

Emojis: Learner-Led Assessment, A New Pedagogical Tool?

This blog is based on funded research undertaken with learners during 2020-21 at Kendal College of Further Education, 16 plus learners, and South Lakes Community Learning Centre, with adult learners. Funding was awarded by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), (the charity and expert body for professional development and standards in Further Education (FE) and Training in England) which itself is funded by the Department for Education (DFE).

Tina Alderson designed and was project leader for the 'Emojis in English and ESOL' research project, one of the EFT's Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment Projects which evidenced successful progression igniting learner motivation, engagement and built resilience, by concentrating on persuasive, emotive writing skills. Feedback showed learners and tutors found the approach engaged learners and helped them to make progress in GCSE English language; Functional Skills English, and English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses.

Learners engaged with using emojis from the outset. Comments from them showed how much more confident they felt using a communication tool from their everyday lives.

Reluctant readers and writers - do you recognise this challenge?

- Do you, or a colleague, worry about the disengaged learner who is reluctant to engage with reading, writing, and or planning?
- Are you concerned that they are not reaching their full learning and skills potential?
- Do you hope for something new to add to your teaching toolkit?

These concerns led to this project.

Learner's Lens

We all need to look through the learner's lens to see what is familiar to them, what they have knowledge and understanding of, and then build upon that to build back better. Many learners come to Further Education without achieving a Grade 4 in their GCSE English; or are still progressing through school, often they are reluctant to engage with reading, writing and or planning. Similarly, ESOL learners can struggle to learn enough language to communicate.

The 'Emojis in English and ESOL' strategy which forms the basis of this research was designed to reignite learners' motivation and engagement using the universal language of emojis. The Team had autonomy to adapt the use of emojis and resources to meet their Schemes of Work and individual learner's needs, creating a low floor, high ceiling inclusive approach to aid progression.

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Online teaching, due to Covid 19, benefitted the learners

As Covid 19 struck the world, and education moved to online learning, the project drove forward meeting the needs of learners as they were able to input their emotional response to texts, illustrating their engagement and understanding of the material. Emojis were a fast way to communicate those learners were actually present and attentive, especially if they were reluctant to show their face or speak online via 'Teams' and or 'Zoom.'

Emoji Keyboard are now available to learners using these keyboard commands:

- **Windows10 – Press Windows & Full Stop**
- **Mac – Command + Control + Spacebar**

See figures 1 & 2 for examples of how learners annotated the text they were reading:

