

How can embedding digital learning platforms in the GCSE maths resit curriculum impact learner participation and engagement.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks goes to the students who took part in this action research and to Georgina and Cath for guiding us through the process.

About CfEM

Centres for Excellence in Maths (CfEM) is a five-year national improvement programme aimed at delivering sustained improvements in maths outcomes for 16–19-year-olds, up to Level 2, in post-16 settings.

Funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the Education and Training Foundation, the programme is exploring what works for teachers and students, embedding related CPD and good practice, and building networks of maths professionals in colleges.

Summary

Since the introduction of condition of funding FE colleges have found it extremely difficult to motivate and engage learners who have failed at something, often more than once. This has led to colleges up and down the country trying different things with their learners and often 'trying to make it not like at school'. As we are coming out of a pandemic and online learning has been at the heart of education we have decided to look at how digital learning platforms can impact learner engagement and participation. We are hoping that the action research that we are completing this year will show that students participate and engage more in class using online learning platforms instead of being disengaged throughout. Hopefully we will find that learners will give things a go in class and will have more confidence to ask for help. This will then in turn hopefully show improved participation in the sessions and thus eventually showing improved grades.

The intervention that we are trying out is firstly using Nearpod as a tool for learners to be able to answer questions in class without the fear of getting things wrong due to the nature of how Nearpod works, we also want to see how Nearpod works for learning outside the classroom and for revision purposes. We will also be using Dr Frost as another digital learning platform for learners to get digital feedback and for learners to use outside the classroom as a learning tool on the go. We will then see if this is helping learners with their resilience and perseverance to maths and ultimately helping them with their overall grades.

We will be using cycles to collate our data and we will be using Forms questionnaires and forums to get learners viewpoints on what we are doing. We will do this with all of the classes that we teach throughout the year in order to get a better understanding of the intervention we are putting in place and to be able to ascertain whether it has had an impact or not.

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Background

Introduction

The research setting

This action research project was carried out by two teachers a Preston college, located in the North West of England, with guidance and support from the Centre for Excellence in Maths (CfEM) Project lead and Research Assistant at Nelson and Colne College Group (NCCG). Preston College is a technical specialist college where courses range from Entry Three to Level Three, and include T-Levels in some subject areas. The college has a resit maths cohort of 563 learners this academic year.

In previous years a cohort of learners studies Functional Skills at Entry Level, Level One and Two. However, this year the decision was made that all learners would study GCSE. The major influencing factor in this decision was the national pass rates for Pearson's Functional Skills (Pearson, 2021. Table One details pass rates in 2020-21; overall the national picture was very poor and suggests that learners found the reformed Level One and Level Two far too difficult (Sezen, 2021). These low level results prompted the organisation's decision to enrol all 16-19 learners onto the GCSE maths resit programme for the 2021-22 academic year. This will hopefully provide the learners with the opportunity to achieve a grade 4 at GCSE maths contributing to the college's overall aim of helping to "create the most employable learners now and in the future" (Preston College,2022).

The Resit Picture

The legal requirement for learners to resit maths and English was introduced in 2014, when the government announced a new condition of funding for colleges and sixth forms, whereby all learners who did not pass GCSE maths in school would have to continue to study maths until they achieved the required pass mark of a grade four (Gov.uk, 2014). This led to a dramatic increase in learners re-sitting a maths qualification.

JCQ state in their analysis of GCSE maths grades for the summer 2021, in the FE sector, which mainly enrolls students who failed their first attempt at school, results are understandably low when compared to schools' results (JCQ, 2021). This showed that at age 17 the percentage of students that achieved a grade 4 was 33.4% and at age 18 it rose to 36.1% and for 19+ learners it rose again to 48.8% (Gov.uk, 2021). Summer 2021 results were achieved through Teacher Assessed Grades (TAG's) and there was an increase in achievement, prior to this the national picture was lower.

The Association of Colleges Performance Benchmark (Sezen, 2021) shows that Preston college learners achieved a pass rate of Grade 4-9 of 23% in 2019 and 26% in 2020. General Further Education [GFE] colleges national pass rates were 26% in 2019 and 35% in 2020, putting Preston College in the lower quartile - ranked 203 out of 230 colleges for high pass rates.

However, when analyzing value added scores for learners at Preston College, they achieved a higher-than-average score for Grade Three (0.20) compared to all other GFE colleges (0.15) (AoC Mides ILR R13, 2020+21). Furthermore, at Grade Two, Preston College learners achieved 0.84 value added, much greater than the national average of 0.42. It is clear from the achievement data that in-year progression at Preston College is

higher than average, yet overall pass rates could improve. The Centre for Excellence in Maths project has helped mould some research in which the team can focus on improving the pass rates, and in turn, the overall progression for the GCSE maths resit cohort.

The Research and Rationale

This research will focus on the GCSE maths resit programmes delivered to 16-19-year-old learners. In the academic year 2021-22 there were 581 learners enrolled to the GCSE maths resit programme with the summative assessments scheduled to take place in May and June 2022.

During the previous academic year all sessions were delivered remotely through Microsoft Teams due to the ongoing pandemic. Tutors delivered the maths sessions through the online video feature and learners were expected to join the session to ensure safeguarding and attendance recording. During the session's learners were reluctant to participate vocally in front of each other and it became difficult to encourage participation and engagement with the learning activities. The team trialled various technologies to improve engagement and a wealth of IT skill were developed as a result. This academic year [2021-2022] all GCSE maths sessions are being delivered at the college and learners are returning to in person delivery sessions, yet we do not want to lose the skills and knowledge developed during enforced online learning. The team were keen to explore how blending traditionally online technologies and face-to-face learning could support engagement in the classroom. Therefore, the research team have decided to continue using digital platforms to ensure the technology skills developed last year can be utilised within a blended learning approach during the in-person delivery sessions this academic year.

A number of the tutors within the organisation have decided to explore to use Nearpod (Nearpod, 2021) as a tool to promote participation within the delivery sessions. Nearpod is an online learning platform that allows the tutor to see each learner's individual screen to monitor progression through delivering the online presentation. This allows tutors to oversee all learning progress at once, enabling learners to type their answer on their devices rather than answering vocally. The learners can also be provided with a link to the presentation to work through and to complete the activities in their own time if they miss a session.

Another digital platform that tutors have decided to utilise this academic year is the Dr Frost (Dr Frost Maths, no date) revision platform. The platform is used for creating revision material geared towards the GCSE maths summative assessments and provides tutors with a tracking feature to track learner progress with the activities. The platform offers a wide range of exam style questions and individual targets for improvement can be identified through the self-marking feature. Feedback can be provided to the learners and a thread conversation can be established to provide support to the learners with the topics and activities.

