



Words for Work Report 2011/12

Evaluation summary

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The National Literacy Trust's Words for Work programme is an innovative way for schools and businesses to join forces and address the nation's employability. Volunteers from the corporate world are partnered with secondary schools within their community to explore speaking and listening in the workplace through a range of workshops, aiming to develop confidence and knowledge of communication skills in context of employability issues for young people participating.

We tracked self-reflective surveys of 232 students before and after the project took place to measure changes in a number of areas around communication, confidence and thoughts about future employment. In addition, we tracked teachers' thoughts on 109 students' progress¹ at three points during the project: pre, mid-point and post-project.

Headline results

These are the headline results of this evaluation:

The programme raised confidence in young people

- Before the project, 4 in 10 young people (42.58%) rated their communication skills on a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being very poor, 5 being average, 10 being brilliant) as 5 – 10. After the project, 9 in 10 young people (90.32%) rated their communication skills as 5 – 10.
- After the project, 7 in 10 young people (71.42%) said they were confident overall that they will get the job they want when they leave school.
- Before the project, 3 in 10 young people (32.91%) were confident overall putting their hand up in class. After the project, 8 in 10 young people (80%) were confident overall putting their hand up in class.
- Before the project, 3 in 10 young people (32.26%) were confident overall in joining in class discussions. After the project, 9 in 10 young people (86.45%) were confident overall in this skill.

¹ Some teachers only provided us with some data. Some of the teachers' observations are taken from a pool of 109 students (from Portslade Aldridge Community Academy in Brighton, Bishop David Brown School in Woking and Heath Park Academy in Wolverhampton). Not all schools who completed Words for Work in the academic year 2011-12 returned these assessments. In this academic year, there were five schools altogether that delivered the programme, with one group that was a mixture of students from a variety of different secondary schools in London at a special Words for Work project delivered with BT as part of their Work Inspiration programme.

- Before the project, 3 in 10 young people (27.75%) were confident overall speaking in front of a group. After the project, 7 in 10 young people (74.84%) were confident speaking in front of a group.
- Before the project, 3 in 10 young people (32.36%) were confident overall meeting new people. After the project, 8 in 10 young people (81.94%) were confident meeting new people.
- Teachers' observations reveal a very pleasing improvement in confidence levels of students. Before the project, teachers assessed that 3 in 10 young people (27.10%) had poor confidence in their abilities. After the project, only 1 in 10 young people (9.17%) were perceived by their teachers to have poor confidence. On the other end of the scale, before the project, 2 in 10 young people (21.50%) were seen to have a high level of confidence in their abilities. After the project, 4 in 10 young people (41.28%) had confidence in their abilities.
- Young people commented on their raised confidence:
 - “Before Words for Work I wasn't confident putting my hand up or speaking in front of a group but now I feel very confident of doing it”
- Year 10 student
 - “Because of the skills we have developed I have better confidence”
- Year 10 student
 - “It's helped me with my shyness.”
- Year 10 student
 - “I am more confident than I was before.”
- Year 9 student
 - “I got nervous at first but now I have confidence.”
- Year 10 student
- Additionally, teachers provided feedback about the impact of Words for Work on students:
 - “A simple example stemmed from the first session run with the volunteers: feedback from the first activity came from the volunteers rather than the learners. By the end of the session the learners were comfortable speaking up and in many cases modelled their feedback on what came from the volunteers.”
– David Barber, Assistant Head, Heath Park Academy, Wolverhampton
 - “Confidence has grown in the majority of students, which is great as this was one of the main deciding factors behind the selecting the students who took part. In particular those with a SEN or EAL background had noticeably improved speaking and listening skills, especially when presenting.”
- Sarah van Duijvenvoorde, English Teacher, Bishop David Brown School, Woking

The programme raised awareness and knowledge of employment in young people

- 8 in 10 young people (78.45%) said that the volunteers were helpful overall in supporting them to learn more about the world of work.
- 9 in 10 young people (92.85%) said after the project that communication was important in the workplace.

- Teachers observed at the beginning of the project that students' knowledge of the world of work was either poor, 19.5%, or average, 80.95%. These stats remained fairly static at the end of phase one, 16.28% poor and 83.72% average. By the end of the project, after working with volunteers who have experience in the workplace, 69.77% of students had good knowledge of the world of work, and 30.23% had average knowledge. No students were observed as having poor knowledge of the world of work after the project was completed.
- Students talked of their experience working with volunteers and investigating the world of work:
 - “I liked asking them about their job and how they got to where they are now.”
– Year 9 student
 - “I think working with the volunteers helped because they made us understand what the world of work is like.”
- Year 9 student
 - “I think working with volunteers helps me understand what it is like when you leave school.”
- Year 10 student

The programme helped young people to improve their communication skills

- Before the project, 4 in 10 young people (43.22%) said they were good overall at working in a team. After the project, 9 in 10 young people (94.19%) said they were good overall at working in a team.
- Before the project, 5 in 10 young people (47.1%) said they were good overall at listening. After the project, 9 in 10 young people (90.53%) said they were good at working in a team.
- Before the project, 3 in 10 young people (29.68%) said they were good overall at adapting their language for different audiences. After the project, 8 in 10 young people (83.23%) said they were good overall at adapting language for different audiences.
- Before the project, 2 in 10 young people (23.87%) said they were good at presenting. After the project, this doubled to 4 in 10 young people (39.35%).
- Teachers stated that 8 in 10 young people (80.73%)² had improved communication skills during the project.
- Participation in Words for Work saw teachers state that students' make more regular contributions to discussions. Before the project, 1 in 10 young people (14.29%) often made contributions to discussions, 4 in 10 (40.48%) sometimes made contributions and 5 in 10 (45.24%) rarely contributed. After the project, 7 in 10 young people often contributed to discussions, 3 in 10 sometimes contributed and no one was seen to rarely contribute.
- Words for Work also saw teachers observe a very positive change in the way participants listen and respond using appropriate language. Before the project, 2.04% of young people rarely responded using appropriate language, 34.69% sometimes responded using appropriate language, and 6.12% often responded using appropriate language. After the project, no participants listened and responded using appropriate language, whereas

² Data taken from 109 student assessments.

53.49% of participants sometimes responded appropriately, and 46.5% often responded appropriately.

- Teachers also observed that Words for Work positively impacted upon students' planning and development skills. There was a rise of 42.18% before and after the project in pupils who often planned their work and developed their ideas. By the end of the project, the 11.36% of students who rarely planned their work and developed their ideas had improved their skills to contribute sometimes or often, as no students were recorded as contributing rarely at endpoint.

- Students fed back further about the change in their communication skills:

“Before I went to words for work my communication with other members in my class was bad. I never used to get involved with class discussions and I never used to answer a question unless I was picked to, now I am more confident to speak out and meet and work with new people.”

- Year 9 student

“I now think of communication as a very important thing, so I become more aware of how I communicate with others.”

- Year 9 student

“I usually just listen to other people and write down the ideas but now I'm the one with the ideas.”

- Year 9 student

- Teachers fed back about their students' communication skills:

“A handful of students changed completely, I've never seen them talk as much and then a bigger group who were already good improved in their speaking and listening skills. There were 2 or 3 who would never speak before.”

- Claire Davis, Acting Head of English, Portslade Aldridge Community Academy, Brighton

“I think they surprised me and they surprised themselves. I think they achieved a lot.”

- Claire Webster, Work Skills teacher, Brighton Aldridge Community Academy

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Words for life

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