

Resource in a Box: why create resources for post-16 students?



Amy West – Learning Development Tutor (LLS)

Amy.West@northampton.ac.uk

Learning Development

Introduction

The Resource in a Box project (University of Northampton, 2019) offers schools loan boxes of plans and materials, designed to give Year 12/13 students experience of university-style learning. Members of the Learning Development team were brought on board to create boxes to develop academic skills. The box I created used the context of 'Presenting Myself' for activities to develop a range of academic skills including reflection, writing with the appropriate tone, speaking in a presentation and group discussion. The research element of this project is currently paused due to COVID-19 restrictions, but will be continued when possible. As such, this poster provides an overview of the creation and evaluation of this box so far.

Challenges



Planning and creating: Careful consideration was necessary to find a relevant context for the resource; in order to motivate, this needed to be considered useful by post-16 students (Brown, 2018). It also needed to attract staff and provide a setting in which academic skills could be developed. As the box is for use by school staff, with no input or elucidation from university staff, all plans and resources needed to be designed to stand alone and give full, clear and concise instructions. Planned-in flexibility was essential to make the box accessible and relevant for a range of school settings and students, and open to a diverse student base. It was important to consider efficient organisation and longevity of resources, and the practicalities of ensuring that users returned everything. These all had implications in the planning and designing.



Research: The process of gathering data from students was complex. As the students were under 18, permission was needed from participants and their guardian; this was difficult due to not having direct contact with the students and their families, and having to ask school staff to liaise on my behalf. There was also a lack of control over how long students were given to complete the questionnaire.

The process



"Getting resources like this is fantastic...they meet all the criteria [outlined as important]..."
– Head of Sixth Form

Benefits and successes



Working together: Collaboration with teachers and students in schools developed my understanding of pre-university learners' focus and context; I now consider this when planning for and teaching Level 4 students. Links were fostered between schools and university staff, and between teams within university (Schools Engagement and Learning Development).



Transition and inspiration: It is hoped the box will encourage students' curiosity and confidence about higher education: both those who already plan to apply for university and those who do not, or are undecided. It advocates Learning Development and informs future students that academic skill support is available at university. The resource may aid transition for students, through developing self-efficacy in academic skills (van Rooij *et al.*, 2017). The process developed my creativity; the need for the instructions to work without additional input exercised my skills of clarity and creating resources which stand alone.



Successes: 10/10 Heads of Sixth expressed interest in the box. Staff and students who used it responded with enthusiasm to the structure of the resource. Plans and activities were well-received and the use of colour, objects and cards reported as engaging (staff feedback). The interactivity and clarity of the resource was identified and valued, as was the ability to use the box with all pupils in a cohort regardless of their current plans or intentions. From a university perspective, it has provided a resource which schools can use without a staff member needing to accompany it.

What's next?

Research

- Begin next phase of research with second school: gather data from students and staff.
- Identify and approach other settings available for research link.

The box

- Refine resources in the light of research findings.
- Online 'taster activity' from resource created to enable schools some access during Covid-19 restrictions.