Utilising these digital learning platforms will build on the engagement we previously had during remote delivery and provides the learners with the opportunity to complete work outside of the session times. We want to successfully combine digital technology platforms in a face-to-face environment with the aim of improving learner participation and engagement. The research we will conducted during this process will explore the uses of technology within education and the impact this has on learner engagement and participation. As practitioners, we feel that technology can be used for educational purposes, and incorporating a blended learning approach could support the learners with their progress with the GCSE maths programme.

Literature Review

Due to the ongoing Covid19 pandemic the organisation could be instructed by the government to transfer lessons to online learning and remote delivery. Therefore, it is paramount that tutors are prepared for this scenario and that a blended learning approach is ready to be adopted in preparation for this to make the transition easier for both tutors and learners. Tutors within the organisation have recognised the importance of developing their teaching styles through the exploration of new technology platforms to adapt to online delivery. This is supported through research where Lewis (2020) discusses strategies for adapting to change during the ongoing pandemic:

“Instead we must find new ways to encourage cooperation and collaboration, offer support and make learning enjoyable and effective”
(Lewis, 2020).

This article has had a positive impact on the delivery for the GCSE maths resit programme where digital platforms are used within the sessions to promote student teacher interaction through the use of the learners’ devices. This also ensures that learners are able to access the sessions from their own devices if learning transfers to online delivery.

Mel Coleman (2021), the Head of Quality at South Thames Colleges Group, discusses this issue of learner confidence when using technology. She suggests that many students do not have the confidence or skill set to use a PC, yet they are often very capable when using a gaming console. Allowing learners to access learning platforms from a games console develops their confidence levels around using technology for educational purposes and ensures all learners are able to participate within sessions on their preferred device. This also emphasised the point that learners could use their devices in a productive way, geared towards education. Learner confidence is a key consideration when using any online learning tool. We can sometimes assume that if learners are using gaming consoles they are proficient in the use of other tools, yet this may not be the case. In addition, a survey by the Sutton Trust (2020) in 2020 found that approximately one third of learners in the most deprived areas did not have access to adequate technology on which they could effectively learn. Both access to and capability in using technology for learning can impact learner engagement with a blended model, and therefore, the researchers enter this research considering learner access to and confidence in using technology both inside and outside of the classroom, as factors which need mitigation.

A positive aspect of embedding technology with the aim to improve participation and engagement is that the platforms allow the learners to submit their answers privately and to ask for the tutors help discretely through the platforms. This was highlighted as a positive aspect of online delivery in an Ofsted online blog, where Joyce (2020) the Deputy Director of Further Education and Skills discusses a small review around the response to the Covid19 pandemic. The blog discusses how the learners have responded to online learning and how “the opportunity to send the teacher private messages is useful because it allows them to ask for help discreetly” (Joyce, 2020). The research team are interested in giving students the opportunity to submit answers privately within the physical classroom, and verbally and this could be an opportunity blend the two. This is also supported by Reed (2021) whose

article discusses the benefits and limitations of technology within the classroom suggesting that learners who are more introverted are often negatively impacted by a noisy and extrovert dominated classroom. Therefore, can we find a way to allow these learners to speak to the teacher directly through digital platforms, as experienced in the pandemic, but also participate in face-to-face lessons, and ultimately improve their progression?

Providing learners with an online platform where they can ask for help discretely during in person delivery sessions could ensure that all learners are able to communicate with the tutor during the sessions. It could also help ensure that learners are familiar with the online learning platforms if they are accessing the content outside of the session times. This will be particularly useful within the GCSE maths curriculum delivery at our organisation where revision material can be made accessible for learners to access in preparation for their summative assessments.

The true benefits of a blended learning classroom are not known yet. However, the COVID-19 lockdowns provided the educational sector the perfect opportunity to develop online teaching skills which can now be utilised in the physical classroom if not lost. Rachmadtullah et al (2020) discusses the opportunity we have been given following the lockdowns to combine the benefits of face-to-face and online learning to create an engaging and safe environment for all learners. Likewise, McGrath, Palgren and Liljedahl (2021) make comment on the idea that a blended learning environment born from the skills acquired in the pandemic through online delivery could provide us with an environment which caters for a multitude of learning needs. Therefore, this research is a timely opportunity to explore how accessible, safe, engaging and effective digital learning platforms could work in a further education setting, and more specifically for the unique nature of resit learners.

Before planning this research, a key consideration for the team is internet access; a strong and reliable connection in the classrooms can often be an issue within the organisation, and connecting to online learning platforms can become challenging. Bennet (2020) discusses strategies for when technology fails within the classroom and how the tutor should see this as an opportunity for a learning experience and to teach the learners about perseverance and problem-solving techniques. Whilst we recognise and appreciate that this can be seen as a learning opportunity, facing issues with technology within the classroom could be viewed as a negative experience for the learners and could result in learners being reluctant to engage with the digital platforms if there are issues with accessing the activities. It is something for the research team to plan for within this work. Therefore, we feel that a high standard of Wi-Fi should be available at the college and is something we will explore throughout this process to ensure all learners are able to access the online activities.

Methods

The next stage of the Action Research project was to implement digital learning platforms within the session and to collect data surrounding the learners' opinions on the learning platforms. After analysing the results, this would inform our recommendations for effective change. All the data that was collected throughout the cycles was done with informed consent from participants, allowed for anonymisation and we held all non-anonymised data in a secure way adhering to our colleges' data protection policies. All learners that were involved were made aware that this was part of an action research project and learners were able to opt out of taking part if they so wanted. This research project was initially conducted during the covid-19 pandemic which had a direct impact on their learning. Returning to in-person delivery session has resulted in disengaged learners and tutors have needed to encourage learners to engage with their learning.

Cycle 1.

During the first term of teaching, we quickly identified through observations, that learners were reluctant to provide vocal responses during the sessions. Learners were not asking for help if they were unsure of a topic and were speaking the tutors after the session had ended rather than during the session. We identified that this made it extremely difficult for tutors to provide support to the learners and to identify skills gaps and targets for progression. Therefore we decided to explore using Nearpod, a digital learning platform, within the GCSE maths delivery sessions. After using the platform for six weeks we conducted a focus group to obtain the learners' opinions around using the platform within the sessions. The focus group consisted of seven learners who were aged 14-15. The learners had been previously home-schooled and were working towards their GCSE maths qualification a year early. The group were asked a number of open ended questions and the focus group was recorded, transcribed and stored within the data protection guidelines. After analysing this data the results showed that using Nearpod within the sessions improved vocal participation and general participation within the delivery sessions. However we did identify that learners did not like using Nearpod for revision activities outside the session. Therefore we decided to explore other digital learning platforms that build on the skills developed in the Nearpod delivery sessions, and that could be used as a revision tool for learning outside the classroom.

