

## Evaluation of Let's Think in English

### Hampshire 2013-14

#### General introduction

Let's Think in English is a new teaching programme created since 2009 to help students develop the thinking skills necessary for success in English. This is particularly important with the coming changes to GCSE English and their inevitable effect on Key Stage 3 teaching.

Over 140 schools are now using the programme, mainly in London and the South East but also in Hampshire, Norfolk, West Yorkshire and Liverpool with more joining each week.

The programme consists of 30+ lessons designed to be used fortnightly over 2 years at KS3. All lessons use English texts – fiction, poetry, non-fiction and film. The lessons are largely oral, based on reading, open-ended questioning and structured group discussion. They systematically develop students' skills of inference, deduction and analysis, increasing their confidence, understanding and ability to express their ideas. This leads to higher results in written examinations as well as in speaking and listening.

Let's Think in English is based on 30 years' research at King's College London which has shown that structured development of students' cognitive skills over two years increases their ability. The programme parallels the cognitive acceleration programmes in Science and Mathematics (CASE and CAME) also developed at King's – see [www.letsthink.org.uk](http://www.letsthink.org.uk).

Let's Think in English lessons can lead to written work if the department wishes and are often used to support the school's scheme of work (the lessons can be used in any order). They are designed for Key Stage 3, initially Years 7 and 8, but teachers have also found them very successful in Key Stages 4 and 5.

The programme complements Assessment for Learning with its focus on questioning, collaborative work, problem-solving, independent learning and challenge. It helps to fulfil many of Ofsted's recommendations in Moving English forward (May 2012) and teachers observed leading Let's Think in English lessons have been assessed as outstanding or good with outstanding features.

### Hampshire trial 2013-14

In Summer 2013, schools in Rushmoor and Hart districts were approached to be a part of an initial Hampshire trial. Six schools agreed to be involved:

The Wavell School

Calthorpe Park

The Connaught

Fernhill School

Yateley School

Frogmore School

Funding was split between HCC and schools, with some time and all materials provided free of charge by King's College.

The proposed model was that each department enabled the involvement of two teachers. This was to ensure that teachers could provide peer support, advice and observation within their own school. It was also to build a broader and more sustainable model of expertise within each department so that the intervention could be used more widely in the coming years.

The county's two Hampshire Lead Teachers (previously accredited ASTs) were also invited on to the programme to gain an insight in to how expert teachers responded to the LTE approach. Two further classes at Crestwood School and Wildern School became part of the trial and are included in the data.

Laurie Smith, the associate researcher who has driven the programme at King's College, led a full days' introductory training in July 2013 and six subsequent afternoon training sessions based in the Hampshire schools, providing a mix of classroom observation, reflections on teaching and further theory.

### **The commitment**

Each teacher needed to:

- Attend the launch day in July
- Teach fortnightly LTE lessons to at least one KS3 class
- Attend 6 x 2 hour network meetings, 1 per half term as continuing professional development
- Provide pre and post intervention data (see below)

### **Data collection**

At the start of the programme, King's provided a paper arguing that the Assessment Focuses used for National Curriculum level assessment provided a better match to the reasoning patterns promoted by LTE than any existing standardised tests used for educational trials. It was decided that each teacher would submit teacher assessed summative reading and writing sub-levels, alongside a sub-level score from a common APP reading task, pre and post intervention.



An interim qualitative evaluation was gathered during visits to each school in February, using question territories from King's own trials. These included teacher responses as well as observed student responses and learning behaviours during the lessons. This process was repeated at the end of the trial.

Two schools chose to gather student evaluation via a questionnaire and some of these responses have been included.

It is important to reiterate that LTE is a 2 year programme based on the KS3 cognitive acceleration model. In the CASE science trials, the broadest and most extended trials carried out by King's on CA, the acceleration of progress was most notable after 2 years of students experiencing the programme and continued in to KS4 after the end of the programme. Essentially, students had been stimulated and coached to use higher order thinking patterns and to bridge their application in to new contexts. This evaluation can only capture the impact over the first year of the intervention.

### Quantitative progress data

The data below has been selected to compare measures of progress only, not attainment. The aim of LTE is to accelerate the progress students make towards a Piagetian age potential of level 6/7 by the end of year 9.

We are at present working within a national system of progress measures that is reported in each school's RAISE booklet. For the academic year 2012-13 the following national statistics were used to judge rates of progress in English from KS2 to 4

Students making expected progress from L4 to grade C	71%
Students making more than expected progress from L4 to grade B+	27%

The L4 to grade C measure roughly expects students to make 3 full levels of progress over 5 years or at least 1.6 levels of progress in each year. Most schools now strive for 2 sub-levels of progress each year in the drive to secure better than expected rates of progress.

We therefore chose to look at the following measures:

1. The percentage of students making 2 or more sublevels of progress (a slight increase on expected) compared to the 71% national rate
2. The percentage of students making 3 or more sublevels of progress (a significant increase on expected) compared to the 27% national rate
3. The average sub-level gain in each class and across all classes (which should be at least 2, but greater than 2 to show significant acceleration)

## Year 8

Teacher assessed reading			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
% All pupils	74	28	3
% FSM	50	38	-

Both measures for all pupils are greater than RAISE. The FSM gap is there for 2 or more levels of progress but is outstripped for those pupils making a full level of progress.

