Self Esteem – Enhancing the Role of the Teaching Assistant

This chapter will consider the following key themes:

- understanding the importance of self-esteem;
- links to learning;
- emotional literacy;
- strategies for positive behaviour management;
- the self esteem of the teaching assistant (TA).

Understanding the importance of self esteem

The aim of this chapter is to explore issues relating to self esteem, not only that of pupils, but also for you as a TA and an educator. As adults working in schools, we are all educators, whatever our title or role. Each interaction we have as a member of staff is critical.

Through our responses to each other, we are subconsciously setting the climate for relationships within the school and also modelling this to pupils. This is a critical concept. A positive learning environment can only occur if all feel valued, have a voice and are heard.

How might the following pages prove useful to you?

You may read this chapter on one occasion when you are focusing on a child you know well and feel has low self esteem. In your search for answers you will be looking to try to understand their needs and also strategies to support and develop self esteem.

The first half of the chapter focuses on this aspect with interwoven case studies of pupils. An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:
1.2 They build and maintain successful relationships with pupils, treat them consistently, with respect and consideration, and are concerned for their development as learners.

On another occasion, however, the focus of your reading may be your role and your attempts to gain a greater insight into your own personal and professional development and practice.

Responses from research conducted with TAs have been included to illustrate this. An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

1.6 They are able to improve their own practice, including through observation, evaluation and discussion with colleagues.

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**Activity**

How well do I support and relate to the pupils I work with?

How do my professional relationships make me feel about myself and my role?

What are the indicators that let me know that I am valued?

Who are the people important to me within my role?

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The responses to the questions above will enable you to begin to consider which aspect of self esteem you wish to focus on in the first instance.

It is important that we as educators provide structure and opportunity for young people to reflect on who they are, and to be confident within themselves and with others as they learn and mature through each interaction, whether in a formal structured teaching environment or informal contact in corridors and the playground. Understanding the system, policies and practices within your workplace and supporting them can help you in this task.

A positive and motivated school as described in Chapter 1 provides such a system. We must also recognize that a school, like any complex organization, will face challenges and will not always provide a positive environment for all pupils and staff.

Therefore, rather than focus solely on the notion of either low or high self esteem I would like you to consider the notion of **self esteem as a continuum**.

With this perspective, our main aim could be to enable a child to move along that continuum, increasing their self esteem from low towards higher. We must bear in mind that the journey along the continuum may take some time and indeed for some, may never be achieved within the school setting.
It may be that in your role you only have the opportunity to work with a child for a short period and not see the outcome of your work. How we, as educators, manage our interactions with pupils is critical if we are to begin to create and reinforce a positive sense of self. It is vital therefore to focus on what we can do. If we can enable a positive change, no matter how slight, we begin to enhance the development of self concept and a sense of self linked to successful learning and social experiences.

There are many opportunities to encourage the development of a positive sense of self esteem within the school setting. Teaching assistants are in an ideal position to address this in terms of their role through their involvement with pupils, teachers and the curriculum and their active support of agreed school policies and strategies.

Developing an understanding of the importance of self esteem and how it links to both achievement and the development and sustainment of positive relationships is crucial.

A school offers the opportunity for us to use a systematic and structured approach, yet allows roles to be sensitive and respond to the needs of individuals, pupils and staff.

The nature of the role you have, and the opportunity to develop supportive relationships with pupils, also enables you to become alert to their sense of self esteem, and their perception of how successful they are at learning new tasks and acquiring new skills, enabling you to plan your approach to meet each individual’s needs.

Becoming aware of the fragility of self esteem in some pupils is the first stage in identifying an opportunity to begin to intervene and thus start to enable the pupil to have the confidence to begin to grow and develop in their sense of self.