Cycle 2

After completing cycle 1, we decided to explore using the Dr Frost online learning platform as a tool for recapping topics covered within the delivery sessions. Tutors delivered an introductory session for using the platform and each learner was assigned an activity each week as an option to complete outside the classroom. After using the platform for a term, we conducted a focus group with seven learners who had been using the platform within the sessions and as a revision tool outside the classroom. The focus group consisted of Level 2 health and social learners who are resitting their GCSE maths qualification. The group were asked a number of open-ended questions and the focus group was recorded, transcribed and stored within the data protection guidelines. After analysing the data, we identified that most learners were actively engaging with the Dr Frost online learning platform and were providing positive feedback around using the platform in future sessions. After conducting tutor observations and documenting online participation, it showed that the number of learners who were using the online learning platform had increased during the revision sessions. Therefore, we decided to design and implement a curriculum that includes using digital technology as a learning tool for in class delivery and for extension activities outside the classroom.

Results and Discussion

During the first cycle, we conducted a student questionnaire and a focus group with the learners. We decided to conduct a questionnaire to obtain the learners' opinions around maths in general and their attitudes and feelings towards the topic. (Appendix 1) Learners were given the option to take part in the questionnaire and were informed that all results would be anonymous. In total, there were 56 responses to the questionnaire. When asked, 'How much do you enjoy maths as a subject', all but two yielded a reason why the value of 1-10 was given and themes began to emerge from their answers. 43 out of 56 views fall into the theme of '50/50' or 'Negative Views', therefore explaining why the average score for the question 'On a scale of 1-10 how much do you like maths as a subject?' is 4.1.

Learners were also asked to rate their confidence in maths on a scale of 0 -10, and all but 8 yielded no concrete reasoning for their rating of confidence. It's very clear from the data that the overwhelming reason for the average confidence score being at less than 5 is because they feel they 'can't do maths', with learners stating reasons such as, "I'm just not that good at it" and "I hate maths". From these comments, it became clear that some learners had a negative attitude towards the subject and this could possibly be hindering their progression. This supports our decision to explore online technology by allowing learners to provide their answers to the tutor privately and discretely. This will hopefully encourage learners to actively participate within the sessions and will hopefully lead to a positive mind-set.

During the questionnaire, learners were also asked about how much independent work they complete outside the session. After analysing the comments for this question, it was apparent that the learners did not understand what they were being asked within this question. Learners made comments such as, 'Depends on the question if I know it I will answer it out loud' and 'not confident at all with public speaking, speaking in a class is not my thing'. These comments had no relevance to the question and when we spoke to the learners some of them stated that did not know the meaning behind 'independent learning'. Therefore, we decided that we would clarify the meaning of independent learning for the next cycle.

During the first cycle, we also decided to conduct a forum with a small group of learners. The group consisted of seven home school learners who had been completing their maths classes online during the first term. This group was chosen because they regularly attended classes and all of their sessions had been delivered online through Nearpod. This meant that the group could hopefully give informed opinions around the online learning platform.

The learners were informed that the forum was optional and that it would be recorded for us to analyse. They were also informed that it would not be shared with anyone outside the research team and that it would be stored securely (Appendix 2).

During the forum learners were asked about their opinions on the Nearpod learning platform and if using this platform has had an impact on their achievement in maths so far. The forum was recorded, transcribed (Appendix 3) and a thematic analysis was completed to analyse the results (Appendix 4).

After completing the thematic analysis, we were able to identify key themes from the learners' comments. A key theme emerged around the platform being 'fun' and 'easy to use', with learners making comments such as, "I like that you can write on the slides and can draw on the screen. Makes it more fun in class". Overall the learners made positive comments around using the platform and it was clear that they wanted to continue using Nearpod in

class. This was particularly apparent when learners were making comments about the private chat feature where they were able to contact the tutor privately during the sessions,

“I get so anxious when I am in class so being able to send you a message is so much better for me. I don’t want to get the answers wrong and get embarrassed and stressed, so I like being able to type it and send it to you without everyone seeing”.

However, learners did make comments about the effectiveness of using Nearpod for independent learning and revision and suggested that we introduce other platforms as a tool for revision. One learner stated, “If I am working through the Nearpod stuff at home I get easily bored and distracted because we’ve already done it in class”. Therefore, we decided to explore other digital learning platforms as a tool for revision and independent learning.

Overall, after completing cycle 1, we found that Nearpod was working for in class delivery and had successfully improved learner participation with the session. However, we did acknowledge that learners did not use Nearpod as a tool for revision and independent learning. Therefore during the next cycle we wanted to explore a digital learning platform that incorporates new material for the learners to complete outside the classroom to build on the skills developed in the Nearpod delivery sessions.

During the second cycle we introduced the Dr Frost learning platform to encourage learners to complete work outside the classroom and to access the revision materials. We completed an introductory session explaining how to use the platform and we then set activities on the platform for learners to complete independently outside of the classroom. We then conducted a forum with a group of seven health and social learners. The learners were informed that the forum was optional and that it would be recorded for us to analyse. They were also informed that it would not be shared with anyone outside the research team and that it would be stored securely (Appendix 5).

During the forum learners were asked about their opinions on Dr Frost learning platform and if using this platform has had an impact on their achievement in maths so far. The forum was recorded, transcribed (Appendix 6) and a thematic analysis was completed to analyse the results (Appendix 7).

During the initial stages of the second cycle, we promoted the learners to complete activities outside the classroom, however there were still a number of learners who were not engaging with the platform. Therefore, to address this issue we decided to use the Dr Frost platform within the sessions whilst they prepared for the mock exams. We then identified that more learners were engaging with the platform and completing the exam style activities. Tutors were able to provide feedback to the learners and a thread of communication was established between tutor and learner. This made it easier for tutors to identify skills gaps and to create individual learning targets for the learners. We also noticed that learners were accessing the platform at hours outside of the college day and were submitting work later at night and identified this as a positive aspect to using a digital learning platform within the curriculum.

During the focus group, key themes were identified around using the Dr Frost online platform. Learners made positive comments about how they were able to access the platform on their phone and how this made it easier to complete the work on the go, “It makes it easier that you can do it on your phone”. This highlights the benefit of using the online learning platform as learners are able to complete the work at any hours of the day. Another key theme that was identified was how the platform was beneficial for independent

learning and how they could use Dr Frost for revision purposes. A number of learners commented that they used the platform when preparing for the mock exam and positive comments were made about how the learners felt, “more prepared for the exam this year” compared to previous years. This highlights how the learners have benefited from using the platform and how some learners effectively used the platform for revision purposes.

