

**ICT in Practice**

**Reflective Evaluation**

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## ***Introduction***

This evaluation looks at the success of sessions that I delivered at South Hunsley School to a group of around 7 students. The students were all adults between the ages of 21 and 65, of mixed gender, varying technical ability and confidence. The sessions were delivered during the day and lasted one hour each, over the course of three weeks. The dates of the sessions were 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup> January. The purpose of the sessions was to give the students an understanding of the concepts of Microsoft Excel's spreadsheet and database functions, and instil the confidence for the students to be able to use these programmes independently.

## ***Reflection***

### **First Session**

The first of the three sessions I designed as an introductory session, through which we could introduce ourselves whilst allowing me to gage levels of ability and confidence. It was important at this stage for me to assess the needs of each student and consider which students would need the most support throughout the three sessions. At this stage I was unaware of the students' individual competency at Microsoft Excel, or the level to which they were required to use it within their job. After a brief introduction, I specified the aims of the first session and began the lesson with some basic techniques that allowed the students to navigate around the software package. I felt that the students were handling this initial activity well, and felt confident at this stage that the range of ability and confidence within the group was not expected to be a barrier to the group's progression.

On ensuring that all students were able to navigate around the software, I moved on to performing basic calculations. It was at this stage that I started to become aware of the different levels of experience within my students. Students who had limited prior knowledge of the software package quickly moved through these sections without any difficulty. However, those who had less experience, at this stage began to ask me questions, often requiring one to one guidance and clarification to complete the tasks.

At this stage, I turned my attentions to those who had identified themselves as less capable users, whilst I instructed the more able and confident to continue working through their task sheet, asking for guidance when needed. I did ensure, however, that all of the students were able to complete the required tasks. At many points during the sessions, the more experienced students also had questions, so it was important that I returned to the front of the class frequently and made sure that I was available to answer everyone's queries. I had to watch the progress of each student carefully, as they progressed at different rates. It was important to ensure that all students were able to complete the set tasks, and were also moved on to the next task to maintain levels of engagement.

Having identified the less experienced members of the group, I was able to then ensure that they had understood the directions correctly by speaking to them on a one to one basis. It was important to ensure that all students knew what they needed to do for each exercise, in order for their confidence in using the software to develop. Through working in this manner, I could ensure that as many students as possible were understanding my session, and getting the most benefit from it. Questioning was very important in not only taking then students' learning forward, but also in checking frequently that my instructions had been clearly understood and heard. At the end of the first session, all students had understood and completed the set exercises and hence were able to navigate around the software, perform basic calculations and print charts. On reflection, I feel that I should have incorporated a higher level of differentiated tasks, and realise that I underestimated

the ability range of the group. Perhaps a pre-session questionnaire would in future enable me to assess the ability range of the students prior to the first session, which would enable me to better facilitate the more able.

## **Second Session**

I began the second session by quickly recapping what had been covered the previous week and then I introduced what we would be covering in the second session.

Unfortunately, one of the students did not arrive until 20 minutes into the hour long second session. This was detrimental to both the student and to the session, as the other students then had to wait, whilst I briefly updated the latecomer. The late student was one of the weaker members of the group, which presented the further problem of her understanding the work already instructed to the other students. This is an unfortunate occurrence, but one that is hard to avoid in my working environment, because of the commitments of the people who attend these sessions. The main people attending were Teaching Assistants and School Support Staff, all of whom can be called away at very short notice to deal with any number of important issues that present themselves unexpectedly within the school day. This is the reason why my group numbers fluctuated so much between each session. In order to overcome this barrier to the groups' learning, I sent copies of the worksheets to students who had missed a session, and gave clear instruction as to how students could access all of the worksheets and sample data on the school network. Hopefully, this gave everyone a chance to see what they had missed before the next session, so as not to compromise their learning experience through them feeling disengaged and demotivated.