As educators, I believe we need to be aware of the degree of responsibility we have in our interactions with others, be it adults or pupils. Whilst it may be that it is unlikely that we will be able to change the behaviour of others (unless they choose to do so), we can endeavour to ensure that when we leave an interaction none of those involved feel worse for their contact with us. A TA is often the link between teacher, pupil and in some situations parents, thus is at the heart of developing and sustaining positive relationships, ensuring pupils are able and willing to engage with the learning process.

An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

1.5 They are able to liaise sensitively and effectively with parents and carers, recognizing their roles in pupil’s learning.

What do you understand the term self esteem to mean?

Activity

What does the term ‘self esteem’ mean to you?

Can you define it?
Previous definitions have included:

Self esteem arises from the discrepancy between the perceived self, or self concept (an objective view of the self) and the ideal self (what the person values, or wants to be like). A large discrepancy results in low self esteem, while a small discrepancy is usually indicative of high self esteem.

(Pope et al., 1988, p. 4)

Self esteem is the individual’s evaluation of the discrepancy between self-image and ideal self. It is an affective process and is a measure of the extent to which the individual cares about this discrepancy.

(Lawrence, 1996, p. 5)

Self esteem is the respect and value of the self. It is the concept that there is real importance in what we do, think, feel, and believe.

(White, in Bovair et al., 1993, p. 100)

Self esteem is the ability to see oneself as capable and competent, loving, unique and valuable.

(Berne and Savary, 1981, p. xiv)

For me the essence of self esteem is defined as a sense of:

- competence;
- being valued;
- being loved.

If these are the crucial elements of understanding self esteem, you may like to consider these elements both in terms of a pupil(s) you support and your role.

### Activity

Identify specific times when you felt:

- valued;
- acknowledged for your individual commitment and competence at a task or activity.

What did others do or say to give you this feeling?

Reconsider your own earlier definition of self esteem. Is there anything you would add?

As you read the activities in this chapter maintain your new definition at the forefront of your thinking.

How do you believe pupils would respond if you asked them the same questions?
Activity

Consider how a child assessed as having low self esteem may present in your class or school.

How would they:
■ behave?
■ respond to a task or an instruction?
■ relate to others?
■ respond to change or new situations?

Consider the following case studies.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Harry is 15 and has a Statement of Special Educational Needs. He is described by staff as frustrated and often directs his anger at peers and staff. He will refuse to undertake work which he considers beneath him, but at times gives up when work is set for the whole class that he feels that he cannot complete, yet he is reluctant to accept help.

He has an older sibling who is often in trouble. Staff recognize the surname and sometimes assume they have a troublemaker in class, confusing him with his sibling. His behaviour has been described as inconsistent – one day he is pleasant, cheerful and works well, responding positively to encouragement, another day he is rude, disruptive and apparently lazy.

Amber has a Statement of Special Educational Needs for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) and is described as healthy looking and well dressed. She is of average height and build and is described as a quiet, shy and thoughtful child with a kind and caring nature. She is openly friendly with all her classmates yet finds it difficult to form close friendships amongst her peers and so often seems lonely. In the classroom she hides behind her long hair, especially when asked difficult questions. She will avoid tasks at times and can talk out of turn. Attendance is a concern as she has frequent absences from school.

These pupils are different, in age, gender and most specifically their individual needs. Yet to staff they represent two pupils who are not only having a negative experience of school and the process of learning but could both be described as having low self esteem.
Is it possible, therefore, to support the development of a positive sense of self esteem when pupils have such different needs? I believe it is.

Understanding the sense of self

The starting point for an understanding of the pupil’s sense of self is the careful consideration of the potential reasons behind their actions or responses. Harry and Amber, plus other pupils, may believe all or some of the following statements:

- I find it difficult to relate to others, so begin to believe that no one likes me and I have no friends;
- no one values me;
- I cannot learn and I am stupid;
- I find many tasks in school ‘high risk’ (e.g. learning new skills, completing tasks) and avoid them in whatever way I can;
- I am afraid of allowing myself to begin to form attachments or connections with pupils or getting involved in situations that would allow me to grow and develop as a person;
- I often feel anxious and seek to please others;
- I have strong feelings, but am often either scared of expressing them or unable to manage them;
- I don’t think much about myself and reinforce my negative perception of myself by making self-disparaging comments – I’m thick!