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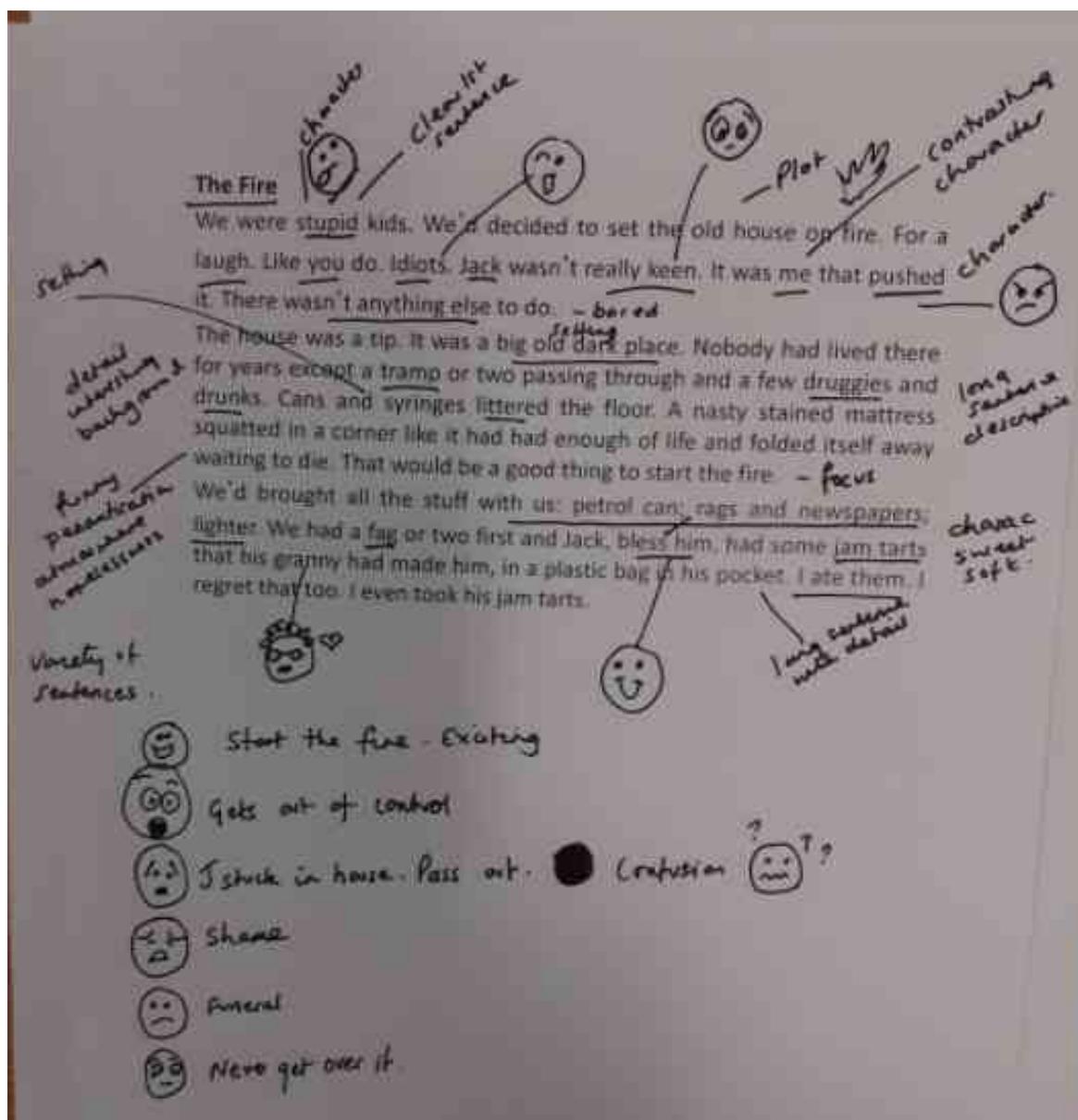


Figure 1 handwritten annotation by GCSE 001JD learner

Figure 2a and 2b, below, also completed by GCSE learner 001JD, illustrate online emoji annotations on a section of text in reference to an examination style task:

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How does the flower seller use language to appeal to the reader's emotions?

Highlight any quotes you think are relevant to this question

Use the emojis to text mark any feelings the reader might experience

Underline any techniques the writer uses

The first interview is with a young girl who sells flowers, and is an orphan.

5 "Mother has been dead just a year this month; she took cold at the washing and it went to her chest; she was only bad a fortnight; she suffered at pain, and, poor thing, she used to fret dreadful, as she lay ill, about me, for she knew she was going to leave me. She used to plan how I was to do when she was gone. She made me promise to try to get a place and keep me from the streets if I could, for she seemed to dread them so much. When she was gone I was left in the world without a friend. I am quite alone, I have no relation at all, not a soul belonging to me. For three months I went about looking for a place, as long as my money lasted, for mother told me to sell our furniture to keep me and get me clothes. I could have got a place, but nobody would have taken me without a character*, and I knew nobody to give me one. I tried very hard to get one, indeed I did; for I thought of all mother had said to me about going into the streets. At last, when my money was just gone, I met a young woman in the street, and I asked her to tell me where I could get a lodging. She told me to come with her, she would show me a respectable lodging-house for women and girls. I went, and I have been there ever since. The women in the house advised me to take to flower-selling, as I could get nothing else to do. One of the young women took me to market with her, and showed me how to bargain with the salesman for my flowers. At first, when I went out to sell, I felt so ashamed I could not ask anybody to buy of me; and many times went back at night with all my stock, without selling one bunch. The woman at the lodging house is very good to me; when I have a bad day she will let my lodging go until I can pay her. She is very kind, indeed, for she knows I am alone. What I shall do in the winter I don't know. In the cold weather last year, when I could get no flowers, I was forced to live on my clothes, I have none left now but what I have on. What I shall do I don't know — I can't bear to think on it."

10

15

20

Figure 2a illustrates emoji online annotation by GCSE learner 001JD

03

You now need to refer **only** to **source B**, the interview with the flower seller.
How does the flower seller use language to appeal to the reader's emotions?