Finally, the learners gave some insightful feedback around their concerns with the platforms and identified areas for improvement. Some learners identified that they struggled to access the work in class due to the college Wi-Fi issues. Therefore, we have included this in our recommendation for future planning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

To conclude, after completing the first cycle and implementing Nearpod into the sessions, the learners' vocal participation levels increased. More learners were completing the work within the sessions, providing answers privately to the tutor and engaging with the activities. The learners made positive comments around the platform and a key theme emerged of how easy and fun the platform was to use. We also recognised that through using Nearpod, this made it easier for the tutor to identify learners who were struggling with the topic and identify skills gap.

However, we did identify that Nearpod was not working for learning outside the classroom activities and therefore decided to explore the Dr Frost online learning platform as a tool for revision. Using Dr Frost had a positive impact on learner progress with the GCSE maths programme because a number of learners started using the platform for revision purposes in preparation for the mock assessments and the summative exam. The learners completed work on the platform, tutors were able to identify areas for improvement and a thread of conversation was established between tutor and learner. This developed the rapport between tutor and learner, and tutors were able to give insightful feedback and targets based of the learners' progress with the online learning platforms and their previous scores. Overall, the learners responded positively to the online delivery platforms and most learners actively engaged with using the platforms.

After discussing the platforms with the learners, it was clear that one of the main issues for accessing the platforms at college was due to the issues with the college Wi-Fi. We have recognised that this is not something that we as tutors are able to rectify, however we will be including this information in our recommendations which can then be discussed with leaders and managers at the college.

Recommendations

We would recommend the following points to help learners and teachers utilise digital learning platforms:

- College Wi-Fi needs to be looked at and utilise boosters in order to maintain a strong signal.
- Tutors to be given a classroom set of tablets in order to be able to utilise digital platforms at all times and to avoid using their own devices.
- More training to be delivered by the research team on using all features of the digital platforms utilised this year in order for more teachers being able to use the platforms.

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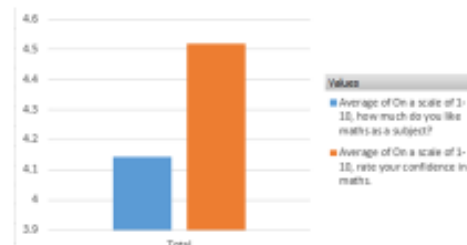
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Appendix/Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire Analysis

On a Scale of 1-10, How Much do you Like Maths as a Subject?



There were 56 responses to the questionnaire and all but 2 yielded a reason why the value of 1-10 was given when questioned about enjoyment in maths. 43 out of 56 views fall into the theme of '50/50' or 'Negative Views', therefore explaining why the average score for the question 'On a scale of 1-10 how much do you like maths as a subject?' is 4.1.

INTERESTING NOTE: Teacher Impact

An interesting point to note is that 6 learners explicitly noted that their maths teacher in college, and the college experience, had made them enjoy maths more.

Theme	Description	No. of Learners	Quotation Evidence
50/50	These learners often commented on some enjoyment whilst also saying they struggled with parts of the course. They were generally complimentary of maths lessons at college but spoke about specific topic or content which they struggle with. They seem to display feelings of joy and struggle when talking about maths.	23	'I struggle a lot with maths but I keep on trying' 'maths is my weakness but I'm okay with familiar topics' 'I like maths but it's hard for me' 'sometimes it's hard sometimes it's alright' 'I like maths but not that much'
Negative Views	These learners all displayed negative attitudes, mainly about themselves and their ability to 'do maths'. Many stated that it was a symptom of their experiences in high school which contributed to them not being able enough.	20	'I don't like maths one bit it's just not my thing' 'I don't feel confident...high school experience and it makes me feel dumb' 'never been good at maths'
Positive Approach	Some learners displayed positive views of their maths lessons and experiences. Two main reasons were cited: natural ability and enjoyment, and the fact that maths lessons are different in college and therefore more enjoyable.	10	'Starting to enjoy maths and I never knew I would' 'I find it fun and easy' 'I have a good brain...makes me enjoy it and some topics just interest me'
Personal Response	One personal response was given for grading enjoyment in maths lessons as a 4, and that was due to moving countries.	1	'Because I've been moving countries a lot so I'm so much behind and I don't even know some formulas my but I'm catching up'
Nothing Yielded	Two responses yielded no insight into why a specific score was given to question 1.	2	'it's good' 'yes'

On a Scale of 1-10, Rate Your Confidence in Maths.



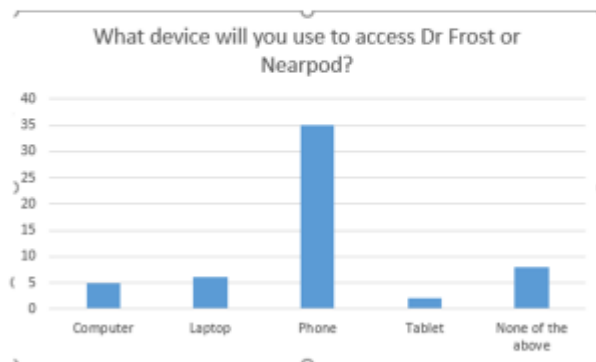
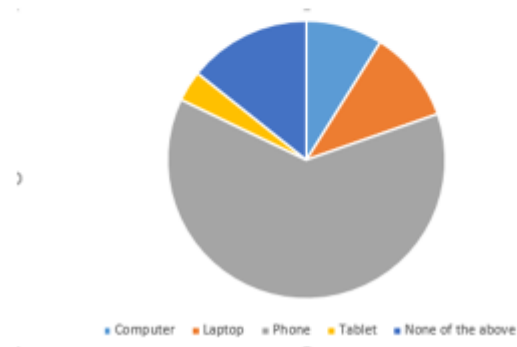
There were 56 responses to the questionnaire and all but 8 yielded no concrete reasoning for their rating of confidence.

It's very clear from the data that the overwhelming reason for the average confidence score at less than 5 is because they feel they 'can't do maths'. Is there something we can do to look at their views and opinions in more depth and see if the language we're using in class supports or hinders this view? Lots to explore and springboard here.

