

WHAT IMPACT DO PEDAGOGIES THAT ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR OWN LEARNING HAVE ON SELF- ESTEEM AND ATTAINMENT?

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What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Abstract

This research and development project expands on research conducted at a comprehensive school in South West London over the last two years. Its aim is to explore the link between self-esteem and attainment, particularly considering whether there is a link between pedagogies that offer students more control in the classroom and their levels of self-esteem and academic attainment. My previous research had highlighted the fact that students in lower sets felt that they were not a high priority for the school and as a result, they felt that their efforts and achievements did not matter as much as some of their peers.

Participants were selected using Key Stage 4 prior achievement data and their responses to Rosenberg's Self Esteem test (1965). Three students were selected to act as 'teachers' in a whole-class setting or as 'experts' in group work, taking responsibility for their learning and the instruction of others. In addition, the class was permitted to select their own groups for small-group tasks, allowing them to decide whether they worked with their friends or other classmates to complete specific tasks. Self-esteem tests were then re-administered at the end of the action research phase as well as an academic assessment to measure progress.

The action research revealed that in general, the self-esteem scores of the 'teachers' did improve, and along with the levels of some of their classmates. Academic results also improved but with much greater success than self-esteem levels, as all students showed progress when re-assessed at the end of the test phase. Again, 'teachers' showed a similar rate of progress to their classmates which suggested that while they had been empowered to a greater degree by being placed in positions of authority, they had not been unduly advantaged by this process. Students preferred student-led lessons and expert sessions to self-selected groups which some felt offered them the chance to socialise rather than learn. However, data collected did suggest that these sessions were successful and created a collaborative learning environment that was not present before the action research had taken place.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Table of contents

Abstract.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
School context and research questions	7
Hypothesis	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
What role do students' social interactions play in motivating them to learn?	11
What impact does student empowerment have on motivation?	18
Is there a link between student empowerment and increased levels of attainment?	25
Conclusions of the literature review	37
METHODOLOGY	40
Action research	40
Research methods	41
Phase 1: using existing data to select a sample	42
Phase 2: Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)	42
Phase 3: Observations and research journal	45
Phase 4: Semi-structured interviews	46
Limitations	48
Ethics	49
FINDINGS	52
Self-concept and social interaction	52
Perceptions of ability	53
Student empowerment	58
Peer teaching	59
Students as 'experts' in group work	60
Self-selected groups	61
Assessment data	62
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	63
What impact does giving students more control over their learning have on self-esteem and achievement?	63
How does 'peer teaching' and using students as 'experts' impact on the progress of both 'teacher/expert' and 'student'?	72
Do self-selected groups encourage students to engage more fully, or are they treated as opportunities to socialise?	81
CONCLUSION.....	84
What effect does self-image have on motivation?	84
What impact does increasing pupil independence have on student self-image?	85
What effect does increasing pupil independence have on attainment?	87
IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	88
REFERENCES.....	90
APPENDICES	93

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers strive to ensure that all students leave school with skills that not only reflect the academic instruction they receive, but offer them a place in society as adaptable, capable and self-assured individuals. However, research by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2015) has shown that nearly 80,000 young people in the UK suffer from severe depression. This begs the question: what impact does being at school have on students' self-esteem, and what can we do to ensure that young people leave our care feeling valued?

This research project aims to investigate whether a link exists between the control students feel they exercise over their learning and their self-esteem and attainment. My Part 2 research found that students' successes in school were intimately linked to self-image, particularly whether they felt 'good' at a subject when compared to their peers. One student commented that he was embarrassed by his English group; as a bottom set student, he felt he was 'not very good' at English and as such, he felt he was a lower priority for the school (Colley, 2014). This study aims to extend that research, identifying whether independent learning strategies that place students in positions of elevated responsibility have a positive impact on self-esteem and attainment.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

As lower-ability students are the group at most risk of not making expected levels of progress, I am keen to work with them in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the following pedagogies: peer teaching, using students as experts in the classroom and students working in self-selected groups.

Over the last academic year my school has worked hard to improve students' views of themselves as learners. Following a whole-staff training day led by Barry Hymer (Professor of Psychology in Education at the University of Cumbria), the language of Dweck's (2012) mindset research can be found in many aspects of school life. Notable examples were the assemblies delivered at the start of GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and AS (Advanced Subsidiary) courses, where students were openly encouraged to adopt a 'growth' mindset when tackling new content and complex ideas. The talks highlighted the pitfalls of viewing oneself as someone whose ability is 'fixed' and unchanging, and linked this mindset to underachievement.

While it is too soon to measure the impact of this strategy in terms of academic results, it certainly highlights the validity of self-image as an issue for schools to tackle and suggests that senior management teams in these institutions view high levels of self-esteem as vital for success. My school's approach to this matter suggests that something needs to change in the way we prepare students for exams and life after education, because it is clear that some do not think they can achieve simply because they *feel* less capable. While the academic benefits may not yet be

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

known, this approach is having some impact on how students think, as pupils often use Dweck's terminology when speaking about progress and attainment in class. For example, I have been asked whether I have a 'fixed or growth mindset' and which approach to learning I think is 'better'. Moreover, it has also created a forum and a vocabulary to help students articulate their views about themselves as learners, and Dweck's language has even made its way into my English lessons. A student once asked me whether I thought George in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* would have achieved his dreams if he had adopted a 'growth' approach to overcoming the obstacles that stood in his way.

School context and research questions

The school in which this action research was conducted is an 'Outstanding' 11-18 mixed Secondary comprehensive in South West London, and is an institution which has already invested intellectual capital in independent learning initiatives. This school sets pupils into 'ability groups' for Mathematics as soon as they arrive in year 7 (aged 11). In English, students are taught in mixed ability form groups until Year 9, when they are placed in to an Upper or Lower 'band' – classes that do group students of similar academic performance together, but cater for a wider range of achievement levels than more rigid ability sets. In Year 10, English groups are then refined into four classes determined by academic performance in Year 9; 1 being the highest ability group, and 4 being the lowest. In Mathematics, there are termly re-setting tests that allow students to move between groups – events that drive competition. In English, sets do shift according to the results of assessed tasks, but

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

few students move up or down in a school year because it is felt that a range of abilities in groups encourages and motivates students to aspire to achieve higher levels.

This academic year, a paired reading programme has been set up, linking Year 12 English Literature students to reluctant Key Stage 3 (KS3) readers. In an extension of this, Year 12 Mathematicians also work with small KS3 groups as peer mentors, teaching key Maths skills in an informal environment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What effect does self-image have on motivation?
- What impact does increasing pupil independence have on student self-image?
- What effect does increasing pupil independence have on attainment?

Hypothesis

I hypothesise that students given a position of authority during the action research phase will demonstrate a more pronounced improvement in self-esteem levels than their classmates. Given that I will be selecting to 'empower' students who display low levels of self-esteem for these roles, this is to be expected as my primary aim is to boost their self-image as learners. However, I do expect to find that the rest of the class will display improved levels of self-esteem as they begin to feel more comfortable learning from their peers and interact with them in a more natural way

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

than they would with teachers. That said, I do expect to find that it will take time for trust to develop; initially I expect to find that students “teachers” will find it difficult to be trusted and taken seriously, and that students may use group work as a chance for social interaction. However, I feel that with repeated exposure to peer teaching, peer ‘experts’ and self-selected group settings, the levels of attainment of the whole class will increase at similar rates as our English lessons should provide a forum in which any student feels able to express and communicate their ideas.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conclusions of my Part 2 research project provided me with a worthwhile investigation: which pedagogies encourage students to take ownership of their own learning and have a positive impact on self-esteem and attainment? There is a wealth of research that has been conducted on the topic of independent learning, but I have been careful to focus my reading on strategies that place students in a position of influence in the classroom. Specifically, I have focused on pedagogies that have their foundations in social interaction, as all of the students I spoke to as part of my Part 2 research mentioned the influence of their peers in shaping their perceptions of themselves. I want to find out whether these strategies of empowerment within the social hierarchy of the classroom have positive or negative influences on the academic outcomes of *both* the instructor and the instructed.

I have used the following questions to guide my reading:

- What role do students' social interactions play in motivating them to learn?
- What impact does student empowerment have on motivation?
- Is there a link between student empowerment and increased levels of attainment?

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

What role do students' social interactions play in motivating them to learn?

Self-concept and the role of social interaction

Writing in the Times Education Supplement (TES) online, Kerra Madden (2014) states that 'Stress at school is the biggest contributor to depression, self-harm and attempted suicide among young people' (Madden, 2014). In evidence, Madden references a report published by MindFull, a charity that supports young people with mental health issues. MindFull found that there was an increasing pressure on young people's mental health in developed countries, where 12 per cent of respondents to a questionnaire (aged 16-25) felt they felt as if they were a failure nearly every day when at secondary school (Madden, 2014). This has been attributed to an increase in the number of exams students sit and the pressure to achieve certain grades. Indeed, Lucie Russell (from mental health charity YoungMinds) is quoted by Madden as saying that "being at school is hard: there is a lot of testing and focus on exams. Someone who gets below a C grade can feel a bit like a failure" (Madden, 2014). As the group with which I am conducting this investigation sits firmly on the C/D borderline for both English language and English literature GCSE, this statement carries real weight as students often express their disappointment at not achieving the much-desired C grade for an assessed piece of work. While considering the impact of low-self-esteem on students' mental health is beyond the scope of this investigation, this article does raise some interesting questions that it leaves unanswered, including *how* teachers can foster a learning culture in which all

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

students feel motivated, included and valued. Indeed, in order to tackle the low-levels of self-esteem and motivation Madden describes, it must be determined what shapes student's sense of self, and the role a school can play in ensuring that all students are encouraged to see themselves in the most positive light possible.

Significantly, policy makers do recognise that self-perception and motivation are intimately linked to students' successes at school. In January 2015, the Department for Education (DfE, 2015) set up the Character Education Grant Fund to help schools ensure that young people develop a set of character traits and behaviours that they feel underpin success both in education and at work. The government's online advice suggests that these golden qualities include 'perseverance, resilience and grit', 'motivation, drive and ambition' and 'conscientiousness, curiosity and focus' (DfE, 2015). Current Education Secretary Nicky Morgan commented that the fund "is a landmark step for our education system" as it "will cement our position as a global leader in teaching character and resilience" – a very bold claim by any standards (DfE, 2015). In order to secure some of the £3.5 million of funding available for 'character education', schools have to submit proposals that demonstrate that they are 'developing the knowledge and skills of staff, trialling school- or college-based initiatives' that encourage character development, 'providing extra-curricular activities after school or college', offering peer-to-peer support and mentoring with successful students or leading professionals, and are establishing 'innovative ways to build character' in young people with 'high-risk factors, such as special educational needs or a disability, poor family functioning, maltreatment and poverty' (DfE, 2015).

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

While this seems an admirable endeavour, it is pertinent to question whether funding school-based initiatives offers a solution to the problems Madden highlights in her article. Indeed, the government's scheme seems to suggest that personality and individuality is something that can be taught or shaped by school programmes – a model that could prove highly damaging if misapplied.

Harter (2012:2) establishes that any individual's sense of self is 'clearly a social construction' as any form of socialisation 'within the crucible of interpersonal relationships' will result in both positive and negative 'self-evaluations' being established. In children, these appraisals become internalised to the point where a child's sense of identity is shaped by their interpretation of other people's views of them, a statement that closely ties her research to the concerns Madden raises in her article. These 'reflected appraisals' come to define one's sense of self and Harter asserts that young adolescents will 'own these evaluations as his/her own judgements' about themselves (Harter, 2012:12). This is, of course, fraught with danger as the judgements a young person consumes in this way will vary depending on a wide range of contextual factors. For Harter, a child's self-image is highly dependent upon social interactions with significant others such as parental figures, teachers and friends. Approval, in the form of praise, is internalised as acceptance and children will develop feeling accepted and comfortable in their own skins. However, in an environment where caregivers are absent or *lack* in responsiveness and encouragement, children will construct a very different image of themselves. Indeed, 'socialising agents who are rejecting punitive or neglectful' will foster a very

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

negative sense of self within a child, a damaging experience that will have long lasting effects into adolescence and beyond (Harter, 2012:12).

However, Harter's theory of social interdependence does not reflect how psychologists have always viewed motivation and achievement in the classroom. Influential behaviourists such as BF Skinner (1968) suggested that an individualist approach to education was necessary for students to succeed. He recommended that individualistic procedures such as programmed learning should be implemented, a methodology in which information is broken down into small sections and pupils test themselves on what they have learned. For Skinner and his contemporaries, students should learn and progress through the curriculum at their own pace, independent of their classmates – an outdated and goal-oriented approach to teaching that goes against the social interaction Harter cites as so vital for success. Skinner's individualist approach places all responsibility for learning with the student, which also means that any successes or failures that they encounter are theirs alone and cannot be shared or attributed to the influence of others. This seems a damaging framework for education, which does not make any allowance for shaping a student's sense of self-worth as part of their school experience.

In direct contrast to Skinner, Harter goes on to stress the importance of the school community on individual success, suggesting that 'school[s] becom[e] a microcosm of society' as they shape whether students have a positive or negative view of themselves. (Harter, 2012:12). Therefore, it is vital that children develop 'self-

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

enhancing strategies' to deal with others' judgements – mechanisms they carry with them through adolescence into adulthood (Harter, 2012:2).

If what Harter suggests is correct and children arrive at school with self-image formation already under way, how does school contribute to a positive or negative outcome from this process? Like Harter, Covington (2000) identifies that a students' view of themselves is shaped by the communication they have with those around them and – more specifically - the place they establish within the hierarchy of school society. Covington explores the link between self-worth and ability and ascribes that for the majority of students, these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. For Covington, students' self-concepts are tied to students' achievements in the classroom and the role they play in the social world of school.

Covington also suggests that the need to achieve a sense of belonging, integrity and respect amongst peers is a key motivating factor as it offers a more lasting marker of success than academic goals. Often, the level to which students achieve success in these areas determines the image they have of themselves (Covington, 2000:178). He suggests that the 'pursuit of social goals can help organise, direct and empower individuals to achieve more fully', and achieving 'for the sake of the group' is a documented phenomenon as it fosters a desire for 'cooperative learning' that is far more productive than going it alone (Covington, 2000:178). In addition to offering personal academic benefits, these 'prosocial' goals foster a sense of moral character, wellbeing and social responsibility in students that they value as highly as academic

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

recognition, something Covington asserts is recognised widely in American schools and is something other education systems could seek to emulate (Covington, 2000:178).

Moreover, students of all ages value the pursuit of social goals such as making friends and being responsible to others as a high priority, and often rank this aim as being more important than academic goals as it plays such an integral part in their view of themselves. Being well-liked and respected by their peers is something to be prized and – perhaps most significantly in terms of my research - being cooperative, compliant, and willing to share is not only highly valued within the social group of the classroom, but is also ‘positively associated with academic success’ (Covington, 2000:178). Specifically commenting on peer tutoring, Covington suggests that this method (that usually uses older students to tutor younger children) is not only a valued expression of ‘prosocial cooperation’, but the ‘benefits to the tutor of consolidating his/her own understanding of the subject matter in the process also bode well for subsequent achievement’ (Covington, 2000:179).

However, most importantly, Covington suggests that the current level of understanding of the role of social goals and how they fit into the ‘larger dynamics of classroom achievement’ is not nearly as comprehensive as the research compiled to consider the influence of academic goals on motivation (Covington, 2000:178). That said, Arnot and Reay (2004) *do* consider the role socialisation plays in determining an adolescent’s sense of self, focusing specifically on the influence of school dynamics

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

on self-image. They add depth to both Harter and Covington's general suggestions and seek to identify *how* school impacts on a child's identity, conducting research into the extent to which students feel confident, included and in control of their learning – and the impact this has on academic outcomes. For Arnot and Reay, a classroom is so much more than a forum for instruction. They found that by asking primary school students about the 'social conditions of their learning' - the relationships they build with both peers *and* teachers – it becomes clear that the 'social world of the classroom' plays an instrumental role in students' learning and the value they come to place on education (Arnot and Reay, 2004:44). This mirrors the comments of the Year 8 students I spoke to in my Part 2 project, who commented that school was about interacting with peer groups and acquiring new skills, rather than simply meeting target grades (Colley, 2014).