APP reading			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
% All pupils	61	27	12
% FSM	90	10	-

The APP task is a response to an unseen text in timed conditions, with a shared mark scheme. The progress of FSM students outstrips that of all pupils.

Teacher assessed writing			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
% All pupils	65	18	2
% FSM	100	-	-

According to this measure, the progress in writing of all pupils has not yet accelerated but the fact that all FSM students made 2 levels of progress seems significant.

## Year 9

Teacher assessed reading			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
All pupils	80	41	15
FSM	83	28	28

All progress measures outstrip the national RAISE measures and are mostly significantly higher than in the year 8 groups.

APP reading			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
% All pupils	61	42	27
% FSM	100	50	-

As in year 8, FSM students seem to have made better than expected progress using an unseen, timed conditions assessment measure.

Teacher assessed writing			
Sub levels of progress	2+	3+	4+
% All pupils	64	38	15
% FSM	78	44	28

Although the percentage making 2 or more sublevels for **all** students does not meet the RAISE measure, the percentage of students making a full level or more progress in writing outstrips the RAISE measure by 11%. The progress made in writing by FSM students in year 9 shows significant acceleration.

### Average sub-level gain

	TA reading	APP reading	TA writing
All students	2.1	2.3	1.81
3 lowest attaining classes	2.35	-	2.25

The average gain in reading, teacher assessed and on the APP task, is encouraging. Most of the groups receiving LTE were in some way grouped by ability. One group in year 8 and 2 in year 9 stood out as particularly low attaining classes at the start of the year. Very interestingly, the average gain across these groups is greater.

Only 1 school (see table below) was able to present data from a parallel ability group who had experienced the same curriculum but not the LTE intervention. These were both year 9 low attaining groups, in which the students were working largely at L4a/5c at the start of the year. The comparative data for these groups is particularly compelling.

	TA reading	APP reading	TA writing
LTE group	2.55	-	2.73
Control group	1.27	-	1.09

## Summary

The quantitative gains in the first year seem significant, particularly in year 9 groups. In the first year of the programme this is perhaps not difficult to explain. Emergence of higher order thinking can appear sudden:

***The connection between organic maturation and that which is possible has a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary character. Development does not take place by gradual alteration or change, by the accumulation of small increments, the sum of which finally provides some kind of essential change...instead we see sharp and fundamental changes in the very type of development, in the motivating factors of this process. Vygotsky 1979***

The kind of 'jumps' in performance are revolutionary, (although the child may already be three quarters of the way there, even if one could not see it.)

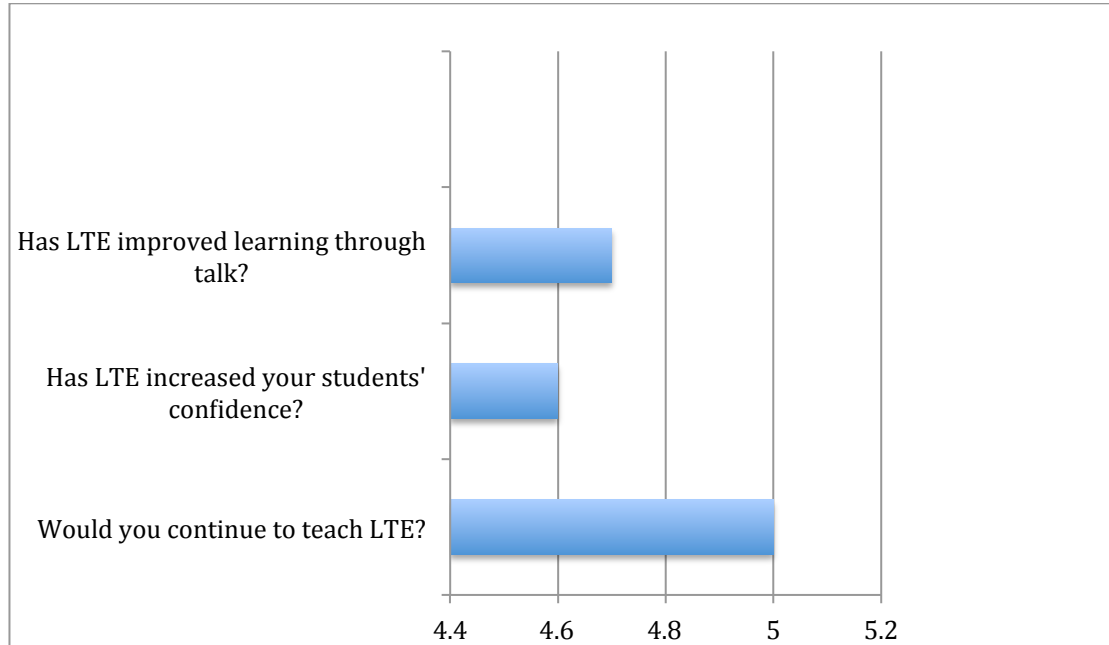
(Michael Shayer reflecting on Vygotsky in *Learning Intelligence: cognitive acceleration across the curriculum from 5-15 years*)

In short, it is likely that students in year 9 had been 'ripening' towards the use of mature formal thinking before the LTE intervention. The revolution caused by the cognitive conflict in LTE, supported by well-facilitated peer collaboration brought these ripening functions to fruition.