It is clear, therefore, that pupils with low self esteem do not feel:

- **Capable** – that they are able to complete tasks. Harry and Amber either avoid tasks by rejecting them or by their behaviour.
- **Lovable** – that they are unique as a person. Harry is often mistaken by staff for his older sibling who is disruptive, and may not feel recognized for himself and what he can offer.
- **Valued** – that they can contribute. Amber, whilst friendly with her classmates, is unsure of her place in the group and what she can offer thus tending to isolate herself.

Pope, McHale and Whitehead (1988) consider self esteem in children in five areas:

- **social** – how they feel about themselves and others;
- **academic** – the child’s evaluation of themselves as a student;
If we apply this model to Harry and Amber, then I would consider social and academic areas as those in which they may need some support. Harry may also feel that the reputation of his sibling influences others opinions about him and thus he may feel that his sense of place within the family has an impact on the school setting. Jim (below) is also affected by this, but his sense of place within the family is in relation to a change in his family setting.

CASE STUDY

Jim is in Year 1. He was ‘chatty’ last term (summer), but at times is now sullen. He lacks confidence when faced with new tasks and seeks reassurance from his teacher and TA. They describe his behaviour as attention seeking with low-level behaviour difficulties and deduce that he is a ‘bright child, but lazy’.

At times he interferes with others’ work and makes sure staff know that others have made errors in their work.

Staff have observed that there are tensions developing in his friendships.

A new baby was born in the summer holidays.

Amber, Harry and Jim may appear to behave or act in ways that would indicate that they have low self esteem, but still try, often with great success, to mask their feelings about:

- competence at the task;
- relationship with others;
- or their place within the group.

Activity

Consider the pupils in your class.

Do they hide behind a mask to avoid a task or new activity that may involve risk or potential failure, e.g. ‘class clown’, ‘Mr/Miss Helpful?’

What are these ‘masks’ that the pupils you know put on?
Jim is Mr Critical, he may feel that other pupils aren’t doing things properly and if he can point this out, he can show that he is not the only one to get things wrong. If he can highlight others’ shortcomings he can avoid criticism of his efforts. Very young children are often unsure about their sense of self and try different masks to find out ‘Who am I?, ‘What am I like?’ In this example staff in school felt this was not the case and that he was responding to the change in his home circumstances.

When Amber is asked a question that she does not understand or want to answer she becomes ‘Miss Invisible’ hiding behind her hair hoping not to be noticed. Contrast that with the attention she draws to herself by talking out of turn, ‘Ms Notice-Me’.

Harry at times is ‘Mr Superior – this work is beneath me’, and at times ‘Mr Angry’, probably in classrooms where the staff have confused his identity with that of his sibling. He feels angry that they have not noticed him for himself and knows that his sibling presents challenging behaviour in class, so concludes that he might as well act up to the mask he’s been given.

The table below summarizes the elements that makeup the elements of self esteem. They are interrelated and each contributes to the growth of the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Being valued</th>
<th>Being loved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn new skills</td>
<td>Have a sense of self</td>
<td>Relates to a significant other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practise skills</td>
<td>Accept recognition of success</td>
<td>Recognizes feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve competence</td>
<td>Reciprocate recognition of success with others</td>
<td>Accepts relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the confidence to try new activities</td>
<td>Have a sense of their own identity and role in relation to the group they belong to</td>
<td>Knows they are loved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1 further demonstrates the flexibility and creativity we need when supporting the development of self esteem and indicates how as a TA you have the opportunity to begin to intervene to build, even though it may be in small stages, a positive sense of self esteem in pupils. For each pupil the point where you can connect and intervene may be different, but as the model below indicates, wherever you enter, it is the beginning of developing a sound sense of self and positive self esteem. I believe for all we can begin to connect through one of these three elements.