The students Arnot and Reay studied felt that their ability sets impacted greatly on motivation and self-esteem. Students in the lowest set for English did not see the point in trying to achieve something they felt was beyond their capabilities (Arnot and Reay, 2004:48). They also found that teachers of these groups felt that students talking to each other displayed a lack of concentration, but that students felt that being allowed to working with peers and having the freedom to talk to them enabled them to receive informal feedback and 'cover up the effects of poor performance' (Arnot and Reay, 2004:51). I am keen to extend this research by considering the impact of using students as teachers or experts in class on motivation and achievement of both 'teacher' and 'pupil'.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

What impact does student empowerment have on motivation?

Perceptions of ability

Dweck (2012:614) writes that ‘debates about human nature often revolve around what is built in’ and how that determines who we become. However, she argues that the concept we really should be considering is what is *not built in*, for the ‘hallmark of human nature is each person’s great capacity to adapt, to change, and to grow’ – something Harter also identifies as important to the development of self-image (Dweck, 2012:614). For Dweck, it does not matter what people are born with, it matters more what people’s *mindsets* are; whether people believe their qualities are fixed by nature (what she calls ‘entity theory’ or ‘fixed mindset’), or whether they believe the qualities that make them who they are can be developed by nurturing them, and by their own persistent efforts (‘incremental theory’ or ‘growth mindset’) (Dweck, 2012:614). In a school setting, Dweck’s mindset theory is often applied to the idea of ability or intelligence; whether somebody is born more intelligent, or whether ability is acquired through practise and hard work.

However, O’Brien (2015) argues that a ‘too-simplistic interpretation of [Dweck’s] ‘growth’ and ‘fixed’ narrative is a dangerous fairy tale that risks leaving some students unhappy ever after’. Writing for the TES online, he suggests that ‘illusion can become a solution’, and that a hypothesis can become ‘the only approach in town’ – something he feels is certainly true with how schools like mine have applied Dweck’s work (O’Brien, 2015). Damningly, O’Brien suggests that at the core of the

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

research lies a limiting 'binary world more reminiscent of fairy tales than reality', and if schools were to apply Dweck's as gospel truth, the results could be highly damaging both academically and psychologically.

Significantly, O'Brien reinforces the concept that learning is a 'risky business' that presents us with the 'possibility of emotional, as well as cognitive, overload' (O'Brien, 2015). Like Dweck, he agrees that social factors have an indelible imprint on cognitive and emotional processes, but he also points out that 'if I teach, it doesn't always mean that you learn. Learning is complex' (O'Brien, 2015). Disparagingly, O'Brien suggests that in Dweck's "'A or B" environment' of 'growth' or 'fixed' mindset, 'there is no room for complexity, diversity or ambiguity', for she – like all good fairy story writers - has created a 'binary world where people are beautiful or ugly, intelligent or stupid, good or bad, heroes or villains' (O'Brien, 2015).

As a final warning, O'Brien assert that teachers must 'guard against "A or B" thinking creeping into schools', because it move us away from accepting diversity, 'working with unpredictability and developing their own professional artistry' (O'Brien, 2015). While he *does* suggest that Dweck's work raises important questions about whether students' self-perceptions can become barriers to achievement and people's capacity to modify their psychology, it is vital that schools understand that 'they are just questions – they are not pedagogic solutions' (O'Brien, 2015). Like O'Brien, I also feel that trends in education drive teachers to label students with little regard for individuality (as auditory, visual or kinaesthetic learners, for instance). However,

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

while I agree with his criticism of the binary world Dweck creates and the oversimplification of her research to provide schools with a 'one-size-fits-all' key to success, to call it a 'fairy tale' belittles the valuable questions Dweck *does* raise. By ignoring the impact of mindset on attainment, we risk creating an environment in which students become over-worked and feel undervalued, a proposition that fills me with dread.

However, while O'Brien's claims do sound like common sense, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) chief executive Sir Kevan Collins claims that there is evidence for a wide-spread teaching of mindset theory in secondary schools. In order to test Dweck's findings, the EEF (2015) and Portsmouth University carried out a randomised controlled trial of their *Changing Mindsets* programme (developed directly from Dweck's ideas), to find out whether developing a growth mindset could change students' attainment levels. Discounting the impact of students' social interactions on their learning, the EEF programme only tested two methods of intervention which limits the validity of their findings. The first was a series of seminars at the University of Portsmouth through which KS2 pupils were taught about the 'malleability of intelligence' and were encouraged to adopt a 'growth' mindset (EEF, 2015:2). The second phase 'trained' teachers to use advocated 'approaches to developing and reinforcing growth mindsets through their teaching' (EEF, 2015:3). The EEF found that those students who had attended workshops had made (on average) two additional months' progress in English and Maths – results that are not 'statistically significant', according to the EEF (EEF, 2015:4). Moreover,

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

pupils whose teachers were instructed in mindset theory made 'no additional progress in maths compared with pupils', so the EEF's claim that 'teaching pupils about growth mindsets directly is likely to be more effective in increasing attainment than training their teachers' seems flimsy at best (EEF, 2015:4). Troublingly, the resources developed as a result of these workshops are now for sale to schools across the country as a solution to every school's 'mindset' problems - perhaps suggesting that their research was more about commercial gain than contributing to academic debate.

Callan et al. (2014) further both Dweck's binary mindset framework and Arnot and Reay's research into perceptions of ability, as they suggest that people's perceptions of self-worth (and, in consequence, their ability to succeed) are tied to – and justified by – their responses to events in everyday life. Their research suggests that if people experience misfortune, they often feel they *deserve* it because of past experiences (as opposed to a fixed mindset) and therefore display lower levels of self-esteem, even if events happened completely by chance. Callan et al. found that experiences perceived to be of good or bad fortune (good or bad 'breaks') - however accidental they might seem - 'can lead to corresponding changes in self-evaluations' due to the application of the learned 'scripts' from childhood Harter cites as so identity shaping (Callan et al., 2014:143). Their research found that people often believe that they get what they deserve - so this can lead people to 'justify their current negative experiences by devaluing, or finding fault, in themselves' (Callan et al., 2014:143). While this is not research conducted into the thoughts and experiences of school-age

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

children specifically, clearly these findings add a new dimension to Madden's damning assertions about self-esteem in her article for the TES, as the students she identifies as being so unable to cope with perceived failure perhaps feel they don't *deserve* to achieve as they are less worthy of success than their peers.

In evidence, Callan et al. conducted a 'personality test' with 62 people chosen at random from the University of Essex campus (a sample which – importantly for my study – included students just past school leaving age). Participants were given a box with a label they could peel off to reveal whether or not they had won £3. For the researchers, this represented a good or bad 'break'. After indicating whether or not they had won this blind lottery, participants completed a variant of Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem test which featured statements designed to measure participants' beliefs about deserving bad outcomes. Significantly, participants who experienced a 'bad break' viewed themselves more negatively, and believed they were more deserving of any future bad outcomes (Callan et al., 2014:145). Moreover, when asked to complete an ability test, those participants who had 'lost' the lottery 'self-handicapped' their performance by stating that they were stressed, over-worked or had not had much sleep, factors they felt would have a negative impact on their results. For Callan et al., this identified that an individual's view of their ability to succeed comes from past successes and failures, so was not the result of the fixed mind-set Dweck would suggest.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Student empowerment

De Charms' research (1976) provides insight into motivation in an educational setting, but – perhaps most significantly for my study – he linked increased levels of engagement to responsibility and independence. De Charms (quoted in Daniels and Edwards, 2004:96) ascribed that as soon as students become 'origins' rather than 'pawns' in the learning process, they engage to a higher degree with what they are learning and display increased levels of motivation. This leads to improved academic outcomes as students absorb far more of the information they encounter.

Like De Charms, Lewis et al. (1995) also make the link between teaching methodologies and self-esteem and attainment. They suggest that 'well-meaning efforts to boost academic achievement can actually damage children's social and ethical development' (Lewis et al., 1995:548). Writing about elementary education in the US, Lewis et al. outline the success of the Child Development Program, as the scheme 'supports educators as they rethink every facet of elementary school life', including how and what students learn, what motivates them, and what fosters bonds with both adults and peers (Lewis et al., 1995:548). They too ascribe that school children must be 'treated as seekers of meaning', as they are an integral part of the learning process, rather than a receptacle for information (an 'origin' rather than a 'pawn', to apply De Charms' framework) (Lewis et al., 1995:549). Moreover, they also advocate changing the role of the teacher as well as the learner. They suggest that an 'individual who simply presents correct information is unlikely to reach [a] child' as a 'teacher is not so much a purveyor of knowledge as an architect

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

and catalyst who helps students persistently engage important concepts' (Lewis et al., 1995:550). Linking their work to both Dweck and Covington, Lewis et al. deride the short-term impact of extrinsic rewards such as prizes, merits and sweets. They suggest that children motivated by 'the intrinsic challenge and interest of subject matter or by the desire to contribute something to the world' are more likely to display 'motivation [that] endures long after the children motivated by prizes and praise have given up' (Lewis et al., 1995:550).

Clearly building on Dweck's mindset research and the link between motivation and attainment Covington identifies, Claxton's (2011) work (like the work of Lewis et al.) states that schools must foster a culture in which young people become better, more independent learners, and that the type of learners we need in the modern world will be created as a result of Building Learning Power (BLP). The semantic choice of 'power' here is significant for my research, as Claxton states that successful learners take ownership of their learning and are nurtured in such a way that those skills become transferrable to real-world situations. For Claxton, methodologies that encourage growth help learners prepare for the learning they will undertake beyond the classroom, as well as in academic study. In order for BLP to be successful, the culture of the classroom is paramount, and the concepts of community and collaboration should underpin all academic endeavour. Extending Dweck's theory on mindset, Claxton describes the brain as a muscle to be exercised, a process through which intelligence increases. He states that making teachers aware of this will shift the 'axis' of education towards the student (Claxton, 2011:111).

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Is there a link between student empowerment and increased levels of attainment?

Peer teaching

As a teaching methodology, peer teaching offers the opportunity to foster the collaboration and community Claxton and Covington suggest is vital for success. In practical terms, 'peer teaching' in UK Secondary schools is often focused on older students playing the role of 'mentor' to younger students; someone who will listen to them read, correct their mistakes or offer them guidance as they head towards exams. However, this seems a limited application of this wide-reaching pedagogy, as my reading shows links between successfully implemented peer teaching programmes and social, emotional and academic progress for both 'learner' and 'teacher'. For this reason, it is important to ask: what benefit does holding an authoritative position in the classroom have on motivation and self-esteem?

Peer teaching and motivation

Falchikov and Blythman (2003) define a peer as 'someone of the same social standing', while a peer group 'consists of the same status with whom one interacts' (Falchikov and Blythman, 2003:1). Importantly, they note that the Free University of Berlin first introduced teaching by peers in 1951 and in this case, 'peer' meant 'students at a similar age and educational level' (Falchikov and Blythman, 2003:1). However, within education the term has come to define a wide range of different relationships. Early forms of peer tutoring involved children playing the part of surrogate teachers in order to pass on knowledge or instruct – they would learn by

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

helping others to learn. However, the definition is now more flexible, as it takes many forms: there might be a difference in the knowledge between the two parties, an age differential or even an education stage gap. Importantly for my research, peer teaching can also be a learning situation in which 'equal status students work in reciprocal didactic relationships', taking turns to be teacher and student (Falchikov and Blythman, 2003:4). Moreover, Falchikov and Blythman also state the importance of trust between tutee and teacher, something I have hypothesised to be crucial. They state that the student acting as 'teacher' must have credibility with his tutees, something that might stem from his / her academic successes in the past. Moreover, the tutee must also feel able to interact and ask questions without fear of 'ridicule or reprisal', so a teacher must be someone who already holds a position of respect, something Covington also suggests is key (Falchikov and Blythman, 2003:5).

Research by Miller et al. (2010) develops this school of thought, and makes clear links between peer teaching and self-esteem. Their 15-week paired reading programme was designed to answer the question: "does improved self-esteem reflect enhanced beliefs about competence, or greater feelings of worth, or some combination of these?", and they felt that the best way to approach this question was to encourage students to work together on a shared task they found difficult (Miller et al., 2010:427). Although carried out with primary aged children, the study's findings are useful in terms of my investigation because they identified that in addition to the 'learning gains' of peer tutoring programmes like paired reading, a range of 'affective gains' can also be identified, specifically in relation to 'self-

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

concept, autonomy, and aspects of conduct' – something both Covington and Claxton also identify as intimately linked (Miller et al., 2010:418). Perhaps even more interestingly, Miller et al. tested the effectiveness of both same-age peer and cross-age peer pairings in order to establish which was most effective. They identified that both experimental conditions contributed to gains in levels of self-esteem and these 'reflected enhanced beliefs about self-competence' (Miller et al., 2010:425). However, the most noticeable gains in self-worth were amongst those taking part in the cross-age study, something Miller et al. attribute to the fact that 'of helping the young' is a tradition that is 'firmly embedded and respected in most cultures' (Miller et al., 2010:428). However, this 'affective gain' is something that the researchers are concerned will disappear as the message about 'helping the weaker members of society may be diluted' by a focus on 'potential gain for all' – a clear link to the concerns Madden expresses (Miller et al., 2010:428).

Unlike previous investigations that had based their reporting of gains in self-esteem on teacher observations, Miller et al.'s research (like Callan et al.'s study) used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale to assess changes in the participants' self-image. This is because they found it difficult to determine the extent to which 'a child's views of his or her worth and competence' could be captured by 'self-reporting' data gathering methods such as teacher observation, as these did not offer an unbiased, first-hand account of students' views (Miller et al., 2010:41). This is a methodology I am keen to employ as it was created to measure self-esteem levels in Secondary age students, and offers a standardised representation of students' perceptions of their

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

self-esteem both before and after each phase of research. I am also driven to identify whether Miller et al.'s findings about the disappointing levels of improvement in self-esteem amongst same-age peer teaching groups stand up in the secondary classroom, as my research will use same-age 'tutors' and 'tutees' to explore the impact of empowering students on self-esteem.

The 'Gross Anatomy' course at the St. Louis University School of Medicine was designed to encourage peer teaching. Not only did Yeager and Young (1992:304) find that the course was liked by the students who followed it, but that it was 'taught with a minimal number of faculty, utilize[d] only half the cadavers of a traditional course, ha[d] less contact hours than the national average'. However, despite these possible negatives, students did better than the national average in the anatomy section of the National Board Examination, which begs the question: what was it about peer teaching that drove them to learn so successfully?

After completing the course, students were asked to feed back on their experiences, and rated the teaching of their peers almost as highly as the teaching of professors of the University. Moreover, Yeager and Young found that students learned as much from their peers as from staff teaching and learned *most* from sessions they themselves had taught – a benefit to the tutor that is not always identified in similar studies. Moreover, they suggest that students taking part in programmes such as this would be prepared, 'continual and independent self-learners throughout their professional life' well beyond the confines of the laboratory, something every school

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

wants for their students and underlines the validity of Claxton's work on BLP (Yeager and Young, 1992:310).

'Peer educators'

Outside academic circles, same-age peer-teaching is more common. UNICEF (2012) is just one charitable organisation to use same-age peer teaching as a means of affecting change in the community. UNICEF sees peer teaching as 'life skills education', has been used in a wide range of global contexts, including - but not limited to – schools as the organisation notes successes with street youth, factory workers, sex workers, drug users and prisoners across the World (UNICEF, 2012). Recognising the power of peer influence, they state that peer educators (whatever their contexts) 'can communicate and understand in a way that the best-intentioned adults can't, and can serve as role models for change' (UNICEF, 2012). UNICEF has found that 'young people appreciate and are influenced in positive ways by a peer-led intervention', as long as it is carefully designed (UNICEF, 2012). Many volunteers have found 'serving' as a 'peer educator' a challenging and rewarding experience which enabled them to 'gain the respect of their peers, and improve their own knowledge base and skills'. In many situations, UNICEF has found that peer educators have gone on to change their own behaviours following their time on the programme (UNICEF, 2012).

