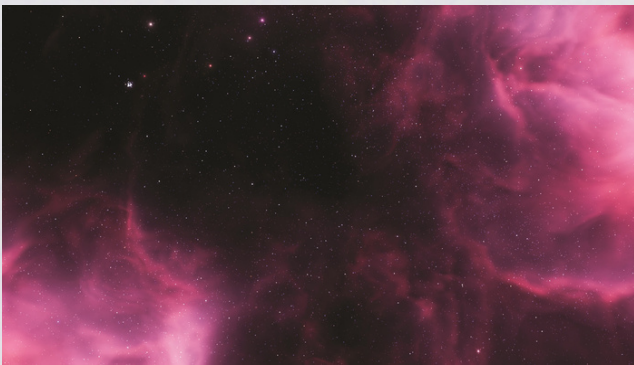


**PAM DALE & SOPHIE SMITHDALE**

# CONSTELLATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

**APCONNECT: A REFLECTION OF COURAGE, CONFIDENCE & COMMUNITY.**



**What was your main driver for joining the AP Connect Programme?**

P. Having seen Lou deliver some CPD in Leeds, I really loved her energy and passion. I wanted to join AP connect to get connected with others, to build communities and to be a better AP. I was really nervous about my new AP role and hoped it would build my confidence and skills. Delivering CPD to staff was a daunting prospect.

S. I felt there was an element of wider collaboration missing from my professional journey and I wanted to see what was happening in other colleges and talk to other people. The reference to collaboration and community in the AP Connect marketing really resonated with me and seemed to be what I was crying out for.



**What' you proudest moment since joining AP Connect?**

P. One of my proudest moments would be when I was asked to write an article for The English Association. I thought 'Wow! People are interested and want to hear my ideas and what I have to say'. I was honoured when Elizabeth rang me to ask me to contribute the newsletter. I know that if I hadn't been on AP Connect, I wouldn't have been introduced to the ideas room let alone have the confidence to go to an event like that. Magic happens when the floor powder sends you to the breakout rooms.

S. Same! Writing my first ever article for the English Association has been a real honour and a huge confidence booster, but also when I did the FAB reflection in the first module; It made me realise that I could write reflectively and in a style that was engaging and other people might enjoy reading. Being brave enough to put my thoughts and ideas out there when previously I just thought I had nothing worth saying is really powerful for me! I've found trust in myself that I have something worth saying. AP Connect has given me a safe forum to share and try out new skills which I didn't have the confidence to do before.





### Has anything changed in your life through AP Connect?

P. I feel like my life has changed; AP Connect has transformed so many things about me as a person and an AP. I have changed the way I deal with situations and how I view myself as a practitioner. I am starting to do and say things that previously would have been inconceivable. I feel as though I've come out of the shadows and stepped into the light a little. At the beginning of the course, I heard the words 'amplify' and 'agents of change' - I didn't understand the significance of the words or the message; however, through the connections I've made and by being given the opportunity to speak, (I have never had the opportunity to speak so much!) I have started to try to be an 'agent of change' and to 'amplify' my voice. I feel like I am part of the most amazing group of people.

S. Courage & self-belief - this is the biggest thing that has changed for me, APConnect has given me a different channel and outlet to share and grow and as a result has re-energised me in work. I have more courage to challenge and share at work which I didn't have before AP Connect.

Belonging and Community - I feel like people really listen to you in the APConnect Community; you get the opportunity to speak and be heard.



I have a voice and a way to amplify it. It has completely changed my direction and my life; It gives me the energy to be a brilliant teacher! The ideas room, for example, energises me, it gives me something for me and I'm always buzzing afterwards with a little spark of an idea to try at work. I feel like I'm constantly learning and growing which isn't always there in the more generic CPD delivered at work.

### An objective of AP Connect is to amplify your voice; do you think we've achieved it?

P. Definitely and in more ways than I thought possible. I had a twitter account lurking, unused and misunderstood, in my life pre-AP Connect - I opened the account because it seemed like all the 'trendy' people had a Twitter account - I had a fancy I could become trendy by osmosis.

However, I did not have a clue what to do with it or how to use it. I am now proud to say I can tweet and I have followers. I have written an article, blogs and reflections on SLACK. I now regularly attend the ideas room and Festival Friday - amplification of my voice has become a natural event and a joyous thing to do.

S. Amplifying my voice and my ideas has really changed with Twitter, the Ideas Room, SLACK and writing articles and reflections, I really feel like I'm putting myself out there. This can be a challenge within large organisations like mine with discrete teams who often work in silos making it very difficult to amplify your voice.



Speaking to people within AP Connect, it does seem to be a challenge within the larger organisations which can makes FE lecturers and Action Researchers less effective - this is something I'd really like to work on going forward.

I feel in M&E we're quite isolated and can be perceived very much as a separate entity to the college which means we have to work really hard to build the bridges across college and get transparency between teams for effective communication and collaboration.



### Has your professional identity changed over the course of the AP Connect journey?

P. Yes it has changed. At the beginning of this journey, I would have considered myself to be a good teacher, and I tried to be an innovative teacher - I felt confident in this role. However, If I am honest, I did suffer from the effects of imposter syndrome - that feeling of not quite being good enough or worrying what people thought about me. Now I can silence the voice of doubt and I am willing to take on new challenges and push myself to be a better practitioner. The fear of failure or ridicule is no longer in charge. I feel I allow myself to be okay with failures as well as the successes. I found my voice and I found my courage. I feel like the Lion in the Wizard of Oz!



Entrepreneur: I am not an entrepreneur but I feel that promoting myself and our sector is an important part of me now. My practice is no longer just contained in the four walls of my classroom. Social media platforms allow us to promote FE and all of the wonderful work that goes on in our colleges.

Manager - I now manage me. This has impacted upon who I am at work - obviously I am managed at work but there are areas now where I lead also.

Coaching and mentoring - when I first became an AP, I felt like I didn't really know how to coach/ mentor or to give support; however, once again this process has taught me that I am up to the job. I used to think I had to have all the answers. I do not. I've realised it's about helping people to come up with the solutions to their unique problems or areas of concern. The answers usually lie within. They don't need to be put in the mind from an external force.

Researcher - I've always tried to do research but it was born from a feeling of having to prove something to prove I was a good teacher. Now my research comes from a place of positivity.

S. Definitely!

At the beginning of the journey, I don't think I knew what my professional identity was. I was a frustrated lecturer / teacher, wanting to be a good researcher, definitely not an influencer or journalist and a new manager in FE. As the process has gone on I've become a much more confident teacher and I'm able to recognise the things I'm good at, being much more reflective, but much more efficiently reflective, able to focus on certain things rather than worrying about everything. I'm almost considering myself as a journalist and the same with influencer. If I think about it, I am starting to be a bit of an influencer both in and outside my organisation. I feel like I've changed in lots of areas, but now my aspirations have spiralled!







I've had a taste of being a journalist or an influencer or a mentor and now my goals have just exploded and I want to do so much more and have a clearer concept of how I want my professional identity to develop over the next 6-12 months which is really exciting and a little but daunting!



### What are your next steps?

P. The next logical step is to do Constellation C and ATS. I would also love to write more. I also want to do a Masters. I love learning. This is probably why I love teaching. We are constantly learning and evolving as practitioners. Every lesson is a new learning opportunity.

S. It's become very clear what I am passionate about and what I enjoy doing and so it's important that I put aside the time and commit to those things like writing articles. And I am desperate to do a PhD, so really look for a way to do that. I obviously also want to do constellation C and ATS next year. Watch this space!



**'HEAR US ROAR'**