

IT'S GOOD TO BE **RIGHT** ABOUT BEING **WRONG!**

*Stephen Carrick-Davies and Maggie Kalnins
reflect on developing the Facework project,
funded by Nominet Trust.*

In 2013 Nominet Trust awarded [Inclusion Trust](#) a grant to develop an ambitious programme that would help marginalised young people who are taught in Alternative Education Provision to be better prepared to make the transition to employment. Our vision was to connect young people with online mentors and help them develop a digital portfolio-based CV that would enable YP to present a fuller picture of how their current activities reflect skills that are valuable to potential employers.

Simple idea right? **Wrong!**

fw
FACEWORK

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS YOU NEED TO FACE WORK?

Employers are looking for staff who can prove they have these 5 CORE SKILLS

S T E P S

SELF-MANAGING TEAM WORKING ENTERPRISING PROBLEM SOLVING SPEAKING + LISTENING

There are many different elements to these 5 core skills. Rate yourself on how good you are and ask your mate to rate you too.

S YOUR RATES MATE'S RATES

SELF-MANAGING

HOW DO YOU PROVE YOU CAN MANAGE YOURSELF?

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

LOW → HIGH 1 4

MANAGING TIME
APPEARING SMART
MANAGING EMOTIONS
BELIEVING IN YOURSELF
GETTING BACK UP

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

T YOUR RATES MATE'S RATES

TEAM WORKING

WHAT MAKES YOU A GOOD TEAM PLAYER?

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

LOW → HIGH 1 4

PLAYING TO THE RULES
RESPECTING OTHERS
BEING RELIABLE
PROMOTING OTHERS
LEARNING FROM OTHERS

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

E YOUR RATES MATE'S RATES

ENTERPRISING

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT?

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

LOW → HIGH 1 4

USING INITIATIVE
RECEIVING FEEDBACK
HANDLING CHANGE
TRYING NEW THINGS
PLEASING CUSTOMERS

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

P YOUR RATES MATE'S RATES

PROBLEM SOLVING

WHAT EXPERIENCE HAVE YOU GOT AT SOLVING PROBLEMS?

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

LOW → HIGH 1 4

SPOTTING PROBLEMS
ADMITTING MISTAKES
ASKING FOR HELP
FIXING PROBLEMS
LEARNING FROM PROBLEMS

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

S YOUR RATES MATE'S RATES

SPEAKING + LISTENING

HOW DO YOU IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION?

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

LOW → HIGH 1 4

SHARING SELF INTERESTS
USING BODY LANGUAGE
ASKING QUESTIONS
BEING HEARD
COMMUNICATING WELL

1 2 3 4 TOTAL SCORE

WHAT'S YOUR COMBINED SCORE?
Add up the totals you gave yourself and then add up the scores your mate gave you. Are they similar? What did you score best in?

S T E P S

What's the secret of getting a job?
Scratch the panel to see!

MASTER THESE 5 CORE SKILLS AND YOUR CONFIDENCE WILL GROW

Called [‘Facework’](#) Called ‘Facework’ we assumed that staff working in Alternative Education¹ would welcome the chance of getting their students ready for work by helping them create a digital portfolio-based CV. The trouble was many teachers had justifiable concerns around students’ behaviour on social media² and felt that they had already been stung by education ICT programmes which overpromised and under-delivered.



There was the problem of band-width - not the technical type, but the sheer capacity of work as staff help students re-boot their desire to learn, challenge poor behaviour, support families and – importantly - impart core skills and knowledge needed to gain qualifications at least for Maths and English. Where were they going to find the time to help their students to focus on soft skill acquisition and also assist them creatively with uploading a digital portfolio to help them present their best face for work? Employability matters were seen to be the responsibility of the mainstream and or specialist careers education providers. (More about that later).



Undeterred we started working with the students. Fabulous and feisty young people who told us straight away what they thought of the idea. Not a lot. “What would you say to an employer if you had a criminal record?” was one of the first questions we encountered; how do you

cover up a digital footprint like that? We presumed young people understood the point about personal experiences and attitudes being relevant to getting a job – which they did, but did they get the opportunity to experience work in settings they enjoyed? And why would they use a website called Facework when they have Facebook. (Now superseded by other social media platforms). What about a ‘My first day at work’ app on your phone we suggested? With fears that some of them would never actually experience a conventional first day at work, there was silence. **Again we were wrong.**

¹ In 2012/13 there were more than 4,500 permanent exclusions and almost 40,000 fixed term exclusions according to the Dept of Education 2014 report. See [The Alternative should not be inferior report](#) for a overview of these statistics, history of AP and what is currently happening to pushed out learners in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

² See previous Nominet Funded project [Munch Poke Ping](#) which looked at online safety within AP.