Theme	Description	No. of Learners	Quotation Evidence
Can't Do Maths	These learners core belief was that they just could not do maths. Some stated this exactly, and some blamed high school experiences. Yet all showed no signs of a belief they could ever improve or 'do maths'.	24	'I hate maths' 'my weak point' 'I'm just not that good at it'
Questioning as a Rating of Confidence	6 learners used their ability to answer questions, or knowing when to ask questions, as a benchmark for their confidence in their maths ability. It was interesting to read that they felt some doubt in their ability but they knew to ask a question to help them better understand the maths in lessons.	6	'I try to understand...I ask for help' 'I know what to answer in class' 'I am feeling quite confident...I can understand the questions and figure out the answer'
Growth and Recognition	These learners sometimes accepted that they struggled but believed they could improve because: lessons are better in college, they prefer their teacher, they enjoy maths even though they struggle, or they show signs of a growth mindset.	11	'I'm willing to learn' 'I feel like I have the basics down by now and I can do some harder things ok' 'I think I'm OK at maths but I just don't revise or go enough'
Topic Driven	These learners hung their confidence level on the maths topic, stating that some topics they enjoyed and were confident and some not at all, meaning their overall confidence was around a 5. It very much depends on the maths topic being taught.	6	'It really depends on the topic. Algebra I find it easy but some other topics I find it complicated' 'I'm very bad at equations'
Online?	This learners seems to think that the online aspects of the lessons are having an impact – this is something to explore further.	1	'In the current class I'm in I think it's really easy. Maybe it's because it's online but I find the lessons to be quick and easy'
Nothing Yielded	Eight responses yielded no insight into why a specific score was given to question 3.	8	'Basics' 'No' 'Yes'

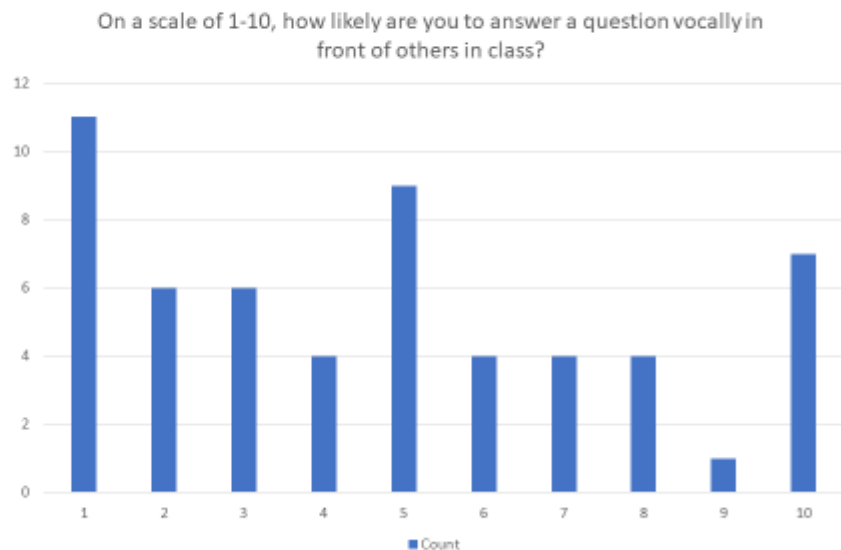
What Device will you use to Access Dr Frost or Nearpod?

What device will you use to access Dr Frost or Nearpod during your maths class?	Count	%
Computer	5	9%
Laptop	6	11%
Phone	35	63%
Tablet	2	4%
None of the above	8	14%

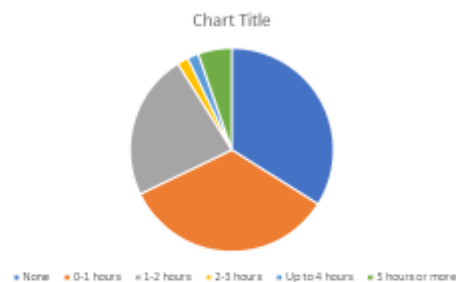
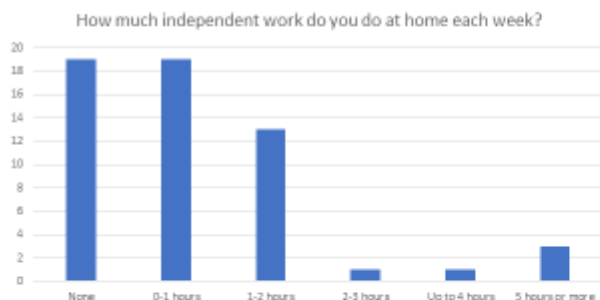


On a Scale of 1-10, How likely are you to Answer a Question Vocally in Front of others in Class?

Scale from 1 - 10	Count	%
1	11	20%
2	6	11%
3	6	11%
4	4	7%
5	9	16%
6	4	7%
7	4	7%
8	4	7%
9	1	2%
10	7	12%



How Much Independent Work do you do at Home Each Week on Average in Maths?



Exploring this question as interesting – I pulled out the learners who stated they do 'none' or '0-1 hours' or independent study. A number state they are confident so don't need too, or that they already have maths twice a week so are not doing any more. However, there are a few answers to note:

- 'I'll answer the question at my best ability to potentially help others.'
- 'I don't have much time as my course is very full so I have homework for that.'
- 'If I know the answer then I will answer it.'
- 'I don't feel confident saying my answers out loud in front of others in case I get it wrong.'
- 'I am not much of a social person'
- 'Depends on the question if I know it I will answer it out loud'
- 'not confident at all, with public speaking, speaking in a class is not my thing'

How much independent work do you do at home each week on average in maths?	Count	%
None	19	34%
0-1 hours	19	34%
1-2 hours	13	23%
2-3 hours	1	2%
Up to 4 hours	1	2%
5 hours or more	3	5%

These suggest to me that they haven't understood the question correctly and this may need amending for the next cycle. Have a look and see what your interpretation would be.

Appendix 2 – Focus Group 1 Schedule

Focus Group Schedule – 10th February 2022

Thank you for being part of this focus group. I need to make you aware that this focus group will be recorded so we can analyse it. It will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team and it will be stored securely. Is that okay?

The aim of today's meeting is to gather your thoughts and opinions on the Nearpod digital learning platform that you have been using during the lessons this year. We are particularly keen to understand what you think of the platform, whether you find it useful during the lessons, and what we can do to improve the Nearpod presentations.

There are only a few basic rules to keep in mind while participating today:

- a) Everyone is encouraged to be an active participant.
- b) There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.
- c) Speak freely but remember not to interrupt others while they are talking.
- d) Note taking is for reporting purposes only and will be used for analysis. Names are not attached to the notes.
- e) All feedback today will remain anonymous in order to maintain anonymity.
- f) Anything that is said during the meeting should not be repeated outside of our meeting.

1) What is your opinion of the Nearpod platform?

- a. Do you enjoy using it?
- b. Is it easy to use?
- c. Do you prefer other online platforms that could be used in class? Which ones?

2) Do you use Nearpod to communicate with the tutor privately during the session?

- a. If yes, Why?
- b. Do you prefer this method of communication?
- c. If no, Why not?

3) Do you use Nearpod to catch up on the lesson material if you have missed a class?

