

**Improving the Level of Self-esteem.
A Practitioner's Overview to Holistic Learning.**

An impact on self-esteem through the enhancement of an individual's cognition.

The objective of this discussion paper is to create a dialogue on the projected impact that non formal learning may have on a learner's cognition. There are no attempts to present extensive research evidence relevant to the propositions made but selective theories will appear, where necessary, to offer clarity to the propositions, and aid the discussion.

The proposition argues that with the evidence/data collected, and set against the cognitive/learning skills, that are embedded within the **standardised framework**, it will demonstrate the positive connection that exists between enhanced cognition and improved self-esteem.

Abstract.

Through a process of unstructured observations, where all significant behaviour, attitude, comments, and interactions are recorded, the case study can log evidence/data against both cognitive and affective learning variables. The former to track the impact on the individual's **cognition** and the latter on the individual's **self-esteem**.

Keywords.

Cognition, self-esteem, learning stimulus standardised framework, schema, Structural Cognitive Modifiability Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Mediated Learning Experience, Systemic model, Zone of proximal development, Cognitive Domain, Affective Domain.

Background.

The proposition aims to examine the link between **cognition** and **self-esteem**, when applied in an individual's learning environment.

It is proposed that there is an observable and thereby a recordable connection between **cognition** and **self-esteem**. This connection will then be used to determine whether **self-esteem** can be improved or enhanced if a positive intervention is inserted when the learner is exposed to a learning stimulus.

The proposition argues that by applying the evidence/data, that arises from this process, to a **standardised framework**, it will be possible to demonstrate any improvement to the cognitive pathway.

Through a process of unstructured observations, where all significant behaviour, attitude, comments, and interactions are recorded, the case study can log evidence/data against both cognitive and affective learning variables. The former to track the impact on the individual's **cognition** and the latter on the individual's **self-esteem**. The **standardised framework**, that is used with the case study, offers an assessment of cognitive skills (contemporary) against which the individual's progress is tracked. This tracking makes use of any observable increase in the level of sophistication applied by the individual. The **self-esteem** element is recorded against a set of affective learning variables. These variables include components that relate to individual's attitude and behaviour. The measurements made by this process are more linear and will examine the individual's take up of the variables and the frequency to which they occur.

Introduction.

A prefix. To embed self-esteem into the cognitive outcome and provide understanding to the proposition, that there exists a connectivity between cognition and self-esteem. To underpin the definitions offered, and to further support the principles upon which the proposition is being considered, the work offered by Piaget and Vygotsky, and the Structural Cognitive Modifiability of Feuerstein will be introduced for guidance and direction. It is accepted, for the proposition, that the examples presented are limited and aim only to aid any discussion that may surround the proposition itself. At the same time, it is acknowledged that there is more extensive and detailed literature available on the topics mentioned.

Historical theories that will assist with establishing a foundation on which the primary proposition can be built.

The aim below is to establish a montage that will create for the observer a view that, collectively, strengthens the understanding of the range of interactions a learner will encounter and experience on a daily basis. This demonstrates the holistic environment for learning.

However, it is also important to reflect on additional theoretical arguments, when consider relevant interrelationships, especially social capital. While the positive aspect for social capital is well documented the study undertaken by Maloney, W. A. Smith, G. and Stoker, G. (1998), provides additional information for its negative considerations. It considers the mistrust between communities in Northern Ireland. Members of outside groups are, 'viewed with greater disdain because of the dynamics of group formation and maintenance. Prejudice and distrust of others may be highhanded through continual reinforcement within a group setting.'

Before examining the theories purported by Piaget and Vygotsky it will help to comprehend the schema theory developed by Young, (Young, J. E, et al (2003) A **schema** (plural *schemata* or *schemas*) describes a pattern of thought or behaviour that organizes categories of information and the relationships among them. The proposition will require an overview of the theory.

Young suggests that maladaptive schemata are broad, and include pervasive themes or patterns made up of memories, feelings, sensations, and thoughts relating to oneself, and one's relationships with others. They are considered to develop during childhood or adolescence, and to be dysfunctional in that they can lead to self-defeating behaviour. He offers the following examples, the schemata of abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, emotional deprivation, and defectiveness/shame.

Although Young went on to look at Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Gestalt Therapy, he was aware of the importance to address the underlying issues of the individual and the possible return to a negative mind set, if not addressed.

Piaget's four stages of Cognitive Development followed a chronological scale for the individual. Whilst the order of each stage would remain a constant, the degree of emersion at any given stage could differ from individual to individual. He suggested that some individuals may not achieve the final, fourth, stage. Also, the degree of development at each stage could differ greatly between individuals.