We can reverse the arrows or interject at any point in the cycle.

It is not about failing to achieve it is about the response to the failure. We need to teach pupils that we learn through failure and that it is OK to fail as that is how we learn and that we need to take risks to do so. If we are confident to take risks we will learn and begin to build confidence and thus begin to feel more competent.
Activity

How do you respond when a young person you work with fails to achieve at a task or activity?

Do they receive the message that you expected them to fail or do they feel ready to learn from the experience and try again?

Reflect on your findings. Your responses to pupils when they are not successful at tasks is critical. The focus must be on ensuring that the pupil feels confident in tackling the task; a relationship based on mutual respect and trust will enable this to occur. Although some pupils may resist support after they are unsuccessful at a task, you need to ensure that the quality of the relationship is maintained and be sensitive in the way in which you approach this. If a pupil does not feel competent, this will affect how valued and lovable they feel. Remember that how we feel about ourselves may make a difference to the way in which we work with pupils and there will be times when we need to acknowledge our emotions, for if we too feel that in our role as educators we lack competence, are not valued or recognized for who we are and what we can contribute, we will not be effective in our role. We must ensure that we are still able to effectively support the learning of the pupils we support.

What is self esteem?

Lawrence (1996) constructed a model that considered self esteem as an embracing term for specific elements in the study of self.
Self image and ideal self which combine to give us: our self concept.

Self esteem, therefore, can broadly be defined as the inner picture we hold of ourselves.

Self image
This could be considered to be what the person thinks of themself. Lawrence (1996, p. 3) describes it as:

... the individual’s awareness of his/her mental and physical characteristics.

This will have begun to be formed in our earliest days, within the family and our social contacts.

Consider a baby’s surprise when biting their toes for the first time, a sensation that lets them know that these feet are a part of them. It is the start of an awareness of body image which grows and changes as we get older; meet and mix with others; influence and are influenced by others. This awareness continues and aids the development of our self image as we begin to decide who we are; perceive a sense of how loved we are; or what abilities we have or do not have.

These perceptions are strongly influenced by both verbal and non-verbal messages we are given as we grow and mature. Consequently, it is vital that we recognize the importance of the quality of the interpersonal relationships we develop and the demand for high level of communication skills when working with pupils.

Your role as a TA can determine the quality of relationships for a pupil as some will need more structure and nurture in their interactions with other adults within the school setting. For example, pupils with an existing low self image will readily accept and internalize a casual negative remark that will reinforce their existing poor self image.

Your role may need you to alert other adults either teaching or supporting the pupil to be aware of the need to choose language carefully when either correcting behaviour or explaining a task or activity.

As children enter puberty and adolescence body image often becomes a high priority. The importance of how they perceive they look, or trying to be part of a group, or part of a ‘look’ can be the source of much anxiety and stress.

By understanding the importance of the elements of self image as part of self esteem, we can be more aware of the difficulties for some pupils despite the positive strategies implemented in school.

Broadly speaking these elements will include consideration of our:

- physical appearance – what we look like;
- skills – what we can/cannot do;
- how we relate to others – the ability to maintain and develop relationships;
- how we manage ourselves and our emotions.
All of these combine to build our self image. Harry, Jim and Amber all have difficulty relating to others and managing their emotions. Whilst Jim and Harry are more demonstrative in their emotions, Amber is quiet and withdrawn. All indicate they have problems in maintaining and developing relationships with their peers. In some circumstances they indicate a lack of confidence in skills for a task and, as a result, either do not attempt it or sabotage their own success.