Interestingly, Education Scotland (2015) also adopts the term 'Peer Education' rather than 'Peer Teaching' for its schools-based initiatives that place students in the

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

position of teachers in classrooms, a semantic difference that seems to place emphasis on the development of *both* parties rather than describing the dictation of knowledge. Reinforcing the social significance of placing students in positions of authority in the classroom, the organisation affirms that 'that peers can be a trusted and credible source of information', and that this understanding develops trust in what students have to say to each other outside of 'teaching' situations (Education Scotland, 2015). The organisation states that peer education as part of the curriculum has the ability to help 'young people become active players in the educational process rather than passive recipients of a set message' – a message that is reminiscent of both De Charms and Yeager and Young's research (Education Scotland, 2015).

In this vein, in 2014, EEF and Sutton Trust (2014) conducted research into peer tutoring and its impact on reading levels in Secondary schools. Building on a randomised control carried out in Scottish Primary schools, the group implemented a paired reading programme throughout North Tyneside. As part of the scheme, Year 9 students worked with Year 7s of a similar ability for three 30 minute periods every week, listening to them read, correcting mistakes and taking part in structured discussions (EEF and Sutton Trust, 2014). The organisations found that both pupils made gains academically, but tutoring that crosses age ranges appeared to offer more benefit for tutor than the tutee, something that certainly supports Covington's research, but goes against UNICEF's findings. Most significantly, the data collected by EEF and the Sutton Trust showed that during cross-age peer tutoring sessions, lowest

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

attaining pairs made the most progress over the course of the trial, a finding highly significant for my research as I will be working with low ability students.

The influence of self-selected groups

As well increasing students' autonomy through peer teaching activities, I am also keen to explore the impact of allowing students to self-select collaborators for group work on self-esteem and attainment. Normally, this is something I would decide as class teacher, basing my decisions on previous performances in such tasks and current attainment data. However, during my Part 2 research, students stressed the importance of being able to work with collaborators of their choosing because it allowed them to make the most of their strengths and hide weaknesses. For this reason, I am keen to understand the wider-reaching impact of empowering students in this way.

Research suggests that grouping students by ability (whether that is a whole year group, or just a few students) often increases the gaps between the achievements of high and low ability students (Linchevski and Kutscher, 1998). Over the course of two studies, Linchevski and Kutscher found that outcomes for students considered to be sitting on a 'cut-off' point for a school were often determined by whether they had been assigned to a low or high achieving set. However, when students were taught mixed ability groups, mid- and low-performing students (like the participants in my investigation) often achieved higher levels than those of the same ability taught in ability-determined classes.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

In agreement with Linchevski and Kutscher, Boaler (2005) found that mixed ability groups provide a motivating and supportive working environment for young people. Grouping by ability separates students from peers who would stimulate them, while placing students in low-ability groups taught by less-experienced teachers who set less-challenging work simply reinforces a perception of lower worth to the institution (Boaler, 2005:125). For Gillborn and Youdell (2000), schools now trade as part of an A-C economy; students are valued more highly if they are likely to achieve a C or above at GCSE as they secure their school a higher standing in league tables. For Boaler, Covington and Gillborn and Youdell, setting creates an environment where low self-worth is the norm, and where failure is often expected by students, which clearly reinforces Callan et al.'s good and bad 'breaks' theory.

Most significantly, Boaler identifies that students believe (and are often taught) that they are either clever or not, and that this is a status they cannot change, something that ties Boaler's research to Dweck. Grouping by ability reinforces this view, whereas mixed ability grouping allows students to see that hard work can have positive outcomes, regardless of previous levels of achievement.

However, while useful in their views to motivation and perceptions of ability, the work of both Linchevski and Kutscher and Boaler mainly considers large-scale groups such as whole classes, rather than smaller, intra-class group work, something I want to explore more closely. I am keen to identify whether the trends they note for

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

improved self-concept, motivation and attainment are also evident in self-selected, mixed ability groups.

Mitchell et al (2004:21) state that most cooperative learning models 'call for teachers to create groups and select members according to criteria that maximize diversity of learning styles, gender, race, culture, achievement, and other relevant qualities' as this facilitates the 'mixed ability' learning that Linchevski and Kutscher and Boaler cite as so successful. They suggest that 'heterogeneous groupings' are recommended by educational researchers because they 'encourage the acceptance of diverse styles and points of view' and 'produce benefits in socioemotional domains' (Mitchell et al, 2004:21).

However, teacher-selected groups are fraught with problems. As well increasing social friction, research has shown that minority students often feel isolated which has a marked impact on both self-esteem and attainment (Mitchell et al, 2004:20-21). Additionally, they also claim that female students are more likely to drop out of a group task if they are the only female in a group – a damaging finding that leads to underachievement and disengagement. This is certainly a consideration for my investigation, as the class with which I am completing this study contains three girls. I have often split them up during group work to ensure that the boys are working productively, but perhaps I have been viewing the girls as a behaviour management tool instead of a voice to be heard by others. Mitchell et al make the case for 'several women or people of color within cooperative learning groups' in order to 'decrease

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

isolation and "spotlighting" of their differentness', factors I will be sure to consider throughout my investigation (Mitchell et al, 2004:21).

Koutrouba et al. (2012) conducted a questionnaire-based study into cooperative learning and group work, collating the views of 428 Greek students (aged 13-18) in 30 Secondary schools in Athens. Just under half of all returned questionnaires stated that students wanted to work with people they knew well in order to feel accepted by group members – and that this was a motivating factor for them completing work successfully (Koutrouba et al., 2012:249). 70.8% of respondents felt they 'preferred group composition to be chosen by the group', and 66.1% felt very strongly that each member's role should be chosen by the group rather than the teacher (Koutrouba et al., 2012:250). Significantly, the research also identified that they wanted to be assigned defined tasks where individual performance was 'regarded as having a determinative impact on group achievement' to avoid group members coasting and for successes to go unrecognised (Koutrouba et al., 2012:251).

Mitchell et al (2014) also acknowledge that there are benefits to students working in self-selected groups, stating that students who know each other 'tend to benefit most from cooperative learning groups, and tend to display more autonomy in subsequent groups' (Mitchell et al, 2004:21). However, they also highlight the negative reality that goes along with peer-selected groups, as students 'often create groupings that promote or reinforce status hierarchies' (Mitchell et al, 2004:21). For girls, these groupings are based on social successes or beauty, while boys tend to

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

think about athletic prowess and physical toughness – ‘all of which have little to do with academic achievement’ (Mitchell et al, 2004:21). While the experience may be positive and motivating for some, there are students for whom this experience is highly damaging, particularly individuals who do not conform to the hierarchy established by the most popular members of the class. For Mitchell et al., this shows a negative impact on self-esteem and attainment, once again reflecting the intimate link between both concepts.

That said, Mitchell et al.’s research does offer a deeper insight into why students feel more comfortable working with students they know well. Responses to questionnaires sent to secondary-age students in the US showed the desire to choose groups was centered on the students' desire for control and responsibility – a finding vitally important for my study, as I am interested in the link between empowerment and self-esteem. Tellingly, students saw themselves as better judges of a “good” group member’ to work with than the class teacher, as they could choose colleagues based on an evaluation of performances across the school (Mitchell et al, 2004:26). Students also expressed the need to control how grades were awarded, as they did not want students who coasted in a productive group to achieve the same grade as those who worked hard for it, so choosing their own group reflected their understanding of how best to achieve success. Moreover, the responses also showed a desire for autonomy, claiming that choosing their own group in class was a responsibility that students enjoyed, rather than offering them a chance to socialise and rebel. One student also commented that “marks aren't

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

always the best way to choose groups. Grades don't tell you how well people will work together", a damning comment that affirms Arnot and Reay's finding that peers are a valuable support mechanism rather than a distraction (Mitchell et al, 2004:25).

Johnson and Johnson (2009:367) establish that regardless of group size, instilling in students the idea that that that their individual performance affects the success of the group 'seems to create responsibility forces that increase one's efforts' – a concept they call 'positive interdependence' and links their research to Covington and Claxton. Indeed, 'interpersonal interaction is insufficient to increase productivity', but when 'positive interdependence' is evident in group work, 'responsibility forces' encourage each student to pull their weight (Johnson and Johnson, 2009:367). However, Johnson and Johnson also noted that 'social loafing' also increases as the size of the group increases, so the smaller the group, the greater the individual accountability.

Importantly for my study, Johnson and Johnson also discuss the role of 'promotive interaction' in group work – a situation in which a student takes some measure of responsibility and accountability for the success of their group. In this role, a student assumes responsibility for processing information for the group, providing help and assistance, motivating the group by 'advocating exerting effort', challenging reasoning and conclusions to promote higher order thinking and feedback in order to improve performance (Johnson and Johnson, 2009:368-9). Significantly, Johnson and Johnson found that the 'expression of respect toward a group member by group

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

leaders tend[ed] to increase the group member's self-esteem', and the 'expression of respect among group members tend[ed] to increase members' efforts to achieve group goals' because of an increase in the belief that they are valued as group members (Johnson and Johnson, 2009:369). They also found that successful group work tended 'to be related to beliefs that one is intrinsically worthwhile, others see one in positive ways, one's attributes compare favorably with those of one's peers' – all of which suggest that 'one is a capable, competent, and successful person (Johnson and Johnson, 2009:372).

Conclusions of the literature review

What shapes what a student's self-image and what impact does this have on self-esteem and attainment? It is clear that students internalise the thoughts of others, and that interactions both in the classroom and in social groups shape how they see themselves. For some students, ability is something unchangeable, determined by birth or even by the class in which they find themselves. For others, intelligence is incremental and is the product of persistence, hard work, and interaction with key members of school society.

Seeing oneself as valuable to the school community is vital for increased levels of self-worth and academic progress. Teaching methodologies that encourage students to take a position of authority – such as peer teaching and using students as experts

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

– provide opportunities for students to shape their education. ‘Prosocial’ goals such as being respected are often seen as being as important as academic achievement, and the link between the two sets of values cannot be ignored. Shaping meaningful interaction by placing students in positions of responsibility for the education or betterment of others benefits both ‘teacher’ and ‘student’, and the evidence for this stretches across the education spectrum from primary school to University. Students’ ability to fulfil their position of responsibility successfully contributes to their self-worth and helps them retain vital information.

Finally, the groups in which students work influence both self-esteem and academic outcome. While theorists point to the value of placing students in teacher-selected groups that reflect the diversity of the classroom, students can find the experience damaging and isolating, especially those on an academic ‘cut-off’ point (like the C/D borderline). Although having students work in mixed ability groups allows every student the opportunity to learn from others, offering students the choice of who they work with is empowering and affords them greater control over the learning process – a choice they value, and will respect if given a clear framework for completing tasks successfully.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

The review of literature I have conducted has enabled me to focus my investigation on the following questions:

- What impact does giving students more control over their learning have on self-esteem and achievement?
- How do peer teaching and using students as experts impact on the progress of both 'teacher/expert' and 'student'?
- Do self-selected groups encourage students to engage more fully, or are they treated as opportunities to socialise?

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

METHODOLOGY

Action research

Action research is the ‘collaborative planning’ and ‘carrying out the evaluation of a particular intervention which has an identifiable focus and purpose’, but does not ‘predetermine outcomes or discard those that are unexpected’ (Armstrong and Moore, 2006:2). For McAteer (2013:8), action research is ‘not only the critical reflection on practice and theory–practice conversation’, but is also an ‘ongoing and evolving action as part of that process’. She suggests that in effective action research, there is ‘a clear and explicit link’ between research and teaching practice (McAteer, 2013:10)

Each action research cycle is made up of four stages: reflecting on the issues to be investigated, planning interventions, acting on planning and observing the outcome (Cohen et al., 2011). After another period of reflection, the cycle may begin again. In this way, action research is an invaluable research tool for educational practitioners as it allows teachers to trial strategies and evaluate their usefulness in real time. Specifically, action research affords teachers the opportunity to adapt intervention methods as a cycle develops. This is in contrast to investigations with control groups, which would force researchers to stick to prescribed methods in order to ensure valid results.

My action research project was made up of a short three-week pilot phase and a main action research cycle. The pilot phase allowed me to adapt pedagogies to be

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

taken through to the main cycle, and discard those that were a barrier to students' learning. During the pilot phase, students enjoyed working as teachers, experts and in self-selected groups, but participants found peer marking given to 'teachers' very difficult. Students found decoding mark schemes very difficult and damaging to their self-image. This was a literacy issue that was difficult to overcome (even with 'student-friendly' mark schemes), so after discussion with my collaborators, I removed peer marking from the main research cycle.

The disadvantage of action research is that it is not repeatable, because each process is so tied to the context of the sample group it would near-impossible to re-create the same set of circumstances again. While this might seem to cast doubt on any conclusions drawn, as long as data is interpreted in context, action research can prove highly beneficial (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, data can also be qualified by using additional research methods, such as surveys, interviews and observations which would all add extra dimensions to raw data generated by the action research process. I discussed all findings with my collaborators to ensure a valid and unbiased interpretation of data.

Research methods

My collaborative action research project has used a mixed-methods approach to evaluating the effectiveness of the student-empowering pedagogies. In particular, I have scrutinised existing data records to select a sample and measure academic

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

progress, analysed responses to Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and conducted semi-structured interviews with participants.

Phase 1: using existing data to select a sample

During the academic year 2013-14, my school introduced the IGCSE (International GCSE) qualification for students studying English language in Year 11, a tierless exam that allowed lower-ability students to surpass the C-grade ceiling placed upon them by traditional foundation-tier papers. During my Part 2 investigation, the Year 11 students interviewed enjoyed the freedom this new qualification gave them, as it did not place a limit on their achievements. Many students went on to exceed the C grade they were targeted.

The school's 2014 results data (Appendix A) shows that 79% of 2014's Year 11 cohort achieved Cs or higher in English, an improvement on previous years. As the positive impact of the IGCSE curriculum could not be ignored, I targeted students who will be on the C/D borderline when they receive results in August 2016 and decided to conduct my action research with a set 4 (of 4) Year 10 group.

Phase 2: Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

Having selected the target class, I needed to measure students' self-esteem in order to select three students who demonstrated low levels of self-worth to make up the sample for the main action research phase. These students would take a more active role in the student-led pedagogies I had selected to test; they would work as whole-

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

class teachers delivering segments of lessons to the group, act as 'experts' in class and – along with the rest of the class – would work in groups of their own choosing. The whole class completed the survey at the start and end of the research phase in order to assess shifts in self-esteem as a result of the interventions put in place. Although I was keen to measure the specific impact on the three 'teachers', the responses of the rest of the class would be as vital as they would allow me to measure the impact of student-led pedagogies on whole-class self-image.

Rosenberg (1965) developed his scale to measure adolescent self-esteem amongst 5,024 randomly selected High School Juniors and Seniors from schools in New York State. A Linkert scale with statements responded to on a four point scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree), the RSE asks students to reflect on their place in the community. Heatherton and Wyland (2003:225) state that 'RSE is used most widely in psychological is the most widely used measure of global self-esteem', and was used in 25% of published self-esteem studies before 1991. However, they do note some potential problems with the scale, as the statements to which students respond are either positively or negatively weighted in their wording. They identified that 'those questions that were worded in a negative direction loaded on the "negative" factor' and those worded in a positive manner 'loaded most heavily on the "positive" factor' which suggests that some participants could be influenced by the wording of each statement (Heatherton and Wyland, 2003:226).

However, having sought the advice of a child psychologist, it was determined that

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Rosenberg's scale was the most appropriate, not least because the wording of each statement was simple and clear to facilitate truthful responses from young people, especially those with low literacy levels such as those in my sample group. In order to ensure that language was not a barrier to participation, I was also advised to include a box that allowed students to draw a response to the survey, and included the following prompt to facilitate this task:

In addition, you can choose to draw a picture that shows your general feelings about yourself. Use the statements above to help you decide what to include.

This meant that students who found it difficult to read and process each written statement could still respond to the survey honestly and confidently.

Once the survey had been administered, each item in each response was assigned a value as follows:

- *Items 1,3,4,7,10 ('positive' statements): Strongly Agree=3, Agree=2, Disagree=1, and Strongly Disagree=0.*
- *Items 2,5,6,8,9 ('negative' statements): Strongly Agree=0, Agree=1, Disagree=2, and Strongly Disagree=3.*

The higher the score a student achieved, the higher their level of self-esteem (the maximum score is 30).

Although obtaining quantitative data would be useful for understanding shifts in self-esteem levels over the research phase, I was also keen to interpret Rosenberg's scale to generate qualitative data, particularly focusing on the responses to two

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

statements:

- “I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”
- “I wish I could have more respect for myself”.