Although Piaget avoided a numeric approach to quantify the stages of the individual's development his qualitative approach only focused on biological growth and environmental experiences. Accepting that environmental experiences remain a criterion for this proposition, the holistic approach adopted by Vygotsky and Mediated

Learning Experience of Feuerstein provide the additional elements to underpin the proposition.

The proposition will not attempt to disentangle the work of Vygotsky but will consider his role to introduce the Zone of Proximal Development. This will offer an additional element to guide the understanding of **self-esteem**.

The **zone of proximal development** is explained as the area that encompasses the individual, and as such exerts the greatest impact on the psychological development of the young person and there by influences a wide range of their 'emotional, cognitive, and volitional psychological processes'. Modern day educational research may interpret it 'as the difference between what a learner can do without help, and what they can't do without teacher's assistance.' Reber A et al (2009).

Vygotsky argued that a child will engage with significant others, either through their peer groups or adult relatives and friends. Through the dialogue, that will ensue, a social interaction is developed which Vygotsky suggests improves the young person's cognitive behaviour. This will then enhance their enquiry and problem-solving skills and create independent thinking. Following Vygotsky, 'some educators believe that the role of education is to give LEARNERS experiences that are within their zones of proximal development, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning such as skills and strategies'. Berk, L. Winsler, A. (1995)

The theories presented by Piaget and Vygotsky offer a foundation for the Mediated Learning Experience, theory, developed by Feuerstein

A theory that should have significant resonance for those working with individuals that offer challenging behaviour or a disengagement with the more formal styles and structure of learning.

Feuerstein argued that the IQ of the learner is not set, and therefore a constant, but is structurally cognitively modifiable. This is an approach that changes the structural nature and influences the future cognitive development. Thus, by modification the structural change will determine the Learner's future cognitive development. The proposition acknowledges that structural change can also take place through personal, culture and environment influences.

However, the interaction between the mediator and the learner will also create a positive effect on cognitive development as he explained. Put simply and with

particular emphasis to quality, it states that the *quality* of interaction between the individual and the environment via an intentional human being (mediator) plays a pivotal role in the cognitive development of the individual. Or Mediated Learning Experience (MLE).

The lack of MLE is often responsible for an individual's deficiencies in learning tools, positive disposition, and propensity to learn. Without mediation, a learner has limited opportunity to benefit from either formal or non-formal learning.

The aspect of how to evaluate quality may arise in discussion and require a response. But the proposition argues that the process of applying the evidence/data to the standardised framework will demonstrate any improvement to the cognitive pathway. This, it suggests, can only be achieved through the quality of the interventions made by the practitioner (mediator).

The proposition, therefore, aims to show that the interaction that takes place between the learner and the stimulus, introduced by the mediator (practitioner), results in a psychological behavioural change. These consequential changes can be observed and recorded. This evidence can then be used to track the cognitive development of the learner.

STYLE Log - Success Through Your Learning Environment

The **STYLE Log** is presented as an effective tool to determine the scale of an individual's self-esteem. As a process, and function, it is able to stand alone. However, it is feasible and perhaps more beneficial for it be employed in conjunction with the **STYLE Framework**.

When used alongside the Framework it facilitates the observations recorded to be handle by both, the Framework, and the Log.

It is noted that there are numerous definitions and portrayals for self-esteem available. However, for the requirements of the **STYLE Log** and to create an overview the following clarification is offered.

Initially William James, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, advocated that self-esteem was concerned with the success and failure the individual may experience in life, and when considered has being particularly noteworthy.

In the 1960s Morris Rosenberg viewed self-esteem as being the amount of self-worth the individuals may feel towards themselves. The self-esteem scale (RSES) was

developed as a tool to measure self-esteem against the individual's feeling of self-worth.

Our introduction to self esteem.

The definition of **self-esteem** dates to the 1890s. James, W. (1892). with William James's introduction to the I - Self and the Me - Self. The further consideration he gives us is that the Me - Self will include the Material, Social and Spiritual selves. The Social Self can therefore be considered as central to the more contemporary definitions, this being relevant to the individuals' emotions and feelings. Therefore, in general terms, **self-esteem** is how we think about ourselves, whether it be in the positive or negative context. It may also include how we feel other people perceived us. This can be offered as a negative or positive perspective.

It is also possible that false low esteem can be observed in some cases of gender imbalance. The process, in these situations, being used as a tool to mask ability and avoid a challenge to a presenting gender imbalance.

The practical self-esteem.