- a. If so, does this help?
- b. If not, is there a reason?
- c. Would you prefer other materials to catch up with the missed work?

4) Do you think using Nearpod has had an impact on your achievement in maths so far?

- a. What is the impact?
- b. What makes you think that?

5) Is there anything else you would like to add with regards to your experiences with the Nearpod online platform?

Thank you for your participation today, we really appreciate your comments and time.

Appendix 3 – Focus Group 1 Transcript

Focus Group Transcript

Thursday 10th February

Present: Molli Markland, Kai Stengel, CR, EV, ZR, AW, MC, CM, JJ

	00:00	<i>Read out information document that they signed in the previous session</i>
Q1	01:24	What is your opinion of the Nearpod platform? a. Do you enjoy using it? Why? b. Is it easy to use? Why? CR – I personally like it. <i>(Why)</i> I like that you can write on the slides and can draw on the screen. Makes it more fun in class. <i>(Is it easy to use?)</i> I find it easy to use when we are in class. <i>(Why)</i> I like having the option to do it online rather than on paper and I can work ahead if I understand the topic. I just usually prefer to type things out rather than writing it, I'm quicker when I type. AW – I like the match up games and the wordsearches they are fun to do. <i>(Is it easy to use?)</i> It's easier to use than word. <i>(Why)</i> I didn't like word, it took forever to type on it when I was using my phone to do the work. Nearpod is so much easier to use. MC – I find it easier to use when we are working at home because if you can't remember how to do a question, you can just flick back to the information and look at how to do the steps. When we were working on word (MS Word) there was no information to help you. ZR – I prefer Nearpod to PowerPoint, I've only ever used PowerPoint before. I like that you can write on the slides on Nearpod, makes it more fun. JJ – Yeah I like the games and the activities, like the match up game and the fill in the blanks thing. It makes it more fun in class. c. Do you prefer other online learning platforms that could be used in class? Which ones? Why? AW - Not really no, I like using Nearpod in class. MC – Yeah me to, I like using YouTube videos if I need help but they are easy to find. <i>(What videos do you watch on YouTube?)</i> Just random ones I find, you can usually find a quick video to explain a topic, I just google it. EV – I use YouTube too if I don't understand something. ZR – What about using Kahoot? I've used that before for quizzes in class. That's alright. <i>(Has anybody else used Kahoot before?)</i> CR – Yeah, it's alright but a bit boring. CM – I like it but it is a bit repetitive. AW – It's good for class quizzes and the winners get a prize.
Q2	05:52	Do you use Nearpod to communicate with the tutor privately during the session? a. If yes, why? b. Do you prefer this method of communication? c. If no, why? d. Do you prefer talking to your tutor through Nearpod or in person? Why? CR – If I need to speak to you without interrupting anyone else I prefer doing it privately. <i>(Why)</i> Like if I need to ask for help or if I need to leave the room for a minute, it's easier to message you privately. But if it's a maths question and I know the answer I don't mind speaking in front of everyone.

		CM – I like messaging you privately it's so much better doing it that way. (Why do you prefer this method of communication?) I get embarrassed if I am the only one who doesn't understand it, and I would just sit there in silence if I had to tell you in front of everyone. I just wouldn't do the work. I prefer sending the answers through Nearpod to check they are right first. Then if I know they are right I don't mind saying an answer in front of everyone. ZR – I like being able to message you privately. (Why) Like if you're in the middle of teaching I don't want to disturb you by shouting out so I prefer messaging you privately so you can see it when we all start working and then you usually come and help me. JJ – I use it all the time. I get so anxious when I am in class so being able to send you a message is so much better for me. I don't want to get the answer wrong and get embarrassed and stressed, so I like being able to type it and send it to you without everyone seeing. AW – Yeah I get really anxious in class and being able to send you a private message is really helpful if I need a minute to sort myself out. MC – I was really nervous at the beginning of the year about the maths lessons, I really didn't want to answer questions in front of everyone. I liked that you didn't make any of us answer questions in front of each other and that we could just write our answers on Nearpod. That helped me so much at the beginning, I really get nervous with maths. (Do you still prefer talking to the tutor through Nearpod or in person?) I am alright at asking for help now I know everyone, but it was hard at the beginning. I still use Nearpod to send my answers if I think I have got the answer wrong or if I need more help.
Q3	09:51	Do you use Nearpod to catch up on the lesson material if you have missed a class? a. If so, does this help? b. If not, is there a reason? CR – Yeah I use it, but if I know what the topic is about then I don't bother. Most of the time I will have a flick through all the information slides and will leave out the activities if I know what to do. I do usually do the grade 4 stuff at the end though, those big questions. MC – I don't usually look. (Why) I just can't be bothered catching up on the work. I find it so hard to do work at home, I'm much better in class, I can't concentrate at home. EV – Unless I really don't understand something I don't bother looking at it. (Why) I would rather have an actual lesson on it, I struggle working independently. It helps when the teacher explains it and I can follow along at their pace. ZR – Same as CR, I go through the info but leave out the activities and just do the grade 4 stuff at the end. (Why) I think it's better do the grade 4 stuff for revision and it will help with the exams. JJ – Yeah sometimes if I don't get it I will go back and redo the activities. (Does this help?) Yes, but I do prefer using it in class than when I'm using it on my own. MC – I prefer to watch video stuff on YouTube if I don't get it. (What videos do you watch?) I like the Corbett videos, or just random ones that I find that explain it. It's quicker than going through the Nearpod slides. c. Would you prefer other materials to catch up with the missed work? JJ – I think I would just prefer some worksheets that I could just work my way through. If I need something explaining I just tend to use a YouTube video. I think with Nearpod, because it's more of a lesson with a few different topics, then it's just easier to look on YouTube for a quick video if that makes sense? (Do you prefer using Nearpod when the teacher is delivering the information in class) Yeah definitely. If I am working through the Nearpod stuff at home I get easily bored and distracted. I prefer doing mocks and worksheets when I am at home and just stick to YouTube videos if I don't understand the work. CM – Yeah, If I don't understand something out of class I like YouTube videos, they are quick and easy to follow.