Specifically, I felt that these questions reflected students’ views of themselves within the school community so exploring responses to these stimuli in more depth would prove valuable to my investigation. For this reason, students’ answers to these statements also informed my sample selection.

To ensure that I did not influence students’ responses unduly, I collaborated with my head of department and asked her to administer both self-esteem surveys. I did not want the fact that I was their class teacher to impact their responses in any way, and I hoped that by involving someone with whom they were not familiar, they might feel freer to be more honest in their responses.

Phase 3: Observations and research journal

The main action research phase lasted 7 weeks, and during sessions led by students or where students worked in self-selected groups, I kept a research journal (Appendix D) noting how students acted and responded to each teaching method as it was implemented. All observations had a specific focus so that I was only looking for the ‘problems and processes’ that were most relevant to my investigation (Cohen et al., 2011:465).

In order to make sure that my participants did not feel that they were being critiqued

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

for their teaching style, subject knowledge or delivery (and to minimise the impact of the Hawthorne Effect), I wanted to avoid formal observations, detached from the lesson, making notes at the back of the room. I decided to conduct 'participant observations', which 'requir[e] the researcher to be an empathetic, sympathetic member of a group, in order to gain access to insiders' behaviours and activities' (Cohen et al., 2011:465). When completing observations, I acted as a Learning Support Assistant (LSA), working with class members who had not been selected to play a more active part in my research which enabled me to collect real-time data that might not have been available to me in interviews. After the session I completed an observation form (Appendix C) which formalised the notes I had made during the lesson.

In order to help students plan lessons, I collaborated with a semi-retired teacher from the MFL department who helped the 3 'teachers' prepare the material they were going to deliver, only intervening when necessary. After these sessions, she sent me any comments about the process which also went into my research journal. She also acted as an LSA in lessons where students worked as experts and in self-selected groups, so could provide me with data from these sessions as she worked with both students and 'teachers'.

Phase 4: Semi-structured interviews

Cohen et al (2011:15) argue that 'the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated'.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Indeed, by rejecting the role of 'detached, objective observer', an individual's behaviour is better understood by the researcher as they 'share' their frame of reference', and understand that 'individuals' interpretations of the world come from the inside, not from the outside' (Cohen et al., 2011:15). Thus, I was keen to take the part of 'interviewer' during this aspect of my data collection – I have been the class teacher of the sample group for two academic years, so I feel that (as Cohen et al. advocate) we share a frame of reference and a way of working that is built on mutual trust and respect. I felt that this was a solid foundation for sensitive conversations about self-esteem and motivation, and that collaborating with my head of department here might prove intimidating to students and stop them from speaking honestly.

Having identified a suitable sample using achievement data and the RES, and having observed student interaction in lessons that trialled each pedagogy under examination, I collected ethnographic data from the three 'teachers', and from one extra 'student' from the class who had expressed a desire to participate in the research process. As the participants do have low literacy and comprehension levels, I chose to interview students rather carry out detailed questionnaires as I did not want their written English to be a barrier to participation. In this setting, I was also able to rephrase or repeat questions if students had not understood my meaning, which enabled them to offer more precise and comprehensive responses. Cohen et al. (2011:412) state that interviews often obtain higher response rates than questionnaires as participants feel that they are playing an active part in research.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

One student commented that he liked being interviewed because it felt more grown up and different from school work, an atmosphere I was keen to build on throughout the process in order to make students feel valued and trusted.

By carrying out semi-structured interviews, I could code responses to facilitate meaningful comparisons and identify trends or anomalies (Drever, 2003). Most significantly, there was more freedom of response in this environment, as I could adapt questions or develop students' responses by asking for additional information, rather than adhering to an inflexible list of questions. As Cohen advocates, I made the interview non-threatening and enjoyable, and while students were aware that it was being recorded, I reassured them that recordings would only be kept for as long as they were of value to my research and the wider educational community. To ensure that students' responses were as honest and individual as possible, each participant was interviewed individually away from their peers (Foddy, 1994).

Limitations

While participant observations generated some interesting data, there were limitations to this research method. When working as an LSA during observations, my focus was not always on the actions of students leading sessions or working in other groups as I was supporting the learning of those students I was supporting. For this reason, I did miss some information that might have proved useful for my investigation. In addition, despite my best efforts, students were also aware that they

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

were being observed for research purposes, which may have had an impact on how they behaved during research sessions. Additionally, as a participant invested both in this investigation and in the whole class making progress, my comments might not reflect an unbiased account of events. For this reason, it was vital that other research methods supplemented my data collection.

There were also disadvantages to using semi-structured interviews as a research method. In particular, it proved difficult not to lead discussion and to keep my questioning open and objective. Moreover, while I had hoped that students' familiarity with me as their class teacher would enhance their answers, their responses might have been more open and critical if they had been interviewed by someone who was not involved in the research that was being undertaken.

Ethics

Asking students to reflect on self-esteem and their perceived position within a community can generate sensitive responses, so my investigation was carried out within very strict ethical guidelines, and the best interests of my students in sharp focus.

My research was undertaken with informed consent, as BERA (2011) recommends. Having sought ethical approval from the University of Oxford's CUREC committee, the purpose of my study was clearly explained to staff and students before data was collected, and approval was also obtained from senior staff for the use of school

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

data. The letter to my headteacher shown in Appendix B was used to obtain written consent for the research to take place.

As Cohen et al. recommend, a credible and meaningful explanation of the project was offered to students, and they were given a several opportunities to opt out. All students wanted to participate, but if they had chosen to withdraw I would have discounted any data they had generated. Cohen suggests that students opting out of research could be down to a mistrust of the researcher – as no one rejected the process, I felt confident that a constructive environment that had been created (Cohen, 2011:79). That said, while pupils could opt out of playing an active role in research (interviews that were out of school hours or infringed on their free time, for example), they could not opt out of any changes I decided to make to my practice as a teacher. Cohen comments on the importance of ‘academic freedom’ in educational research – he suggests that an atmosphere of ‘intellectual openness’ must be maintained in the classroom, and ‘evaluation should not be conducted in a way that chills this environment’, something I considered vital on an ethical level as I was keen to ensure all students realised their potential (Cohen, 2011:98).

My data collection methods were designed to have as little impact as possible on staff and student workloads, and all data was anonymised and stored in secure, password-protected files. All participants’ identities have been carefully protected, and all data is anonymous. Both the self-esteem test and open interview questions carried the risk that students might divulge confidential information. If students did

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

mention sensitive topics in their communication with me, I followed school procedure and passed the information on to our school's safeguarding officer immediately. In addition, I have only used data from research sessions to inform my findings, and I have not included anything passed on to me in confidence in my role as class teacher.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

FINDINGS

Self-concept and social interaction

Interview data

Of the four students interviewed, three students felt that the aim of going to school was to achieve the best grades they can. The fourth student stated that it was about learning new skills and interacting with others. When asked whether working with friends played an important role in the learning process, three of the four students stated that they liked working closely with those in their immediate circle. Two students advocated working with friends as part of a problem solving process, whereas one student said they liked having friends in the class for reassurance, but thought working with them directly might prove an unnecessary distraction and a barrier to work.

Lesson observation data

All students working as teachers sought the approval of their peer group, especially in the first and second lessons they taught. In particular, Student B used humour directed at his friends in order to make them laugh during lessons 1 and 2, but this was not evident by the third time he taught the class. During question–response segments in the opening lesson, all teachers picked their friends to answer questions rather than others with their hands up, and they also gravitated towards them when circulating as the rest of the class completed tasks they had been set, even when they didn't need assistance. This was distracting and resulted in the class going off

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

topic. However, by the third lesson they taught, all teachers were much more open in their choices of student to respond to questions, and when helping class members during activities, they went to students who needed support or who had expressed confusion rather than their friends.

Reflections from research journal

Initially, friendship groups and social dynamics played an influential role in the groups students chose to work in. However, skills that could be utilised became more important than social approval and this determined where students placed themselves in a later lesson that utilised this pedagogy.

Perceptions of ability

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: results

Students completed the RSE at the start and end of the research phase. Students A-C were selected to serve as 'teachers' as part of the intervention phase as a result of both their self-esteem scores and their responses to statements 7 and 8. Initially, Student I was selected to form part of the teacher team, but increasingly poor attendance in the run-up to the research phase meant that she was removed from the sample. Student B was selected as her replacement because of his low self-esteem score, and because I was aware of his very low self-esteem from past conversations about his achievement in English.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

STUDENT	GENDER	INITIAL SCORE	RSE	RSE SCORE AT END OF INTERVENTION	CHANGE
A	M	14		0	-14
B	M	11		15	+4
C	M	13		14	+1
D	M	23		22	-1
E	M	16		13.5	-3.5
F	F	14		20	+6
G	M	20		20	0
H	M	26		19	-7
I	F	12		12	0
J	M	22		Did not complete	N/A
K	M	16		Did not complete	N/A
L	M	21		Did not complete	N/A

Table 1: Student RSE scores pre and post-intervention

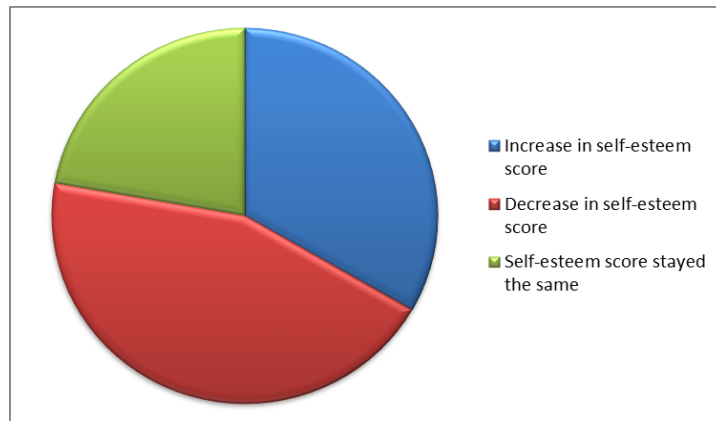


Figure 1: Changes in student self-esteem levels

Three students demonstrated an increase in self-esteem score, including Students B and C from the 'teacher' group. Four students demonstrated a drop in their levels in their levels of self-esteem, including Student A who had been selected to be a 'teacher'. His score plummeted to 0 at the end of the intervention phase. For the remaining two students who completed both surveys, self-esteem levels remained the same throughout the research phase.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

("I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others" and "I wish I could have more respect for myself")

SA = Strongly agree

A = Agree

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly disagree

STUDENT	GENDER	INITIAL RESPONSE TO STATEMENT 7	RESPONSE TO STATEMENT 7 AFTER INTERVENTION	INITIAL RESPONSE TO STATEMENT 8	RESPONSE TO STATEMENT 8 AFTER INTERVENTION	POSITIVE CHANGE? Y/N
A	M	D	SD	A	SA	N
B	M	D	D	A	A	N
C	M	D	A	A	A	Y
D	M	A	A	D	D	STAYED THE SAME
E	M	D	D	D	A	N
F	F	A	A	A	D	Y
G	M	A	A	D	D	STAYED THE SAME
H	M	A	A	SD	D	N
I	F	D	D	A	A	N
J	M	A	Did not complete	D	Did not complete	N/A
K	M	A	Did not complete	D	Did not complete	N/A
L	M	A	Did not complete	A	Did not complete	N/A

Table 2: Student RSE responses to statements 7 and 9

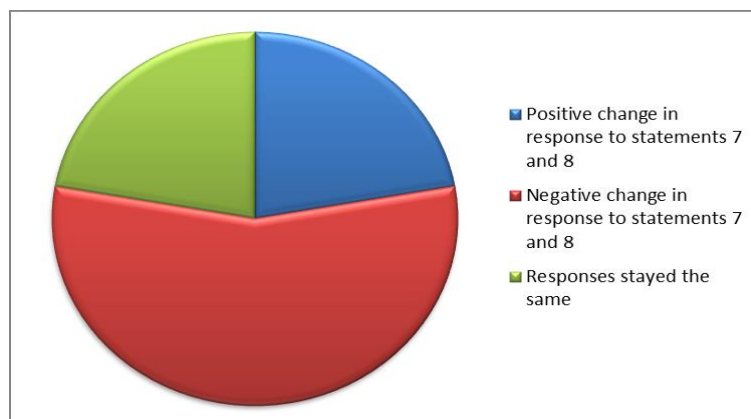


Figure 2: Changes in responses to statements 7 and 8

Statements 7 and 8 of the RSE asked students to reflect on their worth as part of the school community, and on the respect they had for themselves. Two students, including Student C from the sample group, showed a positive shift in their response

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

to these statements. However, five students (including the two other 'teachers') responded to these statements more negatively at the end of the intervention phase. Two students gave the same responses on both occasions.

Student E chose to draw a picture that reflected his feelings as a learner both times he took the RSE. Students C and D both drew the second time they completed the test.

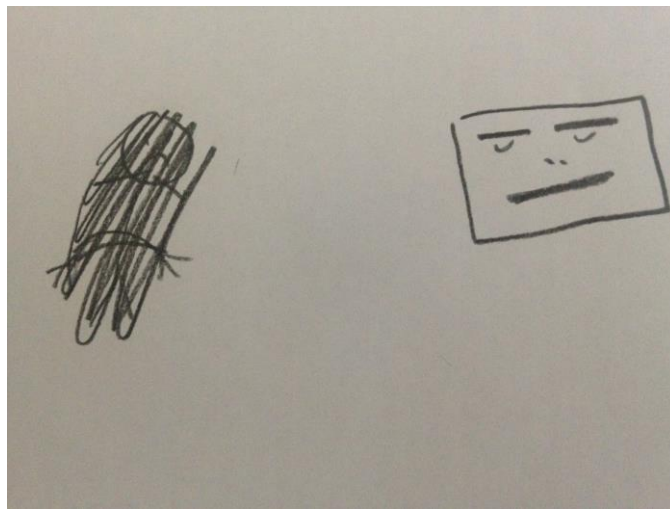


Figure 3: Student C's self-reflective drawing

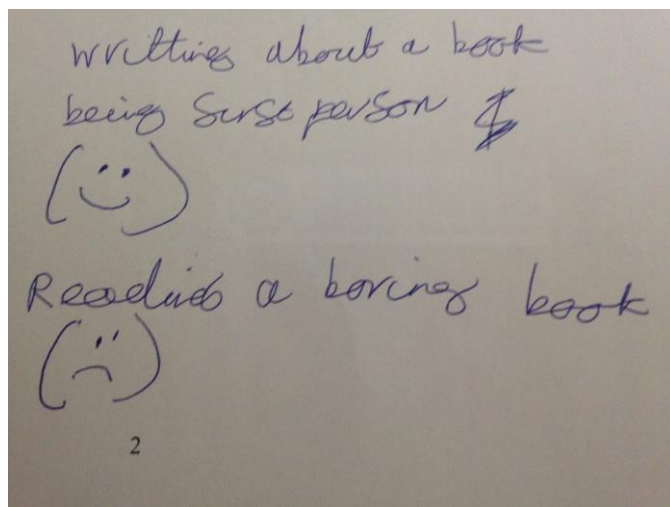
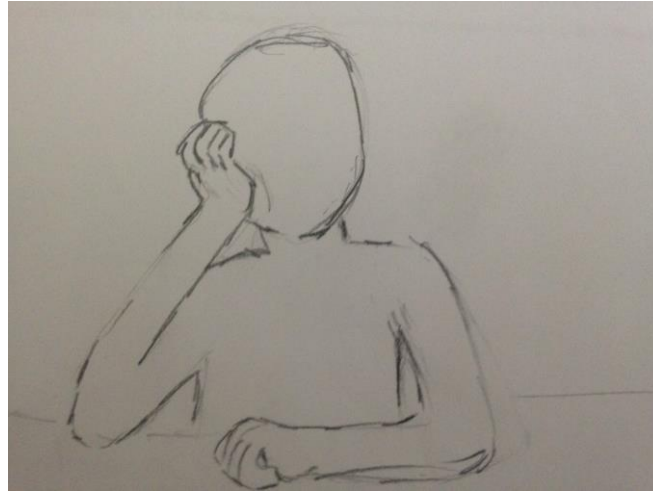
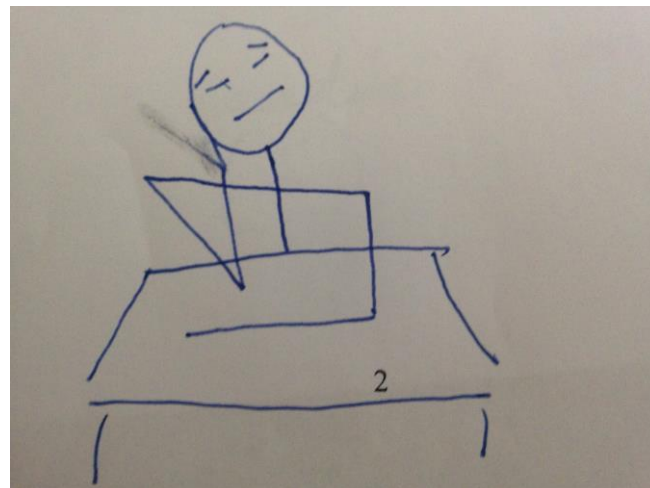


Figure 4: Student D's self-reflective drawing

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?