Individuals strive to protect what they deem to be their self-esteem, and to ensure its good health through a focus on successful outcome in their daily activities. Being acutely conscious to avoid all negativity attributed to them. In general terms it is important in achieving this balance by modifying and consciously assessing their behaviour. This process is usually achieved by the individual seeking out and avoiding environments, activities and tasks that may be too challenging and result in failure. There is a possibility that with a limited focus, and a failure to succeed, that they become over sensitised

Alternately, the individual may set a lower limit, and consciously accepted a changed model, avoiding risks that could damage relationship that are necessary to maintain the acquired balance (norm). This situation could be avoided through a more honest and open expression of ability by the individual. There is some consideration being given that suggests individuals, with positive skills and ability but with low self-esteem, fraudulently portray a lack of ability and skill to avoid any possible failure.

It must also, be considered that in certain situations, that external reinforcement of the individual's skills and ability could create a socially unacceptable false level of self-

esteem. The individuals, through reinforcement. can be oblivious of how they are being perceived.

The self-esteem of the internal self.

This type considers that the individual may possess a low, middle, or high level of self-esteem. This corresponding to an individual's attitude towards one's self and how worthy they may believe they are. How one may feel, an internal evaluation. It may be seen as a psychological process that can rely on the individual's affect towards personal experiences. In certain circumstances this inward evaluation can carry a very dynamic and active process.

Perhaps, the following can be offered as a useful example that links well with the proposition namely, *from a cognitive perspective self-esteem may hold a central life position of the self (individual). The feel of worth may be essential to one's identity and therefore, plays a crucial role to regulate the individual's behaviour.* Epstein, S. (1985).

Self-esteem and this proposition.

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esteem. With the individual, through reinforcement, can be oblivious of how they are being perceived, and immersed in one's SELF.

The populating of the STYLE Log.

Although the log can be populated separately from the framework it is recommended that both functions work from one set of observations.

Whilst the framework makes use of the definitions that arose from Bloom, et al. (1956) Cognitive Domain the log will use the Affective Domain. In both settings the contemporary categorisation makes use of the skills and attitudes that stem from NACE. (National association of Able Children in Education).

This will establish again the underpinning pursuit to strengthen the foundation upon which the objective of the discussion paper promotes.

The STYLE log.

The log is structured in four (4) stages. The initial stage necessitated that any given observation would need to be set, or not, against one the six attitude or behavioural skill associated with the NACE (below). The following three (3) stages are then negotiated to further establish that the initial allocated attitude or behaviour is sound.

- 1) Self-awareness
- 2) Managing feelings
- 3) Motivation
- 4) Empathy
- 5) Social skill
- 6) Communications

Stage two (2) then determines where the observation will conform to one (1) or more of the Bloom, et al. (1956) Affective Domain. See below

Bloom, et al. (1956) Affective Domain. With the associated definitions.

- (a) Receiving
- (c) Valuing
- (d) Organising
- (e) Characterisation

Receiving; “at this level we are concerned that the learner be sensitised to the existence of certain phenomena and stimuli; that s/he be willing to receive or attend to them.” Bloom, S. B. (ed.) (1956, p98, Handbook 2.)

Responding,” at this level we are concerned with the responses which go beyond merely attending to the phenomenon. The student is sufficiently motivated that he is not just willing to attend but perhaps it is correct to say that he is actively attending.” Bloom, S. B. (ed.) (1956, p118, Handbook 2.)

Valuing: “the behaviour categorised at this level is sufficiently consistent and stable to have taken on the characteristics of a belief or an attitude. The learning displays his/her behaviour with sufficient consistency in appropriate situations that s/he comes to be perceived as holding a value.”

Bloom, S. B. (ed.) (1956, p139, Handbook 2.)

Organising: “as the learner successively internalises values, s/he encounters situations for which more than one value is relevant. Thus, necessity arises for;

- the organisation of the value into a system,
- the determination of the interrelationships among them and
- the establishment of the dominant and pervasive ones.

Such a system is built gradually, subject to change as new values are incorporated.”

Bloom, S. B. (ed.) (1956, p154, Handbook 2.)

Characterisation: “here the individual is described in terms of,

- his/her unique personal characteristics - that is, the basic threads or sets of orientations which account for a great range of disparate behaviour or
- his/her philosophy of life or world view - the principles and ideal, the personal credo, which provide integration and a consistency for the various aspects of his life.”

Bloom, S. B. (ed.) (1956, p165, Handbook 2.)

Stage three (3) is a series of actions and responses that apply to stage one (1) and will ensure and provide the final verification that the observation made, and recorded, is assigned to the correct attitude and skill.

The final stage, four (4), allows for the self-esteem to be graded to one of the following levels,

- Working on it.
- Applied
- Present
- Embedded

Each level will be classified against a series of words. These words will need to appear or be representative of an action that is portrayed in the recorded observation. The accumulative score will reflect each level of the classification symbolised above.

Therefore, the proposition being considered is, that the process to enhance the individual's cognition will have a direct influence (positive) on the individual's self-esteem.

DRAFT

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