[12 marks]

This answer is almost finished. Complete the highlighted areas.

The flower seller uses plain, blunt language when she says, "Mother has been dead just a year." This makes the reader feel **upset for the girl as she has no family to support her**

She uses the verbs "suffered" and "fret" when describing her mother and this makes the reader feel **whatever caused her death wasn't natural causes and the real cause was a terrible fate for anyone to go through**

The image "I was left alone in the world" makes the reader realise how **lonely and isolated** Her life is. The reader will feel sorry and hope that someone will find her and help her.

The reader feels some hope when she describes the woman at the lodging house using the adjectives "....." and "....."

By the end of the piece the reader is left with a feeling of fear when the flower says, "I can't bear to think about it"

The overwhelming feeling throughout this piece is sadness and helplessness as the flower seller's life seems **so unwitting for a child**

N.B. Try to describe a variety of feelings in the reader. Don't repeat sad all the way through.

Figure 2b illustrates, GCSE learner 001JD, response to examination style 2a task

Figure 2b, above, illustrates how GCSE learner 001JD, transferred their interpretation of text, writing up a fuller answer after using emoji annotations.

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As the project progressed, the learners took ownership of their learning, they took control of the concept and freely used the idea in their lessons, and the teacher became the facilitator.

How did we work with learners?

The universal language of emojis inspired learners to progress with their learning:

Starting point: initial assessment.

Tutors supported learners to create an emoji glossary for reference. Then the learners undertook Tasks 1 and 2.

Task 1: Reading

1. Introduce the text – use Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTs).
2. Introduce the lesson's learning topic for example Engage with a text to analyse language.
3. Tutor models the process.
 - i. Read without annotation.
 - ii. Read and annotate the text with emojis where language impacts on reader response.
4. Learner then reads text using emojis to identify language that impacts on their emotions – for example a smiley face if it is something they like.
5. Feedback on their response to the text: discussion to develop their interpretation further.
6. Introduce an exam question linking emoji to a learning aim. For example, "Give two examples of where the writer has used emotive language. Give a different effect each one has on the reader."
7. Tutor models how to interpret the emoji in answering a question.
8. Learners then answers the question.

This approach can be utilised for the author's point of view, the impact it has on the reader and a comparison of texts as illustrated in figure 3a.

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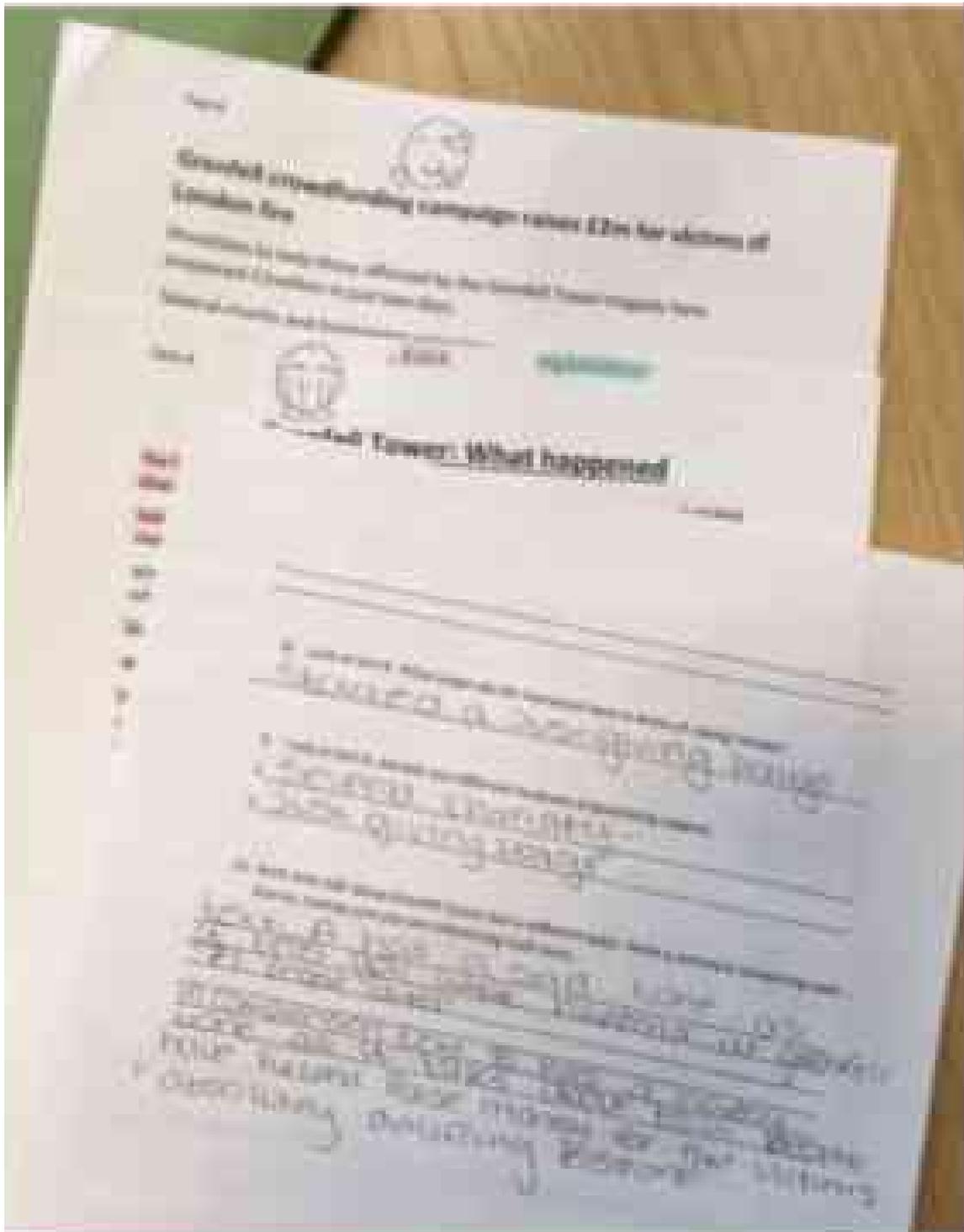