An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

| 3.3.3 They promote and support the inclusion of all pupils in the learning activities in which they are involved. |

Ideal self

This is a consideration of what the person would like to be – their ‘ideal’. Over a period of time it may take into account the messages received from other diverse sources. This includes the individual’s collected experiences and who they want to be, their own goals, aspirations, expectations and dreams, but with the added complication of considering what they think other people think of them. Clearly, this is a difficult aspect of self esteem for some pupils.

Confusion can arise as we process information from many different sources. How we analyze and act on this information and what part of our ideal self the information relates to will all be taken into consideration. At different times there may be more sensitivity to the development of our ideal self within home, school, or social or other highly influential settings – the influence of what parents, carers, other influential adults and significant peers think. Inner conflict may be created for the individual because of the influences of these different groups.

Pupils may feel that at times they are striving for an image that is unattainable.

Jim finds it less threatening to criticize others rather than acknowledge their skills and success.

Harry tries to be positive on some days, but is overwhelmed by a negative sense of self and so gives up.

Amber is unsure, on the outskirts of the group.

A greater sense of self may enable them all to join in more confidently and acknowledge recognition for themselves.

Self concept

Our self concept is our perception of who we are, our own identity. This links in with our personal map of all our relationships both in our personal lives and in our roles as educators, our understanding of the people around us, our personalities and our individual responses to situations. It is made up of three elements:

- how we think and connect thoughts – cognitive;
- how we feel and respond – affective;
- what we do and how we behave.
Harry, Amber and Jim have all been supported by TAs who believed in them and who used strategies that enabled them to begin to develop a more positive sense of self concept.

Why is it difficult to change self concept?
As self concept is a personal evaluation, based on our individual interpretation of events, experiences and interactions, it is difficult for another to intervene, even when it is clear to those around us that we are sustaining and reinforcing a negative image of ourselves.

Harry’s self concept is determined by what he thinks teachers and his TA think of him. If he feels they do not really know him as a person and value him for himself, but only have ‘their perception’ of him (which might also be confused with a sibling), then he sees no reason to change. His negative sense of self concept is being reinforced by those around him.

Lawrence (1996) considered this aspect of self esteem theory in the context of his research and identified four characteristics of self concept. You may recognize these from the pupils you considered in a previous task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of self concept (Lawrence 1996)</th>
<th>Some basic points to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td>Do they appear upright in their posture, using eye contact where appropriate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiet, shy, may be withdrawn.</td>
<td>Do they join in with activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will avoid the situation that may expose failure.</td>
<td>Are they part of a group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the pupil participate or avoid involvement in a task or activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compensation</strong></td>
<td>Do they question either the relevance of activity or their involvement in it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing, dominant personality.</td>
<td>Do they move from group to group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May fight back rather than risk failure.</td>
<td>Do they appear to fall out frequently with others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are they fearful of being put down, tending to criticize first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Do they repeat the same task or activities and appear to fail deliberately?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative perception of the self illustrated through comments, remarks made.</td>
<td>Do they start and restart a task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do they initiate activities or wait for individual instruction or guidance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
<td>Do they reject any support or guidance even when they have not understood the focus of the task or activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejects any support or guidance offered.</td>
<td>Do they avoid adult approval during task completion?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Lawrence, 1966)
In his early writings (1968) Abraham Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs, within his theory a prominent position was given to self esteem. Maslow proposed that in order to achieve ‘potential’ and learn, we must have our needs met as we pass through a series of stages.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: pupil characteristics identified by TAs

Training materials developed for the implementation of the Behaviour and Attendance strand of the Key Stage Three Strategy (DfES, 2004) also make this link and emphasize
the importance of understanding Maslow’s stages in promoting effective learning opportunities. It is important to recognize that a structured response to positive behaviour management within a school promotes **behaviour for learning**.

As you can see from the diagram above a positive response to pupils who are ‘stuck’ within a level is crucial if their needs are to be met and an opportunity to reach self actualization (in this context learning) is to occur.

Clearly links can be made to the Inclusion, Behaviour and other policies within your school at each stage of this model and reinforces aspects of self esteem that we have already examined.