Initial RSE response



Response to RSE at end of research phase

Figure 5: Student E's self-reflective drawings

Interview data

All students felt they were 'better' at some school subjects than others, whether this was down to what they felt were 'natural' abilities or the amount of interest they took in each subject. All students questioned had very negative views of their positions as learners of English, and for two students this was linked to them having been placed into Set 4 for the subject. Two students felt that what determined your

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

levels of success in a subject was how hard you worked. For the other two interviewees, the abilities they were born with determined their outcomes in school.

Student empowerment

Interview data

All students interviewed suggested that more autonomy and responsibility was motivating and garnered success. Three of the students went on to say that independent learning strategies that empowered students made them learn 'better' and contributed to their successes in the unit of work that was taking place during the research phase. They all agreed that they wanted more widespread use of these strategies across the curriculum, not just in English lessons.

Reflections from lesson observations and research journal

Student 'teachers' grew in confidence as they taught more lessons and worked as experts in class. Their 'students' also asked them more questions as the research phase progressed, suggesting that they too valued the learning process taking place. Having relied on contributions from supportive friends in opening lessons, the peer educators became more comfortable in reaching out to other students as part of their teaching. Student C delivered a key segment in the third lesson of the research phase which he'd actively avoided early on. Students also came to work productively in self-selected groups.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Peer teaching

Interview data

Peer teaching was received positively by all students interviewed. Two of the three teachers spoke of their happiness at being asked, but one student spoke of feeling awkward during the process. Lesson planning was a productive process, and each student found a role within the group as they created lessons. Student C found speaking in front of class members difficult, but enjoyed the planning process and “clicking the PowerPoint”. Having an adult to hand to ask for advice was important for Student A. B commented that they had chosen teaching methods they enjoyed as students in order to interest their peers.

As someone who was taught by the peer educators, Student D found the experience rewarding and informative. He commented on the importance of humour as part of the lessons the students delivered, and how the fact that it was “different” to lessons with his class teacher helped the information stick. Both D and A spoke of the importance of a trust between ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ as part of this process.

Lesson observation data

Students progressed from relying on the feedback and support of friends to working with all members of the class and lessons became more serious in tone. The lessons themselves were clear, and included PowerPoints students had written and resources they had sourced. Students imitated teachers in their delivery, using phrases they hear frequently from staff. In return, students referred to their educators as “Mr B”,

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

for example. The class' focus also improved over the course of the research phase and they became less distracted.

Reflections from research journal

The structure of the lessons the students delivered seemed heavily influenced by my instructions to them or lessons I had taught previously. My collaborator noted that the third lesson students taught felt "less student-led" as they relied on techniques I had previously used in class. Students commented to her that they had enjoyed the freedom of working and presenting information as they wanted.

Students as 'experts' in group work

Interview data

All students found using students as 'experts' a beneficial learning strategy. Student A admitted feeling satisfaction at passing on information to others successfully, while students B and C had felt boosted by the process of speaking to smaller groups instead of the whole class. Student B in particular felt he was more serious and didn't show off in this situation which made him a better teacher. Student D also benefitted from the process, commenting that smaller groups allowed peer teachers to "go over things" in a student-friendly fashion. During a one activity, D also enjoyed teaching his 'expert' new information, and suggested he would like the opportunity to be a 'teacher' on future occasions.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Reflections from research journal

Students worked successfully when given pre-determined roles. The 'expert' acted as 'project manager' for the first lesson, and enjoyed delegation and sharing responsibility. During the second lesson in which this method was trialled, the experts were asked to assign roles to their group, which generated conflict in one group. As class teacher, I had to intervene and mediate discussion to ensure a productive resolution was reached.

Self-selected groups

Interview data

Of the four students interviewed, only two students held firm views on the usefulness of working in self-selected groups. Student B suggested that these occasions had been an opportunity to "mess around", while Student C spoke of the academic and social reassurance he obtained from working with close friends. Students A and D felt both strategies worked well, although D had some preference for teacher-selected groups. He did suggest that he could speak to his friends more openly about issues with work, however.

Reflections from research journal

In the two lessons that required students to select groups, students picked to work with friends. There was no official group structure offered by me as class teacher, but Student A (who had not chosen to work with the other 'teachers' from previous

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

lessons) did take a leading role in his group.

During the second lesson, students sought out others who they felt had skills beneficial to the task, although still with some influence of social groupings evident. Skills valued highly as groups were constructed included being 'clever', writing quickly and neatly and having good vocabulary.

Assessment data

Student	Assessment level: start of intervention phase	Assessment level: end of intervention phase	Positive change?
A	D1	C2	Y (2 sub-levels)
B	D3	D2	Y (1 sub-level)
C	D2	C2	Y (3 sub-levels)
D	D2	C3	Y (2 sub-levels)
E	D3	D1	Y (2 sub-levels)
F	D3	D2	Y (1 sub-level)
G	C3	C1	Y (2 sub-levels)
H	E1	D3	Y (1 sub-level)
I	D3	D1	Y (2 sub-levels)
J	D2	D1	Y (1 sub-level)
K	D2	C3	Y (2 sub-levels)
L	D2	D1	Y (1 sub-level)

Table 3: Class' assessment data at start and end of action research phase

Sub-levels within a grade are indicated as 1 (high), 2 (mid), 3(low).

All in the class students made progress over the research phase. Teachers A and C made two or more sub-levels of progress, while Teacher B made one sub-level of progress. Of the students who did not form part of the 'teaching group', five made two sub-levels of progress while the remaining four all made one sub-level of progress.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

What impact does giving students more control over their learning have on self-esteem and achievement?

Self-concept and social interaction

My investigation unearthed evidence to support Madden's (2014) condemnation of the pressure put on students to achieve C Grades at GCSE. The three students who had been chosen to be peer educators because of their low self-esteem scores all suggested that "grades are most important", and Student C even went so far as to say that "they're what make employers see you", implying that students with grades considered below what was acceptable would be *invisible* to those deciding their future. Student A commented that achieving below a C grade in any subject made him feel "a bit depressed", while B felt that during mocks or in-class assignments, grades weren't as important, but if "it was my GCSEs, I'd be really upset". Most poignantly, Student C commented that it made him "feel stupid" when a grade was lower than he was expecting, and would result in him not working as hard in subsequent lessons as his morale was lowered.

In addition, Student A commented that even though he was doing well in school by his own standards, he had "nothing to be proud of [...] in life". When I questioned him further on his thinking, he said, "I don't really know what would make me feel proud of myself. Maybe getting Cs", a statement that certainly highlights the stress and low levels of self-worth Madden and Mindfull identify to be so damaging. Moreover, Student A's views identify a waning in the 'motivation, drive and ambition'

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

the Department of Education's Character Education Fund deems as vital for academic success (DfE, 2015). For A, the 'conscientiousness, curiosity and focus' he regularly demonstrates is not enough, as he is "bad" in lessons where he "get[s] stuck with issues", and cannot find a way of resolving them on his own (DfE, 2015).

In the first lessons that tested the effectiveness of each learning strategy, students sought the approval of their social group in order to establish and validate their shift in position within the class community. This was most evident in the actions of Student B, who used humour and over-played his position as 'teacher' as he delivered parts of the opening 'peer teacher' lesson. By playing the part of a strict disciplinarian, B moved the lesson away from learning in order to test out what others thought of him in this new role. This seems to reflect Harter's finding that praise (here, the class laughing at B's jokes) is often 'internalised as acceptance', and students go on to 'develop feeling accepted and comfortable in their own skins' (Harter, 2012:12). During his interview, B stated that being mentioned in "assemblies and stuff" was what made him feel proud of his achievements, as these occasions saw him being celebrated in front of his peer group – a 'prosocial' goal Covington would identify as crucial to his identity formation. This adds weight to my finding, and suggests that for B at least, one's identity as a learner (or indeed educator) is defined by what your peer group thinks of you.

To a lesser extent, the same could be said for both Students A and C, as they too sought out friends during question and answer sessions and when circulating as the

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

class completed tasks, even when they didn't need assistance. During these interactions, friends asked the 'teachers' very simple questions which they answered with equal flippancy, an interaction that made both students laugh and seemed to make the 'teachers' feel comfortable with their newfound authority. These conversations also cemented the 'teachers'' positions of authority in the class community as they had approval from their friends – an empowering moment that Covington identifies as being so influential on students' feelings of social responsibility.

That said, by the third lesson the students delivered, there was evidence to suggest that the peer educators were not relying on the approval of their social group in order to lead lessons, which extends the research of both Covington and Harter. All three teachers selected a range of students to respond to questions and when moving around the room to provide assistance, they spent time with those who needed extra clarification and scaffolding rather than chatting to, or playing up with, their social group. This 'prosocial cooperation' suggests a clear link between social acceptance and self-esteem, something that Covington would state as being invaluable for both social and academic development (Covington, 2000:179).

When asked whether working with friends was important, all interviewed students commented that being in a class with friends was an important part of the learning process, even if they didn't work with them directly. Students C and D both suggested that friends acted as a support mechanism, with C commenting that "I like

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

to talk to them and learn with them. Otherwise I am quiet and don't talk in every class". The fact that he stated that learning *with* friends is integral to learning is important, as it suggests that conversations between students in class perform the pedagogical function Arnot and Reay identify rather than the lack of focus teachers often fear. Student D reinforces this observation, suggesting that working with friends is "good as you can work together. You can work problems out together", an observation that certainly supports the self-preservation and feedback function of student talk that Arnot and Reay see as vital in the classroom, and enhances the link between socialisation and self-belief.

Perceptions of ability

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem test allowed me to identify the link between whether students felt that they were 'good' or 'bad' learners and their sense of place in the classroom, and if implementing learning strategies that increased student agency had an impact on those views. Conducted in collaboration with my head of department to ensure an impartial environment, the self-esteem tests took place before and after the main action research phase to generate baseline self-esteem data, and to measure whether these levels had changed.

Significantly, three students, including 'teachers' B and C, showed an increase in self-esteem levels, while four students (including Student A) showed a decline in their levels of self-worth. Student A's shift was particularly marked, as his score had plummeted to 0 from 14 by the end of the intervention phase. The remaining two

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

students who had completed both versions of the RSE showed identical self-esteem scores at the start and end of the research phase.

While these results would suggest that Student B and C both benefitted from working as 'teachers' while Student A had found this a damaging process, external factors certainly had an impact on the levels of self-esteem students revealed in the second set of RSE data. The first time the test took place was at the end of a successful unit of work preparing for Year 10 exams. Students had engaged well with content and had gone into the mock exam with confidence, suggesting they were feeling assured about themselves as learners. However, the second time the self-esteem test was given was on the day students received Science ISA results which form part of their final GCSE qualifications. While most students were pleased with the results they had received, Student A was very disappointed and was reluctant to complete the self-esteem test. He told my collaborator that that he was "rubbish at everything", and he didn't see any point in completing the questionnaire, a statement that would resonate with Callan et al. as this seems to reflect their 'bad breaks' theory as A certainly devalued and found fault with himself when confronted with failure. Having invested a lot of effort in preparing for the exam, he felt crushed by the result, and based on his previous performance elsewhere, he felt inadequate in every aspect of school life. Clearly, this would have an impact on his self-esteem score, regardless of how successful he had been in English lessons over the research phase.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

By looking at responses to statements 7 and 8 from the RSE (“I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others” and “I wish I could have more respect for myself”), it is possible to drill down into how students see themselves as part of the school community, something Harter suggests is a ‘microcosm of society (Harter, 2012:12). Two students, including C from the ‘teacher’ group, showed a positive shift in their response to these statements and showed increased levels of self-esteem when comparing themselves to others. However, the fact that five students (including the two other ‘teachers’) responded more negatively to these statements at the end of the intervention phase is concerning and requires further investigation; perhaps the influence of receiving Science results also had an impact here. The fact that one of these students was E is significant, as he had asked me on several occasions when it would be his turn to be the ‘teacher’. Although he seemed reassured that he could take this role in September, it could be suggested that by limiting the number of people I had given responsibility to, I had – unwittingly – made this student feel that he was not worthy of the same trust as those chosen to be teachers.

As well as completing the RSE, students were also given the opportunity to draw a picture that showed their ‘general feelings about [them]self’. Student E was the only student to draw on both occasions, while C and D chose to draw a self-reflected image during the second RSE. Initially, C (Figure 3) had drawn a stick man with a sad face to reflect his feelings about himself at school. However, he had chosen to cross this out and had modified the image to show a face which was neither happy nor

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

sad, but still did not reflect a positive self-image. This adaptation mirrors his 1 point increase in self-esteem over the course of the research phase.

Student D (Figure 4) used the opportunity to draw to highlight differences in self-esteem levels when completing different tasks in English, a complex mindset that would not have been reflected if the Linkert scale had not been adapted in this way. When D is “writing [*sic.*] about a book being first person”, he feels positive about himself as a learner, reflected by the smiling face he chose to draw. However, “reading a boring book” leaves the student with low self-worth, reflected by the downcast expression. As this student had demonstrated some of the highest self-esteem scores in the group, he had not been selected to be one of the ‘teachers’ during this research phase. However, I would be interested to place him in a position of authority in future – particularly when studying “boring book[s]” - to see whether this has an impact on his self-worth in literature lessons.

Student E was the only student to draw on both occasions (Figure 5), and the images that he felt reflect his position as a learner were similar in both responses, as both depict a student leaning on their hand while sitting at a desk in the classroom. The image E drew on his first RSE is faceless and fleshed out, clearly showing a student deep in thought. The lack of detail in the face does make this picture hard to interpret, but it does seem to suggest a negative self-image. It could even suggest that the student feels anonymous, so including a facial expression does not seem important. This is certainly fits with the fact that he ‘agreed’ with the statements ‘I

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

certainly feel useless at times’ and ‘I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others’. However, while the later drawing shows the same pose, the figure is now a stick man with a facial expression. The expression shown has closed eyes and a very concerned frown, an illustration that certainly falls in line with this students’ decline in self-esteem over the course of my research.

As my school has worked hard to encourage students to adopt Dweck’s ‘growth’ mindset, I also was keen to identify whether there had been a shift in perceptions of ability among students in lower sets for English in the year since I had last conducted research in this area. In interviews conducted with staff and students as part of my Part 2 research, both groups felt that setting students by ability limited achievement (Colley, 2014). Staff suggested that “the C/D borderlines benefit from seeing what a B grade response looks like and hearing the talk of students who are performing at a higher level than them”, and that ability grouping takes away this opportunity as students are only exposed to work of a similar level their own (Colley, 2014). Students also felt that ability grouping was limiting, commenting that an individual’s ability was measured by the grades they achieved in school, but if the ceiling for achievement is a C (as it is on most Foundation tier papers that are taken by lower ability groups), that is restricted before students had even begun completing work towards their qualifications (Colley, 2014). Poignantly, one student in Set 4 had commented that “you feel like [higher sets] have more priority over you. Like they will be more important” (Colley, 2014).