Figure 3a illustrates Functional Skills learner 001CC reading and comparison of text skills

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Task 2: Writing

1. Demonstrate to learners how to plan a piece of writing with the use of emojis.
2. Learners develop their planned response to a written task (mind map or bullet points).
3. Learners then add emojis to prompt them to develop additional or expanded sentences.
4. Learners are encouraged to re-read their text, annotating with an emoji to identify emotive persuasive writing to assess their learning. This approach supports their reading skills as well.

See figures 4a & b for examples of how Functional Skills learner learners 002CC used emojis to plan and write a response to the exam style task:

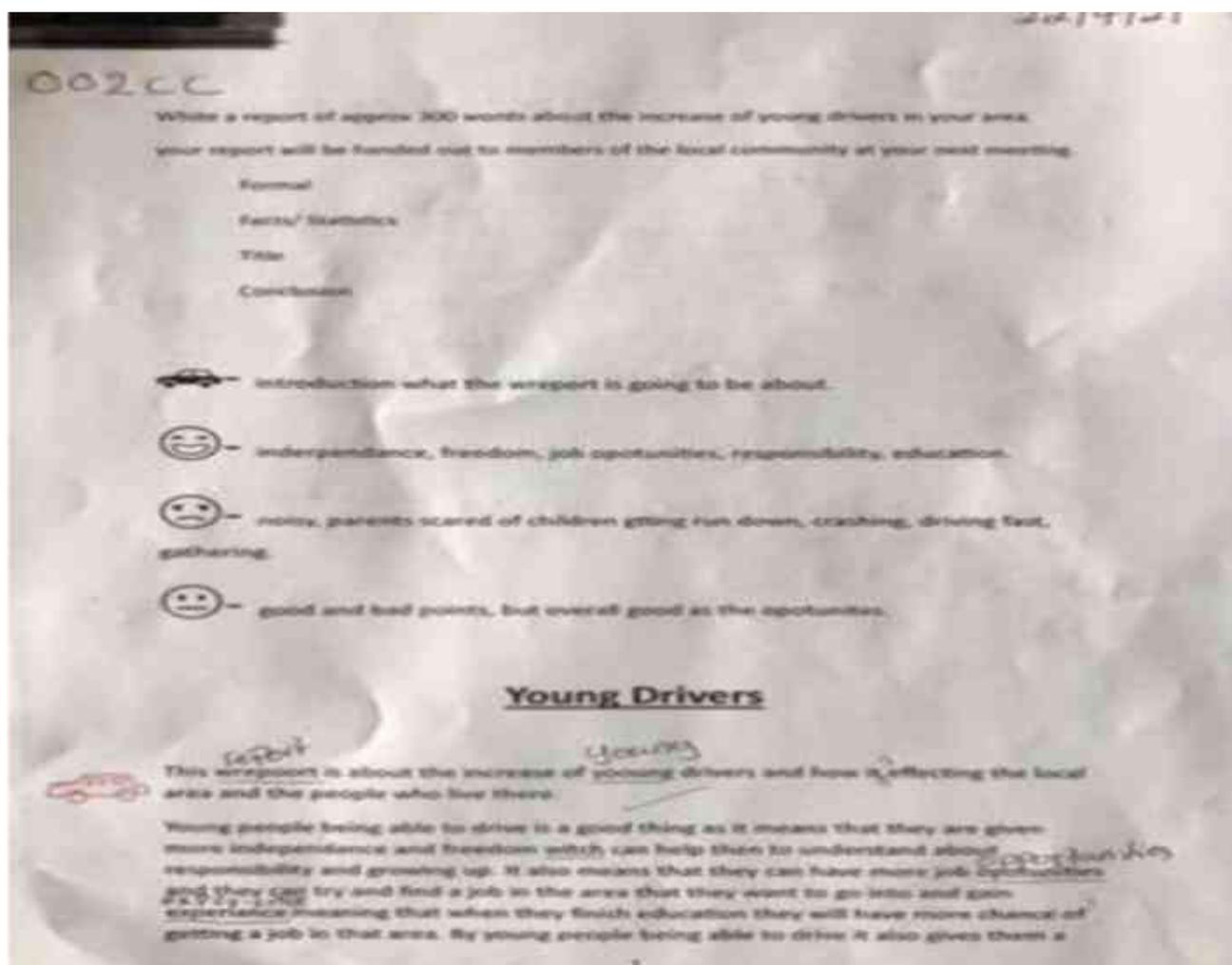


Figure 4a illustrates, Functional Skills learner 001CC, planning and written response to an examination style task

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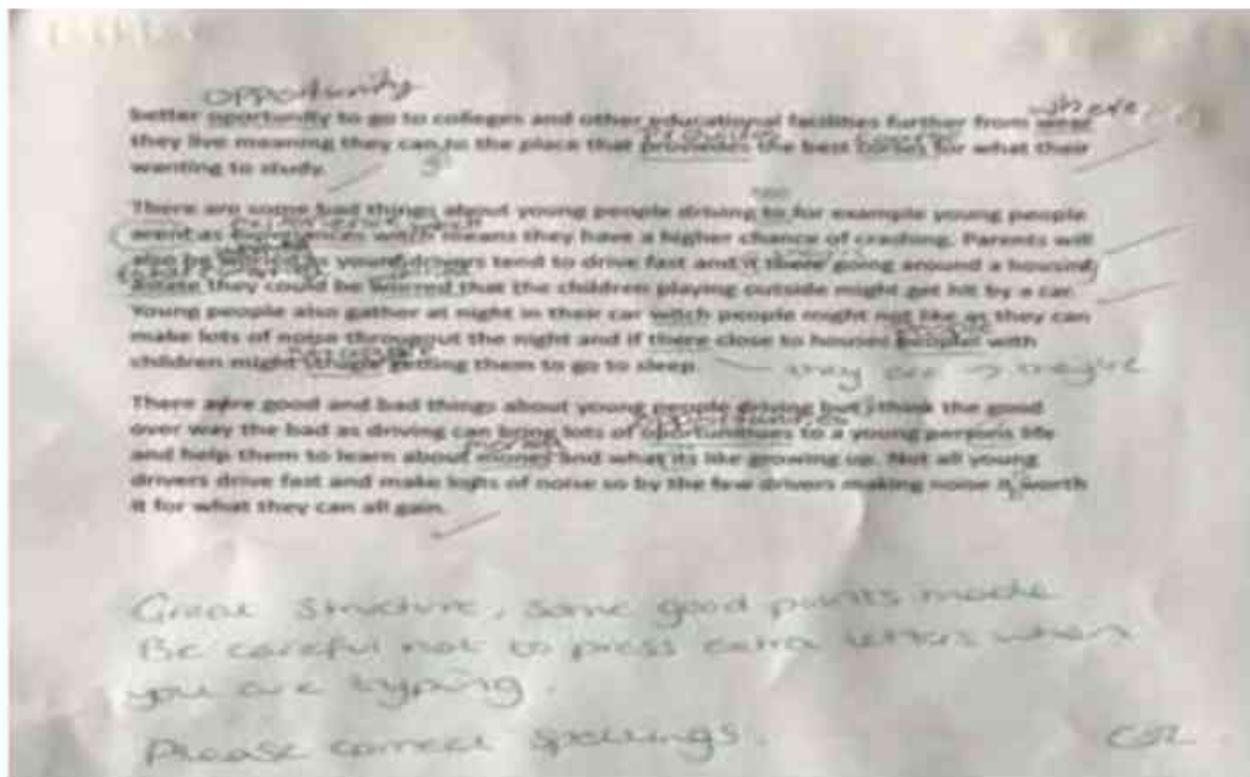