### Activity

**Do I recognize these stages of development?**

Assess if you support these stages within your school setting.

Identify what you do now and what you need to do to ensure that you actively support these stages.

Identify the links to the school behaviour policy.

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An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

3.3.4 Teaching and Learning Activities use behaviour management strategies in line with the school’s policy and procedures.

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I have also used Maslow’s model to consider the role that a TA could have in supporting systems and structures within school settings and to consider the needs of individual pupils, by building sensitively stage by stage. Conclusions reached after discussions with TAs are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maslow stage</th>
<th>TA strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self actualization</td>
<td>Affirm as a person, recognize and acknowledge success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect and self esteem</td>
<td>Praise and encouragement, respond to individual needs, give time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Love, identity and belonging

Express an interest in the pupil, acknowledge strengths and interests, be a good listener, acknowledge and affirm, use positive non-verbal signals, use reward system.

Psychological

Acknowledgement of the person, positively reinforce task or behaviour, allow time for interactions between TA and pupil, check pupil’s understanding of task or events that have happened, collaborate with teacher over differentiation, use behaviour policy to structure interaction.

Physical

Greet each pupil by name, smile, use school interventions to address physical needs e.g. spare PE kit.

Developing emotional literacy

Much has been written recently about emotional intelligence and emotional literacy and how a greater understanding of these concepts can enable us to be more effective in our roles in supporting the teaching and learning experiences of our pupils.

Whilst some imply that the terms are interchangeable, I prefer to view them separately and in this context focus on the process of understanding and managing emotions.

The links between understanding and managing emotions and the development of self esteem are critical in ensuring the optimum environment is created for learning to be both meaningful and successful for the pupil and educator involved.

Salovey (1989) defines emotional intelligence as:

The ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.

Goleman (1996) defines emotions as:

not just intangible but chemical and neurological responses essential for survival and well being.

and notes that:

... IQ at best contributes 20% to factors that determine life success.

The opportunity exists therefore for educators in schools to ensure that their influence, through the relationships they develop, is positive. We should consider the impact we can have in providing the right kind of experiences not only for successful completion of tasks and achievement of potential, but for consolidation and transference of success to other settings and experiences.
Whilst this clearly links to self esteem, it also indicates the degree of self awareness that is necessary, particularly for you as a TA, in the role you have with individual pupils in creating the opportunity for learning to take place. Responding appropriately to the emotional needs of pupils and ensuring these needs are met requires skill, sensitivity and empathy.

An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

**2.5 They know the key factors that can affect the way pupils learn.**

Harry’s TA had to plan carefully as his responses to either the task set, the teacher, or other pupils were so varied and unpredictable. She had to be aware of her own behaviour and how she responded when he was particularly challenging.

Understanding your own emotional responses in the context of the needs of individual pupils will enable you to contribute directly to a classroom climate that openly supports the needs of all learners for both educators (adults) and pupils. Hay McBer (2000) identified that ‘a positive classroom climate includes feeling emotionally supported, empowering pupils to try new things and learn from mistakes’.

### Activity

- What are my beliefs about emotions and learning?
- What is my classroom climate? (Chapter 1)
- What do I contribute now?
- What changes could we discuss? (Chapter 2)
- How might this impact on teamwork? (Chapter 3)
- Do we need to consider:
  - structures that are in place;
  - implementation of policies – the interpretation of policies in the classroom;
  - relationships;
  - acknowledging individuals;
  - learning activities?
An example of an HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

2.9 They know a range of strategies to establish a purposeful learning environment and to promote good behaviour.

What can we do?

You can teach pupils to understand and express emotional needs clearly and also provide positive feedback to pupils and colleagues.

As a TA you need to demonstrate how to connect positive actions that support an individual pupil’s recognition of a sense of self or identity and thus support their development of a sound self-concept (through, for example ‘self talk’, see below).