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Significantly, my sample group for this project was also taken from a Set 4 English class, and their views on ability grouping showed a divide in opinion not evident in my previous research. Two students (A and B) felt that being part of a low set carried a stigma that made them feel “down” or “dumb”, while the remaining two participants (C and D) felt that the group in which they were placed did not have a negative impact on their views of themselves as learners, but actually motivated them to work hard. B commented that being in Set 4 made him feel like “we’re the dumbest set in the school”, while A said that it made him feel “a bit down when you say Set 4”, both damning indictments of setting and show a clear link between students’ perceptions of ability and self-esteem. That said, neither suggested that their set actively limited their achievement, which was different from both my research in 2014 and the study conducted by Arnot and Reay which suggested that demotivated students in lower sets felt so restricted that they did not complete work that was “beyond their capabilities” (Arnot and Reay, 2004:48). Conversely, C and D commented that being in a low ability group made them want to work hard to get out of the group, which *does* reflect the stigma A and B identify, but also suggests that for these students, setting could be seen as motivating rather than a process that condemns them to failure. D spoke of how being in Set 4 means you have to “work to get somewhere and move up”, but if you’re already in Set 1, “you’re there already”, perhaps reflecting the ‘growth’ approach Dweck (2012) suggests is tied to success.

In an extension of this, students were asked whether they felt ability or effort

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

contributed more to their successes in school. Significantly, three students (A, C and D) all commented that effort invested garnered success, while Student B felt a successful outcome was determined by “natural ability”, commenting that “I’m really good at Maths, I think I’m born with it. It’s not a skill that I have learned”. Once again, this reflected a difference from my Part 2 research, where the majority of students in the Set 4 GCSE class had commented that ability alone determined successful outcomes (Colley, 2014). Although too small-scale to provide a definitive conclusion, it does suggest that encouraging students to adopt a mindset that foregrounds effort rather than talent can motivate students in subjects they find difficult. However, in support of O’Brien’s (2015) criticism of Dweck’s binary framework, D suggested that believing that it was *either* an individual’s ability *or* the effort they invested which determined their successes was a limited way to view the world. He suggested that “the ability you have does change the amount of effort you put in”, which implies that the link between capability and invested energy is far more complex than Dweck identifies.

How does ‘peer teaching’ and using students as ‘experts’ impact on the progress of both ‘teacher/expert’ and ‘student’?

Student empowerment

One of the principle aims of my research was to ‘empower’ students who display low levels of self-esteem and improve self-image and attainment. As Lewis et al. advocate, I was keen to place these students in a position of authority to ensure that they become ‘seekers of meaning’, rather than a repository for information which

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

they had been spoon-fed (Lewis et al., 1995:549). Significantly, my findings supported my hypothesis, as every student I interviewed was unequivocal in their desire for more independence and creativity in the classroom. Students A and C spoke of the importance of pushing themselves, something Arnot and Reay actually identifies as a trait of successful more able learners. A commented that “I want to test myself”, and said that in trying something “harder”, it gave him a greater sense of “personal achievement”. Perhaps most importantly, he spoke of how independence in the classroom helped him “learn better”, something D also suggested was important. He said that working independently and empowering students “can get information into other people’s heads”, a concept Claxton would identify as Building Learning Power. All three teachers felt they benefitted from the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning and felt that the skills they had learned were transferrable to the real world, and weren’t limited to their English lessons. There was a marked growth in confidence and focus from each of the ‘educators’, and their interactions with the rest of the class became more wide reaching and learning focused. Over the research phase, the atmosphere of the classroom changed, and the collaborator who worked with the peer teachers once a week commented how much more supportive the students had become of each other.

Peer teaching

Collaboration with a semi-retired MFL teacher (Mrs W) made trialling same-age peer teaching much more straightforward, as she supported the three ‘teachers’ as they

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

planned the three lessons they delivered. Although I had prepared guidance sheets for the first two lessons (Appendix E), because of students' low literacy levels and the demanding nature of the task they were being asked to complete, I was keen to use Mrs W as support for the students as she could help them structure their ideas. Additionally, she provided invaluable insight into students' responses to the planning process (via email), which provided useful qualitative data.

One of the first observations that Mrs W made was that the students all enjoyed the planning process and that high levels of learning were taking place. The task afforded students the "freedom of working how they want / presenting information as they choose", something they all valued highly. This included finding extra clips on YouTube to support factual articles they had sourced and creating quizzes which "B was adamant to include no matter what". However, the final lesson the students planned – ironically, the task for which they received the fewest guidelines – mirrored lessons I had taught in previous weeks. Keen to develop students' ability to respond to 'unseen' extracts from *An Inspector Calls*, I had asked the students to pick the 'most important extract' from the play about the Inspector. Mrs W noted that although "they found the most important in the book" very quickly ("the bit where 'the Inspector slams the Birlings'"), the planning process was "less buzzy", and the lesson felt "less student-led, as they're using techniques" I had used previously. On this occasion, students realised that the lesson they were teaching was explicitly focused on exam technique which proved intimidating and limited their creativity. Mrs W commented that the topic had a "more tangible exam focus" which served to

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

reveal students' low levels of self-belief as the creativity and independence they had previously demonstrated did not seem good enough when teaching concepts that may come up in their exam – a very telling observation.

However, the freedom to design lessons did give the 'teachers' the opportunity to hide perceived weaknesses. During the planning stage for lesson 2 (students wanted the class to design posters containing contextual information on *An Inspector Calls*) they insisted on giving the class the opportunity to work on computers "if they like". When Mrs W asked them why, "A said that they hated their handwriting so it would look more 'proper' if done on a computer" – an option I am often reluctant to offer because tasks often take longer to complete. B also stressed that working on computers allows students to make corrections without it "messing up" their work and making it look "less intelligent", a statement that clearly links student autonomy with self-esteem and attainment.

When peer teaching began, both 'teachers' and 'students' displayed behaviour that suggested they were playing a part rather than behaving naturally, particularly during lesson 1. The 'teachers' used language they had observed staff use, reminding students to "take coats and bags off and get out your pencil cases", and that they only had "five minutes left" to complete the task. In addition, 'students' referred to the educators as Mr A, B or C, and still put their hands up to ask or answer questions. During the first of the three lessons, both sets of students found humour in this, with B playing up to his peers. However, as the research phase continued, while students

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

still fulfilled many of the expectations of 'pupil' and 'teacher' behaviour (hands up, clear instructions, addressing teachers as Mr) this became the norm, and did not disrupt the lessons as I initially feared. Student A, in particular, seemed to revel in this new-found authority, and took his responsibilities for the education of others seriously. Student D commented that he was the "best teacher" because he was "loud and confident and clear", but also because "he did it in a good way so it got in your head" and "he went over things" – two things he felt were important in an effective educator, regardless of their age or experience.

When interviewed at the end of the research phase, all students spoke of the personal and academic benefits of peer teaching, even if they had not necessarily enjoyed the process at the time. In particular, Students A and B spoke of their happiness at being asked, while C commented on how awkward and shy he had felt at the start of the task but had come to present during the final lesson. Student A commented (with a huge grin) that he "really wanted to show" the rest of the class what he knew, and he'd viewed the experience as a "test" of his confidence and knowledge. He also commented that increased agency was important for students, saying that "having more responsibilities is quite good because it makes you feel better and want to work harder", a statement that certainly supports the motivational benefits of building of students' autonomy that Claxton and De Charms both link with academic success.

Likewise, B was happy to be chosen, but more because he felt that "if [he] teach[es]

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

a class, everyone would enjoy it rather than a teacher who is old-fashioned and stuff". He also commented that he'd included "quizzes and games" because "people like them" which meant they would retain information more readily. Unknowingly, D built on this, commenting that peer teaching activities are "good actually because [they're] something different" information passed down to him by people that he knew well. Moreover, like the University students in Yeager and Younger's research, students felt that they had retained more information from the lessons they had been taught by students, commenting that teaching it "made it stick more" or that it was like repeated "revision".

Both Falchikov and Blythman (2003:4) and Miller et al. comment on the importance of trust between peer teacher and those being taught, something Falchikov and Blythman suggest fosters 'reciprocal didactic relationships' in which all parties learn effectively. While students were chosen to be educators based on the results of the initial RSE, I was aware that I wanted to ensure that any student leading a lesson or acting as an expert had *credibility* with their peers, something that may have proved difficult had other students been placed in positions of responsibility. My primary concern was to create a learning environment free from derision or judgement, particularly for those who were being taught as they would need to ask their 'teachers' for help and support. However, by selecting peer educators who saw the experience as a challenge through which they could gain the respect of their peers as UNICEF advocates, trust was developed between students and it became clear to all that "peers can be a trusted and credible source of information" (Education Scotland,

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

2015). D commented (of A) that “you have to ask for help, even if it’s your friend” and that asking friends for help was easier, because “I trusted him” from their interactions outside the classroom.

Students as ‘experts’ in group work

Both ‘expert’ sessions asked either the ‘expert’ or the whole group to carry out teaching tasks, whether that was part of an activity where the groups rotated to listen to the ‘expert’ deliver key information on a particular topic, or involved the group preparing a presentation on a key character from *An Inspector Calls*.

In much the same way as the peer teaching sessions, Students A, B and C enjoyed working as ‘experts’ in small (teacher chosen) groups. Taking the advice of Johnson and Johnson, I was keen to instil a sense of responsibility in the ‘experts’, so I gave them the title of ‘project manager’ in the first lesson where ‘experts’ were trialled and they were asked to allocate the roles of scribe, highlighter and definer to their colleagues. When I spoke to C during this session, he commented that small group work was more “comfortable” as he was not in such a public position, even though he was still shaping the learning of both his group and the rest of the class. Student A was confident and self-assured, teaching around the bullet points his group had put together and rephrasing and restructuring key ideas independently when asked questions. Afterwards, students asked to comment on who had been the best ‘expert’. I was cautious about inviting such open whole-class feedback as I didn’t want to create a forum for criticism that might damage students’ self-esteem, but

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

the feedback received was mature and reflective – a real sea-change for the group who have had friendship issues in the past. Student F commented that A was the “best communicator”, while B “spoke well but needed to use more formal language” and C was the “best at using an impressive words”. As both a teacher and a researcher, I was delighted with their progress.

Taking place towards the end of the research phase, the second ‘expert’ lesson required the ‘experts’ to demonstrate more autonomy and select roles that assign their group roles they had created. Interestingly, they followed the model I had offered for the previous task and students were given skills-based jobs; ability-affirming comments such as “you’re a fast typer” and “you know how to use posh words” were heard during negotiations, reflecting the gains in self-esteem and beliefs about self-competence that Miller et al. attribute to peer-teaching activities. However, the authority the ‘experts’ had been given did cause conflict for one group which included students who had scored highly on the first RSE. Feeling their position of intellectual authority threatened, they questioned the judgement of the ‘expert’, a conflict that was only resolved with my intervention. Once the ‘expert’ had reiterated that his choices were based on individual strengths, the group seemed happy and completed the task successfully.

In interviews, all commented that having student ‘experts’ was a beneficial learning strategy. In particular, B felt he had become more “teacher-like” as his audience was smaller and he had to work hard for his group – a sense of collective responsibility

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

he had not demonstrated until this point.

Significantly, students' positive responses to peer teaching and working as 'experts' in interview were reflected in the academic gains made over the action research phase. All three teachers made progress, with C making the most of any student in the class, achieving three sub-levels higher in an assessment at the end of term than he had achieved in an earlier test. A clear link can be drawn between C's visibly growing confidence and the improvement in his achievement level, as the amount of academic progress he made in just seven weeks was particularly impressive. However, it is interesting that his RSE score only improved by one point, something that certainly does not reflect his academic progress and seems linked to the "awkwardness" he stated to be a hindrance at the start of the process. Perhaps rotating the role of teacher around the class would mediate this awkwardness in future as he would not feel so spotlighted.

In line with those chosen to be teachers, all 'students' also made progress over the research phase, with five achieving two sub-levels higher in their end-of-term assessment. This seems to reflect D's comment in interview that giving students responsibility for their own learning – and for the education of others – helped simply, and solidify, complex concepts for the rest of the class. The fact everyone made progress over the research phase was a marked change for this group, as in previous assessment points over the year, almost all students had achieved the same level for consecutive assessments while others had only made one sub-level of

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

progress (Appendix A). This seems to suggest that making students 'seekers of meaning' as Lewis et al. advocate really does have an impact on both self-esteem and attainment.

Do self-selected groups encourage students to engage more fully, or are they treated as opportunities to socialise?

Students were offered the opportunity to work in self-selected groups on three occasions: the first pair of lessons took place during the second week of the research phase, and the third was the lesson before students completed the RSE for the second time. A marked contrast in group make up was clear between sessions, as during the first lesson, students chose to work with friends, promoting the status hierarchies that Mitchell et al. identify as so characteristic of this kind of cooperative learning. Student A had chosen not to work with the other 'teachers' for this task (who *had* grouped themselves together), but took a leading role in his group which perhaps reflected gains in self-image. Students were often off topic and had to be prompted to focus by both myself and the learning support assistants in the room, but this could be attributed to the novelty of working with friends, as it is not a choice I often allow.

However, although given the same freedom to choose group-mates during the second lesson, students seemed to seek out colleagues with particular skills who would help them complete the task *most effectively* rather than friends, something that shows a clear desire for autonomy and links the findings of Arnot and Reay with

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

both Mitchel et al. and Koutrouba et al. Rather than demonstrating the off-topic discussion that had characterised the previous lessons, students were focused and engaged with the complex analytical task they had been set, taking part in discussions that explicitly referenced students' perceived strengths; being "clever", having "fast" or "neat writing" or a "good vocabulary" were skills that were valued highly.

Despite the success of the third lesson, only two of the four students interviewed expressed any kind of opinion on working in self-selected groups, which counters both the success of the third lesson and the findings of Mitchel et al. and Arnot and Reay. Student B felt that in self-selected groups, "everyone would choose their mates and not do any work". In contrast, Student C mentioned the academic and social reassurance that friends offer that Arnot and Reay highlight as being so important. With friends, he was able to feel "more confident" because "I don't usually end up in a group where I speak very much" but getting to choose friends meant he relaxed. Like B, D showed a preference for teacher-selected groups as "you get more work done". However, like C he suggested that "friends understand your problems better and you can all work together" – perhaps most poignantly, reflecting that "it's easier to admit stuff is hard" to people you know well.

The split in student feedback on the success of self-selected groups suggests that students working as teachers or as experts are more effective ways of empowering students and improving both self-esteem and attainment. However, as a teacher

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

observing group dynamics, it was clear that social gains had been made as self-selected groups came to be productive working environments, and students began to demonstrate the collaboration and sense of collective responsibility that both Claxton and Covington promote.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

CONCLUSION

This action research project has provided a better understanding of the link between self-esteem and attainment. As the sole teacher of the class used during the action research cycle, I have been adapting and developing my practice and sharing findings with my department who have been keen to adopt the strategies I have tested.

What effect does self-image have on motivation?

From both existing literature and my action research, it is clear that the social world of the classroom exerts a great influence on both self-esteem and motivation. To be motivated and feel accepted, students need to feel a sense of place in the community, displayed clearly by Student B and his use of humour to mediate his shift within the class hierarchy. The laughter he received was an indication that he was accepted in this new position, a reward that not only but allowed him to move beyond humour to delivering meaningful and engaging lessons to his peers. The same pattern was also displayed in self-selected group sessions as students moved from being distracted by friends to selecting group mates carefully, picking friends and colleagues who offered specific skills that would benefit them during the task – a extension of the work of both Covington and Harter. It is also apparent that friends form an invaluable support mechanism for students (as the literature also reveals), but both C and D stressed that working with peers allowed them to ask for help in a low-profile fashion, a face-saving resource that ties motivation and achievement to self-esteem once more.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

It is also apparent that self-esteem levels vary from task to task, and that external factors and past experiences determine students' self-belief (seen through the dramatically declining self-esteem levels of Student A). D asserted that his self-esteem levels fluctuate as he completes different tasks, something that both impacts his drive to succeed and extends the research of both Dweck and Callan et al. Specifically, this calls Dweck's binary framework into question, as D found that his varying ability levels in different areas required more or less effort to achieve a successful outcome depending on which skills he was asked to employ, suggesting that success is less about adopting a growth mindset, and more about understanding your weaknesses and employing the right amount of effort to overcome them.

Clearly there is a strong link between self-worth, motivation and academic achievement for all students. It was clear that all participants felt that the set they were in had an impact on self-esteem; it was a class to *move on* from, rather than a group of which to be proud as they feared the derision of the school community for being in "the dumbest set in the school". What was particularly pleasing was that all students made progress at similar rates, not just those used as 'teachers'.

