have sites which they can use for teaching observations – some are observing teaching assistants in various locations as part of their assessor role. Trainees in this position are able to combine this to observe an experienced teacher. The

emphasis in this case being that it has to be in a post-16 environment. However, some candidates experienced difficulties because the organisations where they are employed and with whom we are trialling the targeted observation as an assessment method is spread over a large geographical location with venues in Essex and Kent. Thus the logistics of setting up an observation was quite complicated. Furthermore, there is a problem around study time granted by the main employer, UKE-learning. Although trainees were told that they will be given study time to complete the programme, the reality is that many find they also have to complete their normal work commitments on the days when they are not attending the course. Thus fitting an observation into their working day was slightly problematic. Nevertheless, trainees are optimistic that it will work.

The current group are all employed by the same organisation and therefore they will be observing in –house as it were. With a mixed group there is the possibility that they can share observations across their different sites – ie if candidates work for different organisations they could potentially come to a mutual agreement whereby they observe lessons in other candidates' organisations to get cross fertilisation of ideas and see how other organisations work.

#### Potential application

For introductory TT courses, this approach could be used more generally in place of micro-teach session. It might require trainees to identify opportunities for observation as a condition for admission. On the other hand, providers might build an ongoing relationship with organisations and institutions that will provide the required opportunity for trainees to observe.

#### 1. Can you suggest any improvements?

This will depend on the outcome of the trial but a number of learning points have already been identified as highlighted below.

- (1) Need for flexibility when dealing with private providers: At the beginning of our collaborative process with UK E-learning, we had a named person who we contacted regularly. Mid way through the process, we stopped receiving responses to our email. This persisted for a period of 4 weeks when we then searched their website to identify another name. It then transpired that our named contact had left the employ of UK-E-learning and her replacement had no idea what was in the process of being agreed before she was employed. It became obvious that staff turnover rate in this type of organisation is rather high. The main lesson for us is the need to identify more than one contact to enable us to accommodate potential problems of contact that might arise because of staff departure.
- (2) The second learning point also relates to the need for flexibility. In this case, the focus is on the design / delivery of the programme. We had started out on the assumption that we will be delivering the programme to one group at UK E-learning. However, because of the nature of their work, it was impossible to have all 16 trainees available at the same time. They, therefore, requested that we deliver the programme on alternate weeks to two different cohorts. This request came after we had already agreed time and resources within the university. Thankfully we were able to negotiate additional time and resources. The lesson for us is that it is important to reach a concrete agreement before making request for resource allocation.