Most of the young students understood the challenging future which awaits them outside of the school. When you've been pushed out and told you've "failed" at mainstream schooling, is it any wonder you want try to sabotage a process which may only further highlight failure? There are no 'magic' solutions or technology 'fairy dust' to scatter!

Later another student told us privately, "My mentor in school constantly reminds me about my bad behaviour and tries to correct these by bribing me with treats (including promises to food outlets or exciting end of term trips). We kids can see through this." She was clearly smart enough to understand what was going on and frustrated to be caught in a vacuum, perhaps too tough for mainstream school, yet still too vulnerable for the harsh world of employment? What she needed help with was in breaking down skills used in the real-world into actual activities which she was already good at, where her experiences and passions could be nurtured and enhanced by an audience which gave real world validity. Good career provision is not just providing information. This student, like so many of the other fabulous young people we worked with needed coaching and counselling to understanding how to present behaviours in the workplace in a positive way that involved actually meeting real employers face to face.

Alarmingly, some of the PRUs we worked in just didn't have the resources to be able to facilitate a placement with a local employer. When one of the students, Ben, shared with us that he loved cars and wanted to be a mechanic, we took him to a local garage, around the corner to get his hands and heart engaged in learning. There appeared no local brokerage service to provide this link and the owner of this garage didn't even know about the PRU within a half-a mile radius.

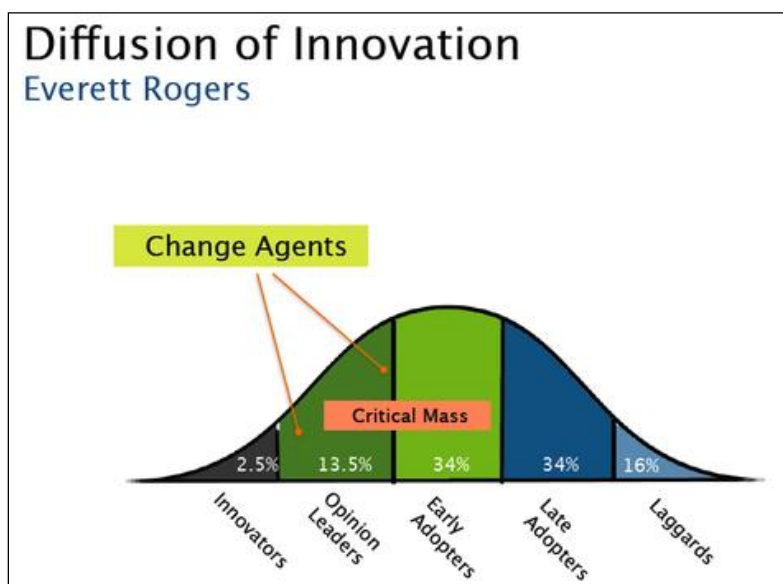
At the end of the morning he shared with Ben his own experience and the two made a deep connection which inspired Ben, who later shared with us about what he had learnt – but more importantly – how he now felt about his skills and his passion. "Grease is the word." It was on his hands and overalls but the grease of real-world engagement had also freed up his thinking and self-belief.



This reality on the ground and these reflections from students made us recognise that it was the learners who had valuable insights into employability and needed a voice. We were the ones who had to ‘flip our thinking’ and put the student in the role of teacher and instruct us on what would work best for them. This challenge however felt too great and without more resources and significant mind shift these challenges were unsurmountable. We went so far as to suggest to [Nominet Trust](#) that we stop the project and give back the grant.

Making change happen with
nominet trust

However, Nominet is different from other trusts. “Show us what you are learning and we’ll continue to support you” they insisted. What is the value to the user of this work? What is the social value to us all in understanding the pattern of a ‘pushed-out’ learner becoming ‘pushed-out’ of the labour market? “We are as interested in the process and in what you learn and share with others, as much as what you finally produce” they told us.



Nominet staff helped us to understand [Everett’s diffusion of innovation theory](#) and re-examine our theory of change. They encouraged us to find the innovators (2.5% of the social system): Those leaders and practitioners who desperate in their mission are prepared to break the mold of their current methods and, driven by their moral purpose do what is best for their students, even if that meant challenging the rigid ‘system’ and constraints. We needed to get them to form a researchers’

group and then go about trying to reach the 13.5% of the ‘early adopters’ to prove and further refine the model and methods so together – and with the students – we could develop a platform and develop a sustainable resource that eventually inspires the ‘laggards’ (both teachers and learners) and leads to real change.

It was OK to be **wrong** - so we returned to the white board.

Looking back now we recognise that it was the deep conversations with both funder, teachers and importantly the young people as co-designers which helped us re-imagine what the Facework project might become. We gathered the innovators together and produced a report [The Alternative should not be inferior](#)³ which captured the wider context to our thinking and that from the movement as a whole.