What impact does increasing pupil independence have on student self-image?

It is clear that by making students feel responsible and in control of both their learning and the education of others, they display increased levels of self-esteem and spoke of their enjoyment at rising to the challenge of teaching others. However, contrary to my hypothesis, the higher self-esteem scores most 'teachers'

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

demonstrated at the end of the phase were at a higher level than those of their classmates. While this does go against my hypothesis, I did find that some students did reveal improved levels of self-esteem and Student D suggested that taking the role of 'teacher' in future sessions was something that would make students feel valued, clearly linking increased agency with self-image.

By giving students control over their education and the way information was presented, it was clear that students felt a more part of the learning process. While 'teachers' certainly imitated the behaviours of staff they'd seen around the school, many of their pedagogical choices were based on teaching methods they enjoyed and allowed their classmates to focus on their strengths rather than expose their weaknesses. That said, this self-assured approach was not evident when presented with exam-focused content to teach, something that shows self-doubt and requires further investigation. In future I will be sure to rotate the students chosen to be 'teachers' as I feel that only promoting three students as part of this action research cycle may have negatively impacted on the self-esteem of others in the group. That said, as I predicted, 'trust' was something that all interviewees cited as central to the success of increasing student responsibility, so finding methodologies that encourage students to trust each other is vital before giving them responsibility for the learning of others.

Moreover, as well as fostering a more supportive and nurturing atmospheres, empowering students with low self-esteem also encouraged mature and reflective

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

discussion as students were keen to reward the progress of others in front of the group. In 'expert' and self-selected group sessions, increased autonomy was evident from all students, and roles were allocated not just to friends but to those who could offer specific skills to the group, something that supports the work of Arnot and Reay, Mitchel et al. and Koutrouba et al. However, my interview data contradicted the gains observed as most students expressed no real desire to work with friends as they felt they would do "no work" with them. However, C did feel more confident working with friends as he relaxed. In teacher-selected groups he usually ended up not speaking very often, so working with friends encouraged interaction that was not usually part of his day-to-day schooling.

What effect does increasing pupil independence have on attainment?

Much of the research I had read focused on peer teaching as a process that takes place across age and ability ranges, with older, more experienced pupils acting as a mentor to younger students who require guidance in specific areas. Miller et al. found that both cross and same-age peer tutoring programmes show elevated levels of self-esteem among participants, but that cross-age programmes resulted in greater gains. While I did not test the effectiveness of cross-age peer tutoring, it is clear that once trust has developed between 'student' and 'teacher', there is a marked impact on the achievement of both sets of students and that same-age peer teaching does have a positive impact on self-esteem and attainment. For 'teachers', as well as improved academic performance the key benefit was confidence as they felt more sure with content they repeated and revised as they planned and delivered

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

lessons, or when they worked as experts in groups. They were keen to repeat the process in the future, with A suggesting that he wanted to ‘test [himself] again’, and ‘see how much confidence [he has]’ while D explained that although he’d learned a lot from his peers, he also wanted the opportunity to teach the class, as he can ‘get information into people’s heads’ – a skill his teachers currently ignore.

Perhaps most importantly, the attainment of all students increased at similar rates. Although I was keen to raise the self-esteem of the ‘teachers’, I did not want to disadvantage the rest of the class so I was very pleased to see this outcome. While ‘teachers’ spoke of their sharper understanding of the concepts they were teaching, their students also felt they could ask their ‘teachers’ questions which created a mutually beneficial learning environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This action research project has provided an invaluable insight into a key issue for all teachers: how can we ensure that our students are developed emotionally as well as academically? I feel that further research is necessary to explore the impact of cross-age peer teaching, building on the guided reading and Maths support sessions my school has developed this year. The opening of a new Sixth Form at my school offers an exciting opportunity to explore the validity of pairing older students with younger students in sessions that extend beyond existing interventions. Moreover, investigating the impact of pupil premium funding on students’ self-esteem would

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

also be worthwhile, as this means-tested government grant is designed to improve the life-chances of students whose backgrounds could present a barrier to success, but can single out these students as different from their peers.

It is the responsibility of all educational professionals to ensure that students feel valued and that they have a say in how and what they learn. By encouraging them to take responsibility for their education and empowering them to see the value in working with others, teachers can create an environment in which all students have the power to succeed.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

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What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDICES

A: Results data

1. Ofsted Data Dashboard - GCSE Results 2012 -2014
2. Year 10 class: assessment data, Sept 2014 – June 2015

B: Letter to Head Teacher seeking permission for action research

C: Student-led lessons: observation forms

D: Research Journal

E: Lesson guidance: student-led lessons

F: Semi structured interview questions

G: Student interview data – colour coded according to subject matter

H: Rosenberg's Self Esteem Test – adapted.

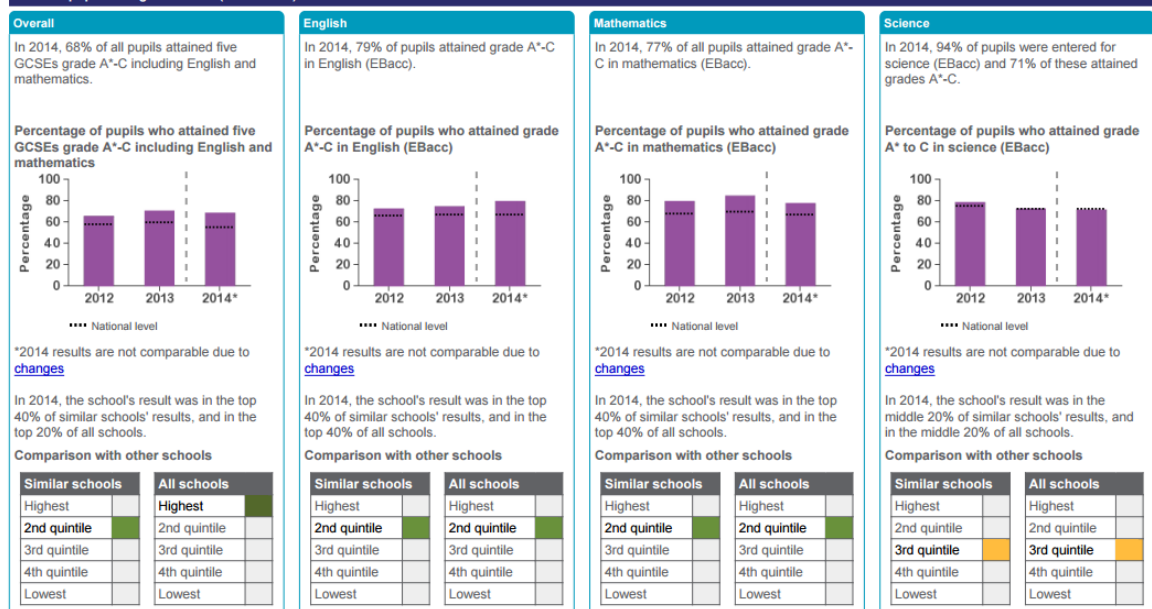
What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX A – RESULTS DATA

1. Ofsted Data Dashboard - GCSE Results 2013 and 2012

This school converted to an academy on 01-09-2012. Data prior to this date relate to the predecessor school.

How are pupils doing in exams? (Attainment)



The data presented in this report are Key Stage 4 and are final. Data source: Department for Education. Similar schools are those schools which have a similar prior attainment score to this one.

Page 1 of 4

2. Year 10 class: assessment data, Sept 2014 – June 2015

STUDENT	Grade on entry to Yr 10	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Grade leaving Yr 10
A	D3	D3	D2	D2	D1	D1	C2	C2
B	E2	E2	E1	D3	D3	D3	D2	D2
C	D3	D3	E1	D3	D3	D2	C2	C2
D	E2	E2	E2	E1	D3	D2	C3	C3
E	E2	E2	E1	D3	D3	D3	D1	D1
F	E2	E2	E2	E1	E1	D3	D2	D2
G	D3	D3	D2	D1	C3	C3	C1	C1
H	F1	F1	E3	E2	E2	E1	D3	D3
I	E1	E1	E1	D3	D3	D3	D1	D1
J	D3	D3	D3	D2	D2	D2	D1	D1
K	E1	E1	D3	D2	D2	D2	C3	C3
L	E2	E2	E1	D3	D3	D2	D1	D1

Sub-levels within a grade are indicated as 1 (high), 2 (mid), 3(low).

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX B – LETTER TO HEAD TEACHER SEEKING PERMISSION FOR ACTION RESEARCH

20/11/2014
(ADDRESS OF SCHOOL)

Dear xxxxx,

I am writing to enquire about conducting research in school this academic year. As you know, I am studying for the Master's in Learning and teaching at Oxford University, supervised by xxxxx xxxxxxxx from the Department of Education. In my final research project, *What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?*, I will explore the teaching methods that best encourage students to work independently in class and explore the link between this increase in agency, self-esteem and attainment.

The research will take place with a Year 10 English set working towards IGCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature, with target grades ranging from C1-D3. Over the course of the project, I will evaluate the effectiveness of peer teaching and using students as experts in the classroom, and students working in self-selected groups on both self-esteem and attainment. Specifically, I will work with a Set 4 Year 10 group, analysing how they respond to the strategies outlined above. I will collaborate very closely with LS staff attached to the class (xxxxxx and xxxxx), as well as xxxxx, Head of English.

By participating in the research, the school would be contributing to a project that will deepen the department's understanding of the link between motivation and self-esteem amongst students with low prior attainment. In doing this, my research hopes to identify ways of improving attainment for similar students in the school in the future, across the curriculum, not just within my department.

I hope to conduct this research between January and July 2015, with the project ending with my final dissertation submission in September 2015. I will ask students to complete a self-esteem test in order to select my participants, interview students and record their responses, observe and take notes, and keep a research journal. All audio responses will be stored securely, and will not be heard by anyone else or used for research without further explicit permission. As both the self-esteem test and interview questions carry the risk that students could divulge sensitive information, I will of course follow school procedure pass any information on to our school's safeguarding officer if the need should arise.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research with teachers and young people, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. Only your consent is necessary, and not that of parents. Throughout the research, students and other teachers will be able to refuse to participate in any research activities at any time.

All participants, including students, teachers and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor and myself, and not used other than specified without further consent. All recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research period, and kept in locked conditions until then. If you feel you would like to take part in the study, or need more information about what is involved, please contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,
(Researcher's name)

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

(Researcher's name)

University of Oxford, Department of Education

(Address of school)

(Head teacher's name)

- ☐ We do not wish to participate in this project.
- ☐ We would like to find out more about this project.
- ☐ We would like to take part in this project.

If you would like further information, please contact me, or my supervisor. If you require clarification of the ethical approval, process please contact Chair of Department of Education Research Ethics Committee, Dr Nigel Fancourt.

(Supervisor email)

Chair of Department of Education Research Ethics Committee, Dr Nigel Fancourt email: nigel.fancourt@education.ox.ac.uk

Please return this form to me.

Thank you for your help.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX C: STUDENT-LED LESSONS: OBSERVATION FORMS

LESSON 1

Lesson focus: Summary - / GNC @ 3 Date: 12/6/15

Teachers'	Students'
Welcomed class (mimicked teacher narration & phrases "Brags H, books out...")	Humor - found it difficult to settle. Referred to 'teachers' by surname.
Clear powerpoint VA & B confident. (appears Py. slides PPT. Answer pointing (hand))	- Again, find it hard to concentrate. - not completing task fully - have to be prompted by notes.
Circulate in students work. help. & assist. Very impressive k for 4 to 7th.	Better focus when completing task. Get over humor & engage well.
Require prompt for me to check time remaining. Task is wrapped by A.	Take a long time to complete task. Some misorders today. Ask for help, even reluctant learners.
(focus on friendship group until painful)	Speakers. Weekend seem v. happy & engaged.

Reflection

~~At the beginning~~ Teachers' mimicked teacher
behavior which was inhibiting. Found
on first slip g.p. when taking red ball.
Did support weekend.

Students' seem happy, but found it
humorous & lacked focus on occasion.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

LESSON 2

Lesson observation notes – peer educators

Lesson focus: *Context - An Impromptu* Date: *26/6/15.*

Teachers'	Students'
Seem less sure wings hole. A leady bit less confident / funny today. C still checks. - choose an image to dip.	less known - better for Still referred to teacher by name. More respectful. Question genuine. Trust is developing.
we n. s. English to suggest & develop. esp. when answering questions. "it's not fair, right?" "Socialism is about not being near to the poor" ! Academic	Students clearly understood. I want to please "Could I write...?" "What's a full word...?"
"Socialism is about not being near to the poor" ! Academic expectations are less clear. Quit it the end ! generate	Students do make progress. clearly nothing important in. ! All take part Quit is exciting & they respond.
competition. Reflection ! but few more q's. ! Again, peer group selected	! All take part

Focus still seems to be on inspiring peer group. Picking them for answers. Getting lost in chat & banter. But do support clearly when circling & Quit is great - something I need to do very often...

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

LESSON 3

Lesson observation notes – peer educators

Lesson focus: *Role of the Inspector* Date: *3/7/15*

Teachers'	Students'
Have selected a great extract. I confident & clear in instructions. I leads <i>(smiley face)</i>	Like the extract (rehearsal it being controversial). → Still in Mr X!
- Build on learning from my lessons (highlighting rules & advantages) Have I influenced too much?	Get straight down to talk. Does he seem to reflect learning desire
- Their P&P definitions are useful. Make more student friendly.	Not engaged by P&P defn. learning point for me. Examples for applying
- Example on bond (Show their tips). - Homework is used to	More useful. Suggest better ways. Active engagement (De Charn?)
-	

Reflection

Think I influenced the design too much. Need to step back, but also perhaps a result of time & years of experience & peerig. Needed to be focused. Perhaps try with yr 9?

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Reflections from research journal

‘Peer teachers’ sessions

Lesson 1: IGCSE English language Q3

Collaborator: “students enjoyed task, and found a suitable text following guidelines. Were able to do that part of the task quickly. However, extracting answers to create mark scheme took more time. They were slow at this. Student C found it a difficult process emotionally – he was on edge and fidgety – perhaps at the thought of presenting on Friday”.

Strengths: clear guidelines, enjoyed agency, took real responsibility.

Weaknesses: too much text in guidelines – list of instructions? More time to create mark scheme against which they’ll be judged.

Students will be given preparation time to practise before next lesson.

Lesson 2: Context - An Inspector Calls

Collaborator: “much more focused. Students found an interesting YouTube clip which they tested on me – I took notes while they watched for the PowerPoint (while pretending to be a student). This got rid of the need for lots of time to be taken up with them doing this. Poster task was designed by them – they said they enjoy the freedom of working how they want / presenting information as they choose. So they have said students can use computers if they like which I hope is ok?? I asked why, and A said that they hated their handwriting so it would look more ‘proper’ if done on the computer. B was adamant that he wanted to end on a quiz no matter what so they’ve included one!”.

Strengths: more independence, liked the responsibility, seem excited to teacher, achieved everything in the time this week so seem used to the process.

Weaknesses: Finding / watching the clip took time so they could do this at home in preparation next time.

Lesson 3: Role of the Inspector

Collaborator: “less ‘buzzy’ with this one. Task was more exam focused, but they really knew what they were doing. They picked the extract they liked best, that they found the most important in the book and called it the bit where ‘the inspector slams the Birlings’. They chose it immediately and could offer great reasons for their choice. Lesson feels less student-led than the last one, as they’re using the techniques you have suggested in the past to the whole class. Only highlighting short phrases, start, middle, end – I guess this has a more tangible exam focus. They wrote their own example to improve which is very funny and includes some colourful language!”.

Strengths: C took more of a leading role in discussion, he pulled out key points for example. Worked quickly and effectively, and clearly focused on what was needed

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Weaknesses: less student-designed (due to exam constraints??) so less flair and individuality.

Sessions where students worked as experts in assigned groups

Lesson 1 – carousel activity on the context of AIC

Students asked to turn short articles on Mr Birling, Mrs Birling and Sheila into facts / critical opinions the 'expert' could teach to the rest of the class as groups rotated. Worked in groups well – assigned roles. They were to be 'project manager'. Seemed to enjoy delegation and sharing responsibility, rather than being the only person to pass on information. Scribe, highlighter and definer were selected.