Figure 4b illustrates, Functional Skills learner 001CC, continued written response to the examination style task.

Task 3: Vocabulary

The learners identify words that relate to a particular emoji.

1. Initial assessment: twelve common emojis were chosen as a starting point to test any prior vocabulary knowledge. Learners say or write words prompted by each emoji.
2. Tutor, and or learner, then models the words in example sentences. Learners repeat.
3. In the following sessions develop learners' vocabulary related to emojis from the initial assessment, beginning with three words linking to each emoji. Activities include:
 - Call and response to drill in pronunciation.
 - Memory games in which the learners turned the emoji flash cards over and matched them with words.
 - Speaking activities where learners were taught how to use words in full sentences.
 - Facial and body language activities to develop cultural knowledge of nonverbal communication.

See figures 5a-e for examples of how learners were empowered to develop their vocabulary skills:

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Which words do you think of when you have seen the emojis?

	Like, Love, Heart
	?
	Red, (purple)
	Peace, (H)
	Angel
	Oh, My goodness, Wow
	We were crying
	Happy, (H)
	Joking
	Scary
	Peace, (H)
	Okay

Figure 5a illustrates Learner 002CF Initial Emoji Assessment (12.11.20)

Total number of words linked to the emojis: 19

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Figure 5b illustrates call & response and memory games.

OTLA7 CF: Evidence Emoji use in first exam March 2021

CF: Successful transition back to online lessons via Zoom. Learners still engaged and enthusiastic about the project.

Learners' vocabulary linked to emojis is widening, with further emojis added to list we started with. Learners have completed a short diary entry using emojis based on a recount of their recent (and first ever) English exam, copied below:

I was ready for my test because I am hard-working. 👍

Before the test, I felt nervous. 😬

We went to the wrong place and I was worried. 😟

Our teacher called us, then told us the right place to go. I felt grateful. 😊

My friend was so nervous he didn't want to do the test. 🙄

After we finished, our teacher told us we passed. I felt happy and relieved. 😄

Now I must study for the next test, which will be harder. I feel motivated! 💪

Figure 5c illustrates tutor reflection, and success of learner 001CF having sat their first pre-entry level English exam, in March 2021.

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson has encouraged members of the public to clap for Captain Sir Tom Moore at 18:00 GMT on Wednesday.

The 100-year-old, who raised almost £33m for NHS charities by walking laps of his garden, died with coronavirus in Bedford Hospital on Tuesday 🙄

Mr Johnson said the clap would also be for "all those health workers for whom he raised money".

Capt Sir Tom's family said they were "incredibly touched".

In a statement on Twitter, they said they would be "taking part with huge love in their hearts 🥰 for their father, grandfather and father-in-law".

Dozens of tributes have been left outside his home in Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire.

Meanwhile at least 10 petitions calling for a state funeral for the late Army veteran, have been started on the website [Change.org](https://www.change.org).

The only non-Royal to be paid such an accolade in recent times was former Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill in 1965, though ceremonial funerals, which observe many of the same traditions, were held for Diana, Princess of Wales and Margaret Thatcher.

Other petitions have called for a statue, a minute's silence, a burial in Westminster Abbey and a 21 gun salute or flypast.