We became more confident in our belief that something was unfair and plain wrong. That there was a deep inequality in the provision of careers advice for students in Alternative Provision who paradoxically stood most to benefit from channeling their passions and unrecognised achievements and resilience into worthwhile careers.

Influenced by the work of Professor Eve Tuck at the State University of New York, we adopted the term 'Pushed-Out' to describe the students with whom we work that for a multitude of reasons, find themselves unable to attend mainstream education. This narrative shifted the focus from labelling and trying to fix the 'abnormality' of the child to provoke instead a debate amongst practitioners that focuses on the weaknesses in our education system. It was clear that those who were pushed-out in education were most in danger of being pushed out of employment. We wrote a [paper](#) and presented it at the Youth Employment Convention. We could see students who were most at risk of becoming NEETs, struggle with being in Alternative Provision, yet saw they had enormous untapped potential. Others were showing education in the real world⁴ so how could we bridge this gap and support staff?

We pursued an empathetic approach to these work, placing adults in the shoes of 'pushed out' learners. We focused on asking the students to construct the questions and activities they thought would best help them and their peers to talk about the skills associated with their current personal and social contexts. This enabled them recognise that work skills are rooted in social behaviours. It also helped the young people with whom we are working to recognise that their talents and existing

³ This [report](#) has made a real ripple both in AP but also across mainstream schools who are increasingly innovating and finding new ways with their own funding to 'hold' students before they are excluded.

⁴ See for example **Kitchen Impossible** currently showing on Channel 4 where Michel Roux Jr. puts eight out-of-work people through an intensive four-week introduction to catering, one of the toughest jobs in the world.

skills, many of which are acquired through troubled and challenging circumstances, are valued and can be transferred into the world of work.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

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Independent social entrepreneur, trainer and youth advocate

Conversations Into Employment

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34 Likes, 4 Shares, 4 Tweets, 0 +1s, 0 Comments

"What's my line? I'm happy cleaning windows, Take my time, I'll see you when my love grows. Baby don't let it slide, I'm a working man in my prime, cleaning windows"
Cleaning Windows by Van Morrison.

Last week I met a window cleaner. He was wiping the smears off a grimy glass door in a busy railway station. As people barged by and rushed for their departing trains, he remained calm and focused on the task at hand, exhibiting a remarkable pride in his job. I watched him for a while before summing up the courage to talk to him. "I have to do all the windows in this station once every 3 -4 weeks", he told me. "To be honest, I enjoy my job. I used to manage window cleaners, now I've gone back to just doing it myself. No stress, just pride and a real sense of achievement every day."

The circumstance of this encounter was that I was travelling with three work placement students from London en route to running a session with other students in a Pupil Referral Unit in Bedford. "Would it be OK if my students asked you some questions about your work?" I had asked. He seemed surprised that anyone would be interested in his work but agreed and before long, Lucas and Omar (two of the students with me) were deep in conversation with him. "How did you get into this work? How much do you get paid an hour? What skills do you need to do your job? What did you want to do when you left school?"

It turned out that Roger had come from a similar environment from which these students had come. He had been thrown out of school, left with no qualifications and had drifted into a range of jobs and environments (not all of them very healthy). As he shared his life story with the students I could see in their faces that something was

We transported students literally from a London PRU one on Bedford to run a workshop in another PRU in Bedford. (See reflection piece in [Huffington Post](#)). Throwing learners into the pit of learning and become “near peers in their ears” really worked. They new teachers grew in confidence, the students valued their authenticity and credibility. The anger had gone, suddenly they were engaging with other young people who knew what it felt like in deep learning.

We recognised early on that to really help students we needed to move the focus away from creating information about jobs (there is an abundance of online resources) and instead focus on demystifying what we started calling ‘Employment Intelligences ⁵’ and work behaviours that employers actually want. Flipping the students to teacher led

to the desire to capture what they were sharing on film and quickly we were co-designing Facework tools and resources using [film making](#). By flipping an earlier well known quote we encouraged the students to “Ask not what job an employer can give you, but first what precious skills and attitudes you can bring to an employer!”

This released the thinking and gradually we were able to codify 25 soft skills and employment intelligences into 5 easy to remember STEPS and found ‘sticky’ ways to bring these skills to life.

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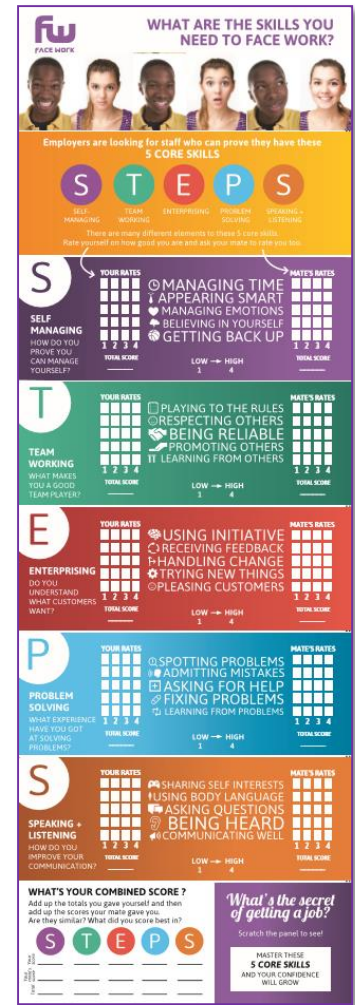
⁵ To remind us that although harder to measure and codify were nevertheless as important as academic intelligences.