The increased gain across some measures for FSM students is encouraging and worth reflection. For hypotheses as to the accelerated progress of students from lower socio-economic background, and with previous low attainment, it is helpful to look at the qualitative teacher evaluation.

## Qualitative evaluation

Teachers were asked to rate the following questions on a scale of 1-5 – (5 being strongly agree.) The following chart represents average scores.



Comment responses were prompted for the following questions:

### What have the students said about the lessons?

- Enjoyable, develops thinking and reasoning and is interesting.
- They have encouraged them to listen more to each other. They have improved their confidence with analysing texts.
- Helped them feel more confident in talking about difficult texts. Made their brains hurt.
- They enjoy sharing opinions, and using other students' ideas to help them formulate their own.

### Did you notice a difference in the way your students responded to LTE compared to their usual English lessons?

- On the whole - more positively. The odd few have seen it as an easy lesson as they did not have to write.
- Over time, they started to engage more with other people's ideas.
- They are enthusiastic, boys in particular like the discussion and 'no writing' ethos.

### Has LTE changed your mainstream teaching?

- Improved questioning and more time made for group discussion as well as wait time after posing a question.



- The variety of texts the students are exposed to has increased their confidence as well as experience.
- The need to limit evaluative teacher feedback is difficult at first but essential in weaning students off the teacher as 'sage.'

**If there is a particular student for whom LTE lessons seemed to make a difference, please give details**

- One in particular who would stay behind to further discuss the story/poem and would refer to it again at the beginning of the next lesson :)
- Two of the more reticent students in the class gradually began to contribute more to all lessons, not just LTE sessions.
- One FSM student's writing improved dramatically over the last term of 'Let's Think' - evidenced in bridging work done after 'Night at a Cottage'.

**If you had to summarise the benefits of using LTE, what would you include?**

- Promotes independent reasoning and learning with stimulating texts and structured questioning. Develops students' confidence with unseen texts and equips them for the rigors of the new GCSE programme.
- Students are now able to learn more independently; students now engage more with each other's ideas and rely less on the teacher for affirmation.
- Students having the confidence to tackle challenging texts during the LTE lessons but then applying this confidence and skills used in these lessons to texts explored in 'normal' English lessons
- Improves students' confidence in approaching new texts.

**Summary**

There are three clear threads through these responses that seem helpful in explaining the reason for accelerated progress.

**1. Improved engagement:** This seems to be linked to the quality of stimulus provided by the texts, structured group talk tasks and the withdrawal of written response until higher order thinking through talk is emerging.

**2. Increased confidence:** Initially the confidence is seen in willingness to contribute to group and class discussion, then over time to tackle unseen texts and eventually independent written tasks. This is likely to be testament to both the repeated structure of LTE sessions, within which students begin to feel safe and familiar and to teachers' effective facilitation of talk. The removal of affirmation or evaluation in teachers' responses, that teachers at first found difficult, does seem to have had the effect over time of increasing



student confidence as they turn to each other and themselves in developing a critical sense.

**3. Increased quality of learning through talk:** At first this emerges as an improved ability to listen and respond to each other, which leads to increased time frames to think through talk, leading to an insistence on the use of evidence and the emergence of multiple interpretations and perspectives.

### Moving forward

HIAS sees that LTE provides a very timely and welcome intervention at a time of significant change in curriculum and assessment. The current policy emphasis on ensuring that 85% of children meet age expectations, in a curriculum with greater cognitive demand, calls for significant change in the expectations we make of children and the way teachers teach. LTE will not and does not pretend to provide all of the answers, but it does provide materials, teaching approaches and if delivered properly, rigorous CPD that will help schools to achieve these aims. It is not a quick fix, and demands a serious commitment in terms of CPD and ongoing coaching time.

Leah Crawford (Hampshire Inspector/adviser) has facilitated the group this year and has been teaching a year 7 group in a Hampshire school to familiarise herself with the LTE programme. She and two of this year's KS3 LTE teachers have been accepted on the LTE tutor programme at King's that will build Hampshire's capacity to provide both initial and ongoing CPD to teachers wanting to develop the expertise to teach Let's Think. A large exam board are poised to purchase the rights to LTE so that its roll out can be more widespread. King's have already secured agreement that authorities with existing LTE schools and expertise, like Hampshire, can continue to use the materials with their schools.

There will also be an initial trial of LTE at KS2 in the Winchester/Eastleigh district, starting in January 2015. This will be led by Michael Walsh, who leads on LTE at Primary, but will be shadowed by Leah. It is hoped that on successful completion of the tutor programme, Leah will be certified by King's to lead CPD in Hampshire at both KS2 and at secondary. LTE for KS4 is well underway and the materials will be provided free of charge to our year 1 KS3 schools for trialling.