## **Third Session**

By the third session, all students could confidently utilise the functions covered in previous sessions. However, the less confident students required reiteration of some points. To assist these students in particular, all students were given printed guidance as well as verbal instruction. The objective of this last session was to allow the students the opportunity to put their learning into practise within a supportive environment, whilst also expanding upon previous skills. During this session, I was able to speak with all of the students on a one to one basis, to gauge their confidence in using the software whilst also providing them the discrete opportunity to seek clarification. By circulating amongst the class, I was able to see the students working with the software and provide instruction appropriate to their skill level. More simply, I could see the impact of the teaching when considering their ability in the first session. It was notable that the ability gap had lessened, and also that the students had progressed at very different paces.

## ***ICT Commentary***

Due to the objectives of these sessions, a certain amount of ICT usage was inevitable. Because the session was about using a piece of software, it would have proved very hard to deliver this session without each student having access to a computer that was running the software package. Hence all students in the group were sat in front of laptops, and the class room layout allowed for the students to quickly look between myself at the front of the class during instruction, and their screens.

As the instructor, my essential ICT included an interactive whiteboard, a wireless keyboard with mouse, and the same software package as the students. I had also prepared various semi-completed excel spreadsheets that the students could access from their laptops, and utilise as data for use in completing the set exercises.

I spent about half an hour before each session setting up the ICT that myself and the students would use, to ensure that it worked correctly. This prevented any problems with the ICT from impacting upon each session. This was a very time consuming process, but it was necessary, as a lot of different groups utilise the training room in which the sessions were delivered, and it is impossible to ensure that laptops and ICT equipment will have the same configuration as when you last used them. This point is illustrated 33 minutes into the first session, when I ask the students to open up an excel spreadsheet that I have saved in a shared network folder, only to discover that one of students' laptops does not have the network folder correctly set up on their machine. This meant showing the student the long way to open the folder, which somewhat complicated the process for the student.

The ICT that I was using was intended to aid the learners understanding of the sessions. The use of an interactive whiteboard allowed me to show all of the students on a large screen the functions and methods we were looking at in the software, at the same time. The interactivity of the whiteboard was meant to enable me to operate the software, whilst still facing the group and giving instruction. However, due to technical difficulties and the limitations of the hardware, I found myself resorting to using the keyboard and mouse frequently. This meant that I would often have my back turned to the students, and often I was conscious that my directions became muffled, meaning I would have to repeat them. I feel that more practice with the ICT I was using would eliminate a lot of these difficulties. If you consider how I have laid out the room in each of the sessions, you can see that I was trying to change my positioning at the front of the class, to best suit the equipment I was using. I think that the layout I had created by the third session was probably the best to accommodate this type of class, and I felt that I had become confident in using the interactive whiteboard by this session.

When I was not confident in the equipment I was using, it impacted negatively on the students, as I was spending too long trying to get the ICT to work how I wanted, and not enough time focusing on their difficulties with the session. However, once I became more confident with the whiteboard, it clearly enhanced the learning of the students, and helped them achieve the objectives I set out for each lesson.

On reflection, I have learned a great deal through planning and delivering these three sessions, and in particular through watching my teaching of these sessions on video. I have found this a valuable learning experience, in that it has highlighted to me the different ways in which people learn through the use of ICT, including myself. Having had no formal training in teaching, I have found the process of fully planning sessions of great value, especially in recognising methods of differentiation, in order to accommodate mixed ability groups. At times, I found structuring and pacing the sessions very challenging, as it is tempting to move at the pace of the less able. I have realised that clear instruction and allowing regular opportunities for students to ask questions is vital in progressing the learning of a group or individual.

I feel that the sessions could have been better facilitated by me taking the time to more fully familiarise myself with the interactive whiteboard prior to the session, as this would have enabled me to spend more time instructing the students. Also, I would in future provide all students with a CD containing all the resources and data needed to complete the course, to both prevent the problem of missing data, and allow students to review and reinforce their learning outside of and in between sessions.