		ZR – I liked having the work online, on the word documents. I liked typing my answers, I end up losing the work on paper or it gets ruined cause I don't use a bag. If I can do it on word I can do it from my phone when I am on the bus home, makes it so much easier. CR – Yeah I agree, I like being able to do the work on my phone, I always lose work that we are given on paper. d. What devices do you use outside of class? CR – Phone and PC EV – I either use my laptop or my ipad ZR – phone, laptop or Ipad AW – laptop MC – laptop JJ – Laptop or Macbook CM – phone or PC
Q4	15:02	Do you think Nearpod has had an impact on your achievement in maths so far? a. What is the impact? b. What makes you think that? JJ – I think the student paced one is really helpful. When we can go back and forth through the slides if we don't understand something. That's helpful for when you do the grade 4 questions at the end and you are unsure of how to do it. You can just go back to the topic you want and look again and it saves your answers. That's good to use for revision for the mocks. AW – I find it easier to do worksheets because I like to keep repeating things until I get it. That's just how I prefer to learn. I like using Nearpod when I get a topic cause I can do the fun activities and the grade 4 questions. But I prefer using worksheets to practice the work, but Nearpod is good for the information. CM – Yeah I use Nearpod for the step-by-step guides. They are really helpful for remembering how to do something and I use them if I've forgotten how to do the work. (Does this have an impact on your achievement in maths?) I guess so because using the guides on Nearpod is useful for revision for the exam. MC – Same, I use Nearpod to remember the steps on how to do the questions and this definitely helps with my revision.
Q5	17:12	Is there anything else you would like to add with regards to your experiences with the Nearpod online platform? JJ – I really like using Nearpod, it would be good if they used it in other classes. ZR – I like the fact that you can draw on it and you cant do that on a word document, or if you do it's really awkward. EV – Same, on a PowerPoint you cant write on the screen and I like that you can do it on Nearpod. CR – if you can add YouTube video to Nearpod that would be so helpful for revision. Then I wouldn't need to go between the two websites.

Appendix 4 – Thematic Analysis 1

Thematic Analysis – Focus Group 1 10th February

Theme	Cycle	Evidence
Easy to use	1	AW – It's easier to use that word. I didn't like word, it took forever to type on it when I was using my phone to do the work. Nearpod is so much easier to use.
		CR – It's easy to use if we need to message you privately
Fun	1	CR – I like that you can write on the slides and can draw on the screen. Makes it more fun in class.
		AW - I like the match up games and the word searches, they are fun to do.
		ZR – I like that you can write on the slides on Nearpod, makes it more fun
		JJ – Yeah I like the games and the activities, like the match up game and the fill in the blanks thing. It makes it more fun in class.
Independent learning		CR – I like that I can work ahead if I understand a topic. (Nearpod)
		MC – If you can't remember a question, you can just flick back to the information and look at how to do the steps. (Nearpod)
		CR – I will have a flick through the information slides and will leave out the activities if I know what to do.
		EV – I struggle working independently. It helps when the teacher explains it and I can follow along at their pace.
		JJ – Sometimes if I don't get it I will go back and redo the activities.
		MC – I can't be bothered catching up on the work. I find it hard to do work at home.
		JJ – If I am working through the Nearpod stuff at home I get easily bored and distracted because we've already done it in class.
		CR – I like being able to do the work on my phone, I always lose work that we are given on paper.
Communication tool	1	CR – If I need to speak to you without interrupting anyone else, I prefer to do it privately through Nearpod.
		CM – I prefer sending the answers through Nearpod to check they are right first. Then if I know they are right, I don't mind saying an answer in front of everyone.
		ZR – I prefer messaging you privately so you can see it when we all start working and then you usually come and help me.
		CM – I get embarrassed if I am the only one who doesn't understand it, and I would just sit there in silence if I had to tell you in front of everyone. I just wouldn't do the work.
		JJ – I get so anxious when I am in class so being able to send you a message is so much better for me. I don't want to get the answers wrong and get embarrassed and stressed, so I like being able to type it and send it to you without everyone seeing.
Other platforms	1	MC – I like using YouTube videos if I need help because they are easy to find.
		MC – I prefer to watch videos if I don't get it. I like the Corbett videos, or just random ones that I find that explain it. It's quicker than going through the Nearpod slides.

Appendix 5 – Focus Group 2 Schedule

Group Schedule – Focus group 2

Thank you for being part of this focus group. I need to make you aware that this focus group will be recorded so we can analyse it. It will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team and it will be stored securely. Is that okay?

The aim of today's meeting is to gather your thoughts and opinions on the Nearpod digital learning platform that you have been using during the lessons this year. We are particularly keen to understand what you think of the platform, whether you find it useful during the lessons, and what we can do to improve the Nearpod presentations.

There are only a few basic rules to keep in mind while participating today:

- g) Everyone is encouraged to be an active participant.
- h) There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.
- i) Speak freely but remember not to interrupt others while they are talking.
- j) Note taking is for reporting purposes only and will be used for analysis. Names are not attached to the notes.
- k) All feedback today will remain anonymous in order to maintain anonymity.
- l) Anything that is said during the meeting should not be repeated outside of our meeting.

6) Tell me how you have used Dr Frost this year?

- d. Do you enjoy using it?
- e. Is it easy to use? If not is there anything that would have helped make it easier to use the platform?
- f. Has anyone not used the platform, if not why?

7) Have you found Dr Frost useful this academic year?

- d. If yes, Why?
- e. If no, Why not?
- f. What features of the platform do you find useful or not useful?

8) How often do you use Dr Frost outside the classroom?

- d. How do you access the platform?
- e. How do you use the platform? (revision, exam questions, topic tests...) Is this useful?

9) Do you think using Dr Frost has had an impact on your achievement in maths so far?

- c. What is the impact?
- d. What makes you think that?

10) Is there anything else you would like to add with regards to your experiences with the Dr Frost online platform?

Thank you for your participation today, we really appreciate your comments and time.