People view a mural of late record-breaking centenarian Capt Sir Tom Moore, in Two Gates, Tamworth, Staffordshire

A man leaves flowers outside the residence of the late Capt Sir Tom Moore, in

Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire 🥰

People look at flowers left near Capt Sir Tom Moore's home, following his death

A union jack flies at half mast from the top of Victoria Tower at the Palace of Westminster

Figure 5d illustrates Entry Level learner 001NS response to text using emojis

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Response to text using emojis – Captain Tom's death 001NS

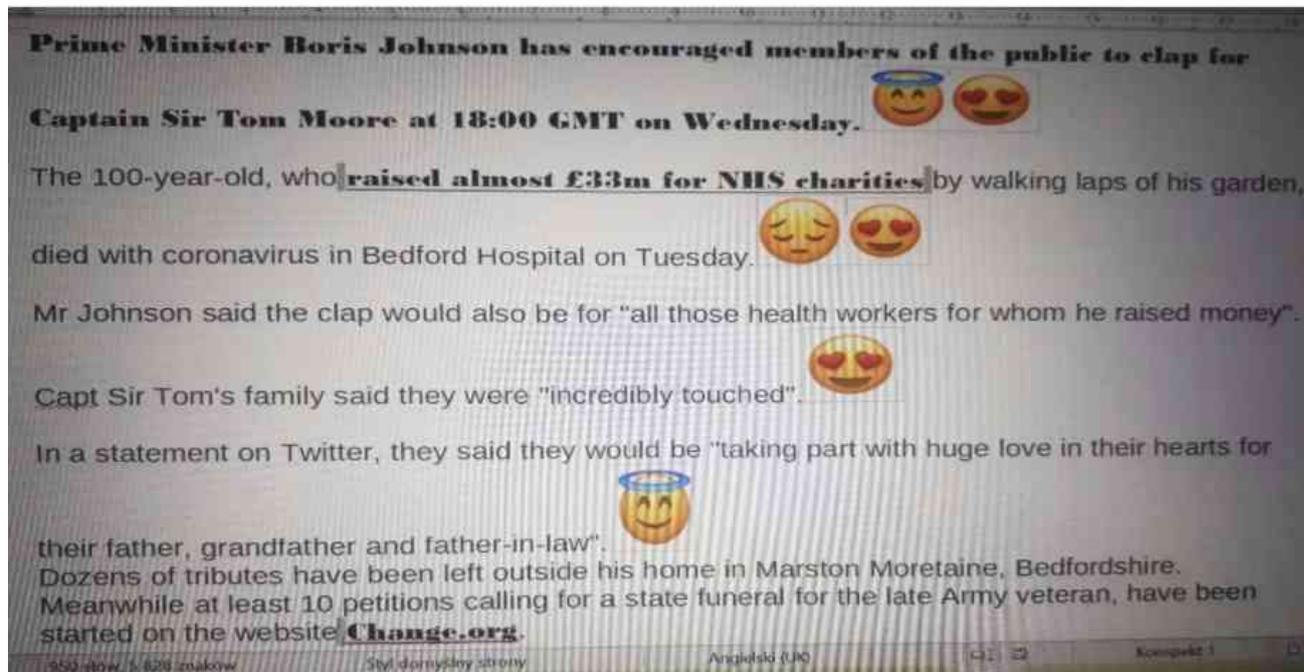


Figure 5e illustrates learner 001NS written interpretation to task 5d

As the learners progressed, they took ownership of their learning, and were able to comment on text and they no longer needed the emoji steppingstone ... they had done their job!

Assessment For Learning: Key Findings

The findings were that the inclusive learner led approach, using the universal language of emojis, ignited learner motivation, engagement, promoted independence and built resilience. The approach:

- Reignited reluctant readers to read.
- Showcased how emojis provide a road map when planning a piece of writing.
- Evidenced how emojis develop vocabulary skills, progressing to standard English
- Provided a tool to develop ESOL vocabulary, understanding and body language.
- Aided refugee integration into the United Kingdom.

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The full report and the national presentation provide further details about how the approach supported successful progression with **Pre-Entry, Entry level, Levels 1 & 2 Functional Skills English and GCSE English Language**.



- Published Report: <https://lnkd.in/grbYq8Rk>
- National Presentation: <https://youtu.be/wn7otztmKIE>

You may also be interested in the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) Anthology of Practitioner Action Research Reports (2021-21):

<https://lnkd.in/dF86NtZG>

References

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