You can also (where appropriate) share personal emotional responses demonstrating the skills of empathy and understanding.

Strategies for positive behaviour management

In order to begin to manage behaviour effectively we need to understand ourselves and how we react when dealing with behaviour difficulties. This knowledge enables us to begin to be aware of the powerful influence that we have over how a young person feels.

The table below outlines some strategies that can build self esteem and promote positive behaviour management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>TA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive statements</td>
<td>The use of a positive record book or diary.</td>
<td>Amber’s TA used this to enable her to record success and reflect on her feelings with weekly sessions to discuss this. Jim’s TA used a daily positive statement book and stickers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You and I messages</td>
<td>Modelling positive language by using I statements, encouraging activities e.g. circle time that use I statements: I am worried, I feel happy.</td>
<td>Harry responded well to modelling using positive language. Jim’s TA actively adapted her language to I messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>TA</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive self talk</td>
<td>Allow pupils to visualize scenarios in which previously they have been unsuccesful, provide them with positive statements to overcome their perceived sense of failure and offer ways of achieving real success. Talk them through a different approach to a problem. This is a systematic strategy that works.</td>
<td>Harry needed a ‘script’ for lessons he found challenging particularly the first ten minutes when he found it hard to settle. Amber responded to metaphor e.g a curtain coming down for not understanding a task, staircase for success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach children positive</td>
<td>I am valued in my group.</td>
<td>Amber and her TA used daily affirmations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self talk and ways to</td>
<td>I belong to this class.</td>
<td>Jim’s TA used them to reinforce one-to-one sessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>overcome and bounce off</td>
<td>My skills are valued.</td>
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<tr>
<td>some of the negative</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>messages directed back</td>
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<td>at them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affirmations</td>
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<tr>
<td>These build on the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power of self talk and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can be used in many</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ways.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Can be unconditional (for the person) or linked to tasks. Both must be meaningful and affirming.</td>
<td>TA communicates to teacher. Harry, Amber and Jim’s TA all ensured this happened and used smiles, stickers, certificates, comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

3.3.2 They communicate effectively and sensitively with pupils to support their learning.

We, as educators, are part of the process of developing self esteem in pupils. Consider the potential negative influences that we can present.

- Emphasis on negative language to describe events with no recognition of what has gone well. For example, a noisy lesson with a group, ignoring the quality of the task and completion that may also have happened.
- Using assemblies and other times when pupils are in large groups to repeatedly stress situations that may only apply to a few e.g. uniform infringements, litter, movement around the school.

Often there are **pressure moments** within a school timetable when staff responses to these stressors can culminate, often accidentally, in what Canfield and Wells (1976) called
'killer statements'. These manifest themselves as either verbal or non-verbal negative statements that can have the effect of making someone feel worse as a result of an interaction. They undermine an element of an individual’s self esteem. They may be in the way we speak, not only to pupils, but also to colleagues, the words we choose, or the emphasis, tone of voice, or accompanying gestures.

**Activity**

Be honest – what killer statements do you use?

Are you more likely to use verbal or non verbal behaviour?

Are there some times of the day or week when you are more likely to use more killer statements?

We must be aware that pupils acutely observe our interactions and, therefore, opportunities exist for modelling clear communication and positive interaction with our colleagues. The quality of relationships we have with the other adults we work with will determine the effectiveness of the learning environment for the pupils.

An HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

1.4 They work collaboratively with colleagues, and carry out their roles effectively knowing when to seek help and advice.

I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.

(Hiam Ginott, 1972)

The language, both verbal and non-verbal, that you use, not only to pupils but about them to other adults in the school setting, can influence the development of the young person’s self concept. Skills of communication are vital in underpinning the relationship that exists between staff and pupils. These skills may need to be taught to the pupils, but first consider yourself.
Activity

Ask colleagues to observe you as you interact with pupils and record the context (as you may find that your responses change in different situations). Consider:

What body language do you adopt?