Appendix 6 – Focus Group 2 Transcript

Focus Group Transcript

Tuesday 10th May

Present: Kai Stengel, JR, FH, MS, JV, ED, EF, MI

	00:00	<i>Read out information document that they signed in the previous session</i>
Q1	01:24	11) Tell me how you have used Dr Frost this year? g. Do you enjoy using it? h. Is it easy to use? If not is there anything that would have helped make it easier to use the platform? i. Has anyone not used the platform, if not why? KS: Tell me how you have used Dr Frost this year? JR: I mainly use it in class cause it's easier to do the work on there, and I've done the work that you have set us to do. FH: Yeah I've used it in class instead of doing it on paper. MS: Use it in class and I use it at home for extra revision and I've gone through practice questions and practice papers. JV: Just in class really, although I have done some work at home but mainly used it in class when you give us time for revision stuff. ED: I use it in class and at home to help me revise for the mocks. EF: Use it in the class mainly but then used it when we did the mock exams. KS: Thanks for that. Do you enjoy using the platform? JR: Yeah I like it. <i>(Do you find it easy to use?)</i> Yeah, I can use it on my phone so that makes it easier. EF: Yeah that does help, means I can do the work on the bus in the morning. <i>(Does anyone else find this helpful?)</i> JV: Yeah more for when I'm at home but it makes it easier that you can do it on your phone. KS: Thanks for this, has anyone not really used it, and if so why not? MI: Yeah I've not really used it but I've missed a lot of lessons and I've got a lot of work on there to catch up on, and I can't be bothered doing it. <i>(Can I ask why you can't be bothered?)</i> I don't know really, just can't be bothered and don't see the point in doing the work. I will just do the exams and if I fail I will try again next year. <i>(Do you not think it would be better to try really hard this year and pass, and then you will never have to worry about passing maths again?)</i> suppose but it will be alright innit so I'm not gonna worry. <i>(Thank you for the feedback)</i> KS: Is there anyone else who doesn't really use the platform? FH: Wi-Fi can be an issue in class so that puts me off. I have to end up using my own data which I don't like doing and then my phone runs out of battery. I use it more at home when I am on my own cause I can concentrate more. <i>(Has anyone else found that this is an issue?)</i> MI: Yeah the Wi-Fi is shocking at college. FH: Everything works well, it's just the Wi-Fi issue in class. ED: Yeah that would help if that was sorted. EF: It works for me, and I like looking at exam style questions cause it helps me with the work. JR: Yeah me too, I like it.
Q2	06:48	12) Have you found Dr Frost useful this academic year? g. If yes, Why?

		h. If no, Why not? i. What features of the platform do you find useful or not useful? KS: Have you found Dr Frost useful this academic year? EF: Yes cause I can do the exam style questions and do those wordy questions that I usually leave out. And I like watching them videos that are on there when I don't get something. (why) It just helps to see it being explained on a video. MS: Yeah I feel more prepared for the exam this year cause I use it quite a lot for extra work. MI: I've not really done anything on it so it's not helped me at all. (Is there a reason why you haven't used the platform?) I just can't be bothered, I don't like maths so I don't want to do any work. (Thank you for the feedback, is there anything that would help you pass the exam?) Don't know. KS: Thank you for those responses. What features of the platform do you find useful? EF: Exam questions and videos. MS: Yeah the videos are good for revision if I get stuck with something. JV: The questions are good cause it makes me think about the big questions and how to answer them. (Why) Cause you can see how many marks the questions are. Like if it's a five mark question you know it will be harder. JR: I like the you marked it and gave me feedback and I could write back to you. (why did this help?) When I'm working at home and need some help, it's good that I can message on there at whatever time. (anyone else?) KS: Thank you. Are there any features you do not find useful? FH: I found the points system at the start of the year annoying as it kept coming up on the screen and that put me off a bit. ED: I like that the answers come up and it shows you the mark scheme...But sometimes the mark scheme was complicated and I didn't get it. EF: I find writing your answers really hard when I need to show the working out, so I just do it on a piece of paper and then write the answer in.
09:13	13) How often do you use Dr Frost outside the classroom? f. How do you access the platform? g. How do you use the platform? (revision, exam questions, topic tests...) Is this useful? KS: How often do you use Dr Frost outside the classroom? ED: quite a lot really, I just do the bits I struggle with. (How often do you use it?) Dunno, like once or twice a week. It's good for revision. FH: I use it at home when you set work on there or if I miss a lesson. (Does this help) Yeah, means I don't fall behind. KS: In your free time, do you access Dr Frost at home or in college? FH: On my laptop at home cause it's easier to see on there. ED: On my phone in class cause the password is saved on there (do you find it difficult to remember the log in details?) yeah! Couldn't tell you what they are. (Does anyone else feel the same?) MI: yes I always forget my login details. JV: Me too.	
12:07	14) Do you think using Dr Frost has had an impact on your achievement in maths so far? e. What is the impact?	

	f. What makes you think that? KS: Do you think using Dr Frost has had an impact on your achievement in maths so far? JR: It's been good to use, it makes me try harder, maths is a bit boring really but at least using this is helping me. JV: its ok but I would not say I have enjoyed it as its maths. But I do feel more prepared after doing the wordy questions. MI: I don't like maths but it's something I need to do. <i>(Do you think Dr frost has had an impact on your achievement?)</i> Not really, doesn't matter what I use, I don't like it. I am just trying to get it done now FH: Yeah cause I feel more prepared for the exams, its really helping for revision. EF: Yeah I feel confident. Definitely more confident than last year. <i>(Do you think using Dr Frost has helped with this?)</i> Yeah I like that it marks the mocks so you can see where you are up to. KS: Thank you for those responses. Do you feel that you have improved your confidence with maths after using Dr Frost? FH: yes definitely, this is really helping me a lot as I feel like I can just have a go at the work now and only you see it so it doesn't matter if I get it wrong. EF: Yeah I like that too, otherwise if everyone saw the scores I wouldn't do it. I like that hint thing that it does if you get something wrong. FH: yeah I like that, forgot about the hint. Yeah it means I can double check it first.
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Appendix 7 – Thematic Analysis 2 (ADD ONCE DONE)

Thematic Analysis – Focus Group Tuesday 10th May

Theme	Cycle	Evidence
Phone use	1	JR: I can use it on my phone so that makes it easier.
		EF: means I can do the work on the bus in the morning.
		JV: It makes it easier that you can do it on your phone.
		JR: I like the you marked it and gave me feedback and I could write back to you. <i>(why did this help?)</i> When I'm working at home and need some help, it's good that I can message on there at whatever time.
Positive comments around use of platform	1	JR: I mainly use it in class cause it's easier to do the work on there.
		FH: I've used it in class instead of doing it on paper.
		EF: I like watching them videos that are on there when I don't get something. <i>(Why)</i> It just helps to see it being explained on a video.
		MS: The videos are good for revision if I get stuck with something.
		JR: It's been good to use, it makes me try harder, maths is a bit boring really but at least using this is helping me.
		EF: I like that it marks the mocks so you can see where you are up to.
		FH: I feel like I can just have a go at the work now and only you see it so it doesn't matter if I get it wrong.
Independent learning	1	EF: Yeah I like that too, otherwise if everyone saw the scores I wouldn't do it.
		EF: Used it when we did the mock exams
		MS: (I use it in class) and at home to help me revise for the mocks.
		EF: I like looking at exam style questions cause it helps me with the work.
		MS: I feel more prepared for the exam this year cause I use it quite a lot for extra work.
		FH: I use it at home when you set work on there or if I miss a lesson. <i>(Does this help)</i> Yeah, means I don't fall behind.
Concerns with the platform	1	FH: I feel more prepared for the exams, its really helping for revision.
		FH: Wifi can be an issue in class so that puts me off.
		FH: Wifi issue in class
		FH: I found the point system at the start of the year annoying as it kept coming up on the screen and that put me off a bit.
		ED: sometimes the mark scheme was complicated and I didn't get it.
		EF: I find writing your answers really hard when I need to show the working out