And the flipping didn't stop there:



• When students told us it felt like winning the lottery if they got a job, we created the world's first [educational scratch card](#).

- When they said they didn't want teachers to score them we said, ok let's create a peer-review "rate's mates" score card and [quizzes](#)
- When students said they didn't want yet another inspirational story of success from a distant expert, we instead [filmed](#) the young people sharing their own authentic insights, experiences and tips about how to enter and navigate the world of work.
- Instead of worksheets we created [Challenges](#), instead of ignoring social media we ask students to find their favoured social media sites, videos and apps that unlock curiosity and make these soft subjects "hard" and relevant.
- Finally when students trusted us enough to voice their personal stories of hardship, early set-backs or trauma, we sought to show them how the personal and challenging experiences could be flipped to show an employer the positive qualities of perseverance, loyalty, managing and overcoming very real challenges. Indeed the phrase **'What makes you Sparkle like a diamond?'** is one of the key themes running through Facework.



FLIP YOU ALREADY SHINE BRIGHT LIKE A DIAMOND!

It can be tough when people judge you by what you do, rather than value you for who you really are, but remember diamonds are formed under pressure.

1 What have you overcome in the past which shows an employer what you are capable of in the future?

"If you are always trying to be normal you will never know how amazing you can be."
Maya Angelou

By working in 6 different PRUs with over 70 young people running intensive workshops we were struck time and time again that whilst teachers really valued the non-academic, social and emotional soft-skills needed as the foundations of

adulthood and employability today, they had little time within the curriculum to engage their students in deeper learning about employability. Good quality independent careers education, as Ofsted states, is woefully patchy and failing many students, yet at the same time there is growing recognition of the importance of helping students acquire good soft-skills under the Character education banner.

Indeed all teachers know instinctively that if we help to shape young peoples' behaviours and attitudes for the adult world of work by giving them authentic opportunities to learn how to grasp responsibility, manage emotions, handle rejection, take initiative and show respect (to name just a few), this will significantly improve the chances of a better and more secure future. However, to really put employability training on the curriculum we knew this resource had to have authority and we knew we had to bring in a partner from educational accreditation to the project.



We found such a partner in OCR who when they heard what we were pioneering, said they would work with us to map all the 25 Facework Challenges to their 'Employability', 'Life & Living' and 'Cambridge Progression in English and Maths' exams. Teachers can now use any of these resources free of charge as a stand- alone employability activity or towards a formal qualification.



And so after 2 years we have learnt, unlearnt and re-learnt, been challenged and been wrong, but today as we return to the Youth Employment Convention and launch the resource we offer others to join us and use the platform to share student's voice and co-designed employability resources. Not just another online website but rather a bespoke careers education and vocational pedagogy which helps unlock how students feel about attitudes and behaviours, gets them to Flip their thinking and re-

boot their drive. It is this that captures the richness of human behaviours and capabilities and it is this which all schools could do if employability was embedded more on the curriculum. These soft skills and attitudes may not be able to be 'taught' in the traditional way but they can be 'caught' through near-peer learning. Of course the competences that young people need to develop as they face work may be more complex to codify, categorise and assess, but surely we should be measuring what is of value, not just what is easy!

An afterthought

So we are glad we didn't give up and return the grant. It was good to be wrong because our theory of change was shaped by our practice. The missing ingredient was flipping ourselves to be the learners and getting the students to teach us about how to make employability stick and in doing so learn. Focusing on the principle of *'Teach once; Learn twice'* we found that when students were given the platform to help their peers and share their insights publically (through video and social media and indeed in the classroom), they behave differently and something extraordinary happens to that learner. They learn and believe they can! As one teacher working with us put it, "When students seeing they have the ability to relate to each other in this way it is beautiful and I don't think we make the most of that."

Just as all of refine and reflect on what we really think when we are forced to exhibit or produce and refine a piece of work for public display (take this blog for example), we are motivated to improve, and can gain the confidence to edit again and again, refine, collaborate and to reflect and take feedback and not be crushed by set-back because we know someone is listening! Not just the 'expert' but their near-peers. Indeed as we saw time and time again, it is when students are challenged by their peers they begin to flip their thinking and engage in deep reflection about their attitudes and behaviours.

It's indeed good to be right about being wrong!

