

A novel way to boost personal skills

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(Phys.org) -- Psychologists from Royal Holloway, University of London believe a collaborative writing project can help boost self-esteem and improve core skills such as team work among young people.

Dr Yvonne Skipper was part of a team of [psychologists](#) analysing ProjectTooManyCooks – a writing workshop that challenges a group of students to write a full-length novel in just five days.

The project, devised by Computer Science research assistant Dr Joe Reddington in partnership with the English Department, saw a group of nine sixth-formers from Strode's College work collaboratively on the novel, which was set in real time and drew on the events of the previous week. They had just one day to plan their story and establish a plot, two days to collectively write the novel and a day and a half to proofread and make any last minute alterations before it is sent to the printers to be published.

Dr Skipper said: “We were looking at a number of outcomes such as self-esteem, initiative, conceptions of success and interpersonal skills including team work. We ask young people questions about their skills and feelings at the beginning of the week and again at the end to allow us to examine how participating in the project may influence them.”

Dr Skipper explains: “One of our key measures is locus of control – whether students believe they are in control of their life or if things just happen to them. We are examining whether working on a project like this leads students to feel more in control over what happens to them and

that they can succeed if they are willing to put in the effort to do so. If this is the case then we would expect that in the future they would be more likely to take the initiative to make things they want happen for themselves.”

Dr Reddington explains that ProjectTooManyCooks is about artefact-based learning and that on the Friday evening, after five days working on the novel, the students can download their book on [Amazon](#) and just a few days after the project they receive a published version of their work.

He says: "This is learning by co-operating and creating as a group and then being able to hold in your hands something that is special, that is yours, and that you are proud of making - and we hope that this workshop has put a structure into place that allows the students to do this."

Dr Skipper adds: “We are still in the process of analysing the results, but our initial findings suggest that this sort of [project](#) can help to raise aspirations, initiative, and social skills. It has been brilliant to watch the students working together, developing their ideas and [skills](#) through the course of the week.”

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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