Presented well to others as students rotated. Student A was particularly impressive: teaching round the bullet points. Having reduced information down, he then added to what was being said.

Student D asked if they could vote on who the best teacher was at the end. Was reluctant to agree, but gave in! A was the 'best communicator' as he really explained things in detail, clearly and rephrased difficult concepts. B was told he spoke well, but needed to use more formal language (!), and C was the best at using 'impressive words' and explaining what they meant which one group in particular liked as it made them feel really clever.

Really liked the atmosphere of reflection on learning being created in the room ☺

Lesson 2 – producing presentations on character from AIC

Students drew a character from AIC from a hat and had to produce a short presentation

Again, roles were assigned by team leader. This time these seemed to be directly linked to skills. "you're a fast typer", and "you know how to use posh words".

Students with excellent animation skills in PowerPoint were also highly prized by their group and seemed a badge of honour!

Students worked well, and looked to the leader for direction – could be linked to their influence as class teacher. Team leader was respected for the most part. Was conflict from group where students with high self-esteem were working together – did not necessarily listen to advice given by leader, but they – in turn – hadn't listened to their group either which caused some friction which required some intervention from me. Once group roles had been re-established, they worked well and produced an effective presentation.

Sessions where students selected who to work with

Self-selected groups – lesson 1

Grammar concepts revision. Students given key grammar concept (word classes and sentence moods). Had to produce a short, 20 minute lesson to teach to the rest of the class. Could teach in any way they wanted. Websites for advice were suggested but this was all the guidance given.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

Students picked to work friends, which left 2 students without a group – I asked them who they wanted to work with and they told me – seemed to lack confidence and fear rejection, which is why they hadn't initially moved. Were accepted by groups. Some off-focus chatting occurred; 2 groups of boys sat close together and were off topic until prompted (which was very often). Short time frame for producing lesson for the group seemed to work as this meant they had no choice but to get down to work pretty quickly. No structure to group – although 'teacher' who had chosen to work with people who weren't 'teachers' did take lead (student A). Presented in last week of term – students produced varied activities for the class including animated videos, word searches, crosswords, quizzes, gap-fill activities. Some had been sourced online, others had been created by students themselves. Some students asked for help with providing worksheets, especially students with very low self-esteem scores, interestingly. All students worked well, esp. given the dry topic...! Questions were serious and teachers were respected which reflected the class being comfortable with the concept of peer education.

Self-selected groups – lesson 2

PEE paragraph on character from AIC – group writing task. Character could be chosen by students – agency they seemed to enjoy. I encouraged them to think about more obscure characters as a bit of stretch and challenge, and one group chose to write about Eva Smith which was really impressive.

Sought out students with particular skills rather than just peers – 'clever', fast writing, neat writing and good vocabulary seemed to be popular. Friendship groups were still evident, however. No one left out on this occasion. Students worked much better this time – wasn't about chatting as much, as they only had 20 mins to complete the task. The novelty seemed to have worn off. Squabbling over a pen ensued, but this is normal behaviour.

Students weren't afraid to critique the work of their group. This time they gave each other roles they'd created themselves – I said that everyone had to have a job. 'Quote finders' or similar were least popular jobs.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX E: LESSON GUIDANCE: STUDENT-LED LESSONS

LESSON 1

Setting up today's task

What a fantastic article 😊 Well done you!

Task:

Come up with an introduction to the task you made with Mrs W that you can present to the class (it could be a very short PowerPoint – you are teaching this skill to us today!). In it you need to explain:

1. What we are doing today is like question 3 of the IGCSE paper (the final question)
2. The question in the real exam will be worth 20 marks.
 - a. You get 15 marks for a list of bullet points about an article
 - b. You get 5 marks for putting them into a paragraph in your own words.
3. Today, we are going to practise taking bullet points from a text.

In class

Explain the task fully, however you wish. The question you wrote is:

Why did the extreme sports team keep the dog through the journey?

Explain you don't want to see answers about **HOW** they kept him, but you want to know **WHY** they loved him so much.

You then need to get them doing a task you have designed, and come up with a way of checking they all understood. That is up to you!

Set H/W – for all! Write the bullet points up in a short paragraph IN YOUR OWN WORDS!

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

LESSON 2: CONTEXT - AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Hello teachers!

Today you need to teach the class about the context of *An Inspector Calls*.

You need to find an interesting way of presenting information to the class, and working out how to get them to record it in a snappy and memorable fashion.

You can present this information however you like. Could you look at YouTube, or find some websites to help you?

Useful websites:

BBC Bitesize

Sparknotes.com

Keep it simple – and I look forward to seeing you teach again!

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX F: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What's the most important thing about school for you?
2. What makes you succeed or fail in different areas?
3. Which subjects do you work hardest in? Why?
4. Do you think you're good at English?
5. What makes you think that?
6. What does being in Set 4 for English mean to you?
7. Is effort or ability more important?
8. How do you feel when you get work back and the mark is lower than you would like?
9. What makes you proud of your achievements in school?
10. How did you feel being asked to teach the class?
How did you feel being taught by your classmates?
11. Did it help you learn?
12. Do you think students should have more responsibility for their learning?
13. Do you like choosing the people you work with?
14. Does this make you work better?
15. Can students be experts?

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX G: STUDENT INTERVIEW DATA – COLOUR CODED ACCORDING TO SUBJECT MATTER

Data – interview transcripts

Coding:

Self-concept

Social interaction

Perceptions of ability

Student empowerment

Peer teaching

Self-selected groups

Q: What is the most important thing about school for you?

A: I think education is, I think because right now I'm in year 10, I've got more responsibilities, you know. And I think main subjects English, Maths and Science, I'm trying to concentrate on them. I'm just saying education is really important.

B: Getting a good grade at the end of the year. You get information too. I make friends and stuff too.

C: Learning because that's what you have to do. The grades are most important. They're what makes your employer see you.

D: well just to basically learn and concentrate and take in the information that you learn. I don't find it easy. With me it has to interest me. If I lose interest I can't focus. If it's not interesting, I just don't want to learn in.

Q: Is it about the grades or the experience of learning?

A: It's kind of both to be honest. The better skills you have and the better knowledge, the better grades you'll get.

D: Getting good GCSEs – I'd like to do an apprenticeship.

Q: What do you think makes you succeed or fail in different subjects?

A: Succeed or fail? Erm. I think I sometimes have problems with concentration, and in some subjects I tend to be good and in some subjects I tend to be bad which is not about behaviour ... I get stuck with issues while I'm concentrating or studying or something.

B: rewards and challenges make me want to get involved. Challenges and stuff like that.

C: I don't really try as hard in some subjects.

D: Say in English where we're reading stuff that's long, and I lose interest, then I just don't work as hard as in subjects that I do have interest in.

Q: What subjects do you work hardest in?

A: Right now, I'm working hardest in science because I'm doing my GCSE exams this summer. In exam week, I done a lot. I done a bit of revision on Maths, English and on business. I've tried my best all over and I've got one more year to go.

B: In PE and games. I'm the best. I think I'm good at everything. I have abilities in games. I don't work hard in French. I don't understand anything . That wouldn't

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

change if I worked harder. I just don't get it.

C: Maths, probably Maths, English and Science because they're the main three. I have to try hard in all my subjects. I don't find them easy.

D: PE and I like Geography too; it's about the world and maps and that. So probably Geography and PE. They're the ones I find the most interesting.

Q: Do you think you're good at English?

A: No not really.

B: I'm ok. I struggle with it. I forget to use commas and stuff and sometimes the old fashioned stuff is boring. I don't think I'm good at it.

C: I don't think I'm bad but I'm not that good. I don't always get good grades. I know the information but I don't always get it down on paper in time.

D: I used to be better than I am now. I am good at bits of it; I'm quite good as writing in detail but reading is boring.

Q: Why?

A: it's because I just don't fill in the gaps that I need to. There's some things wrong when I'm doing coursework, or writing. There's some problems. I want to prevent that. I want to improve that.

B: Because I'm in the lowest set, I think I'm naturally bad at it.

Q: what makes you good at a subject or not good at a subject do you think?

A: I think it's my abilities. If I know something straight away I think, I'm good at that. But if I think ... If I'm not, I still try and get it I think. And then if I still don't get it, that's a problem for me.

B: I'm good at games because I was born with it. It's a talent I have.

C: how much effort you put in. How hard you work. If you don't work hard you don't deserve to do well.

Q: what does being in Set 4 for English mean to you?

A: well it makes me feel a bit down when you say set 4, but I don't really know if all the sets have the same work but I think if you're in the same set the main point is you're just going to learn.

B: that we're the dumbest set in the school. And that makes me not want to work hard. When it comes to exams you have to try, but in lessons sometimes I feel we do work that's pretty low... not low but sometimes the work is kind of easy. If it's to do with GCSEs it's kind of hard. But revision is easy.

C: Nothing. It doesn't matter. I only really care what set I'm in in Maths. Most people I know are in set 1. So I want to be there. I need to compete with them.

D: I don't really see it as anything bad. It's something to work on and improve on. If you're in set 1, you're there already. When you're in set 4 you have to work to get somewhere and to move up. I want to move up.

Q: What's more important: how hard you work or your ability in a particular subject?

A: I think to be honest it's how hard you work. Anyone can have good natural abilities but I think it's how hard you work. Because if you don't study you're going to forget stuff as you won't practise it very much.

B: my natural ability. I'm really good at Maths, I think I'm born with it. It's not a skill I've learned.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

C: Effort. Because if you don't try you can't really be good at something that much. You have to work hard at it for it to be something you are proud of.

D: I think effort maybe – the ability you have does change the amount of effort you put in. But you always have to put effort in.

Q: How do you feel when you get work back and the mark isn't as high as you'd like?

A: I do feel a bit depressed because mostly because if I'm trying to achieve something I want to get a particular grade that I really want I feel a bit down. But right now it's alright because I've got another year I can improve. So it's a bit depressing but I can improve. It makes me want to work harder because if I've done something wrong I can prevent that from happening again. Make it a better thing.

B: I'm ok with it because it's not actually my GCSEs. But if it was my GCSEs I'd be really upset. If it's not a real qualification I don't care. It doesn't make me work harder.

C: it makes me feel grumpy. I wouldn't try for that lesson. It would make me feel stupid.

D: it's something to improve on, to work on.

Q: What makes you proud of your achievements in school?

A: I don't really feel proud of myself there's nothing to be proud of. Just hard work and dedication. There's nothing to be proud of for me in life I just have to work and achieve what I have to achieve. I don't really know what would make me feel proud of myself. Maybe getting Cs.

B: When I get mentioned in assemblies and stuff.

C: When I do well. I don't like certificates. It's my personal sense of achievement that matters.

D: say if you spend loads of time on it and put loads of work in on it, it pays off and shows that if you work hard and do everything it pays off.

Q: How did you feel being selected as one of the three people to teach the class?

A: (with a huge grin) It was quite good I really wanted to show my It was kind of like a test for me so I was trying to be confident and trying to be like a teacher like you. I think B and C tried their best as well. It made me want to work harder because you for example you have a lot of responsibilities as a teacher, so I think having more responsibilities is quite good because it makes you feel better and want to work harder.

B: quite happy. Because I don't actually like people teaching ... I feel like if I teach a class everyone would enjoy it rather than the teacher who is old fashioned and stuff. I think I am a good teacher as I am the same age and I think I know what they want from lessons. Like quizzes and games. I wanted to include them as people like them.

C: it was awkward. I felt shy and didn't want to teach.

Q: How did you feel being taught by class members?

D: I think it's quite good actually because it's something different and it's good to see how they teach and give information to the class. I didn't learn more, it was different. A was the best teacher because he was loud and confident and clear and did it in a good way so it actually got into your head. He explained things well when we were in groups. He went over things.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

D: You have to ask for help, even if it's your friend. There's no point being stuck. I trusted him.

Q: How did you find planning the lessons?

A: the first time it was hard. We didn't know where to start. Working with Ms W really helped us as she could give us tips and ideas. The other times we did it it was fun – we got told what skills we had to teach and we just thought of ideas and looked online.

B: It was hard. I didn't realise how hard it would be. But it was fun – we could do what we wanted which I really liked. I picked articles about sport which interested me so that helped me be interested.

C: The planning was nice. It was a small group and I did the research when we'd decided what to do. I clicked the PowerPoint as I didn't want to talk. We sorted that out with Ms W.

Q: Did it help you learn the information you were teaching?

A: I learned the content before but if I was revising on the same thing I'd definitely remember it.

B: yeah – it made it stick more. It also taught me how to be a teacher.

C: yes. But I would have learned it anyway.

D: Yes. They explained it well and it was funny. Less serious which really helped me learn.

Q: How did you feel being an expert in class?

A: It was really fun. It made me want to learn things before the lesson, like the sheets you gave us, in case anyone had questions. I liked feeling a bit special. It made me stand out a bit and I liked that they knew things afterwards because of me.

B: I didn't take it seriously at the start, but when we did the group work I had to be serious as I was teaching them facts they didn't know before. I liked the small groups better. I was tired today and wasn't a very good teacher. But I think they still learned things. I got better as I went along.

C: It was much better than being a teacher to the whole class. I also had time to learn the facts which helped. Today was fun. Teaching things to the small groups was nice and I learned it all better each time I said it.

Q: How did you feel having friends as experts to help out in class?

D: It was great. They were funny and acted like teachers which made me laugh. But they explained things well... they were more simple. They used different words to teachers to help me understand things I didn't necessarily get before. I thought they were really approachable as well, but as I already knew them from before, maybe that helped. I'd like to be the expert next time.

Q: Do you think we should give you more opportunities like that?

A: Yeah definitely. Because I want to test myself again, and see how much confidence I have. People say I'm not that confident which I'm not, so I want to try something harder in which I can achieve a personal achievement. It kind of helps me learn better. Maybe you can make the point more structured, but I have to learn it and present it which makes me think about it twice I suppose. To trust a student as a teacher you need them to show a standard quality as a teacher and I'd want to trust

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

him so we can both communicate and learn. That's really important.

B: yes. More independence.

C: yes. Because they should feel awkward too. I think I could learn from them, they might phrase it differently. It's nice to hear it from them. I know them so it's easier to understand. It's not about trust.

D: yes. I want to be a teacher in class! I can get information into other people's heads which makes it get into my head better. Like for example, when I make a PowerPoint I put all the key information in bold and underline it so it just makes it clearer. Better and easier to understand.

Q: Were you proud of the work you did as a teacher?

A: I felt happy and I felt confident that I'd done ok.

B: yes – I think I was a very good teacher and it made me happy to be asked.

C: Yes, but I think I could've talked more. I just found it really awkward which stopped me.

Q: Do you concentrate better when you have friends in the classroom, or do you concentrate better when it's you with people you don't know as well?

A: It's kind of both to be honest. If your friend is next to you, you kind of get along with it and sometimes it can be distracting. Or if you're by yourself with other people you don't know you get more straightforward, you carry on with the thing you've been asked to do.

B: better without them. But I don't want to not be in classroom with friends. I want to be with my friends.

C: With friends. I like to talk to them and learn with them. Otherwise I am quiet and don't every talk in class.

D: It's good as you can work together. You can work problems out together.

Q: Should teachers let you pick your own groups for group work?

A: I don't mind whether you choose or not; if I have people that are difficult to communicate with that I a problem but I think I am a good communicator so that's ok. Even if they mess around.

B: no – I'd mess around. I know for a fact everyone would choose their friends and not do any work. You'd automatically be talking about something else. Absolutely not

C: I prefer choosing. I don't usually end up in a group where I speak very much so I like it when we get to choose. I feel more confident. I just like working with them.

D: it's your friends, so you speak about different things and not the work. The novelty would wear off. But I do prefer it when you put us into groups as you get more work done. I'd rather work with friends as they understand your problems better and you can all work together. It's easier to admit stuff is hard.

What impact do pedagogies that encourage students to take ownership of their own learning have on self-esteem and attainment?

APPENDIX H: ROSENBERG’S SELF ESTEEM SURVEY (1965)– ADAPTED.

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
2.*	At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5.*	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6.*	I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
7.	I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8.*	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
9.*	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

In addition, you can choose to draw a picture that shows your general feelings about yourself. Use the statements above to help you decide what to include.