What words do you choose to use?

Do your words and gestures match?

How do you communicate with the teacher or other adult in the situation?

How do you use space and move around the classroom?

What is the first strategy you adopt in addressing a behaviour problem?

What are the outcomes?

Did you ‘escalate’ any situation?

An HLTA Standard relevant to this theme is:

3.1.2 Working within a framework set by the teacher, they plan their role in lessons including how they will provide feedback to pupils and colleagues on pupil's learning and behaviour.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

Cleo is studying on our Foundation degree. As she has been a TA in a primary school for a number of years she decided to take the opportunity to focus on her behaviour and responses from pupils for an assignment. She was confident that she could demonstrate how her beliefs about a positive approach to behaviour management enhanced her pupils’ learning opportunities. Rather than rely solely on feedback from colleagues who observed her she arranged to be videoed, in order that she could analyze it herself. Cleo thought that she was always positive in her interactions with staff and pupils. She always thought about her choice of language and chose her words carefully. However, she was not prepared for what the video revealed. She did use positive language, but when the sound was turned down it revealed that her non-verbal language was much more powerful than her verbal language and was not empowering and affirming, but critical and at times judgmental. This enabled Cleo to understand why she did not always get the response from pupils that she wanted. Other staff in the school also chose to be videoed and analyzed their own behavior. The outcomes surprised them and contributed to the professional development of all involved.
Cleo’s experience may enable you to understand why you are not getting the response you planned for. Rogers (2000) refers to the notion of congruence: the words you use and the way in which you deliver them should match. Disparity in either will block communication with the pupil you are supporting. These are skills that need to be recognized and practised (Chapter 3). Completing a task such as the one above can also improve communication and collaboration between staff and enable you to provide evidence to meet HLTA Standards, for example in this case Standard 1.6.

**The self esteem of the TA**

Research with TAs beginning their studies on the Foundation degree elicited the following responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to describe me as I am now: self image</th>
<th>How I would like to be: ideal self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uneasy</td>
<td>Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking in confidence</td>
<td>Self assured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of touch</td>
<td>Outward going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired</td>
<td>Not stuttering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitated</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehensive</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>Even tempered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Self assured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Liked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Tactful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These comments all relate to the self esteem of the TA, and therefore will affect how the TA is able to work alongside the teacher to support effective teaching and learning in the classroom.
Activity

Reflect

Do you identify with any of the comments in the self image column?

What can you do to overcome some of the negative feelings and identify with the more assertive comments in the second column?

Do you need more information from colleagues, for example, or to clarify your role in a specific situation?

The **Johari Window** is a model we can apply to looking at self and encourage us to look at our sense of self with regard to our professional role. It was designed by two psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (cited in White, 1995).

The use of a window as ‘an analogy of a model of self’ is apt as it allows us to hide as much, or reveal as much, as we choose.

It is apposite in considering the role of the TA as your professional role is evolving and changing not only in response to your individual needs but in the wider context of change within schools and the remodelled workforce (Chapter 2).

Briefly the model is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to self</th>
<th>Not known to self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Known to others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Open</strong> What I know about me and what you know about me. You can see this all the time. TA responses: I know I am flexible, reliable, consistent, fair, informed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not known to others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hidden</strong> What I know about me and what you do not know. I keep this hidden, I may share it with you and if I do this information will then be in my open window as we both know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TAs on our Foundation degree completed this by focusing on their perception of the role of a TA. Examples of their comments are included above and indicate how the role of the TA changes as confidence increases and acknowledgement from others occurs.

**Activity Johari Window**

Complete your own Johari window
Consider how this highlights your strengths and skills
Can you match any of these to HLTA Standards highlighted in this chapter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to self</th>
<th>Not known to self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Known to others</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known to others</td>
<td>Hidden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Understanding the importance of the role that you have within a learning organisation is the beginning of a process that will hopefully enable you to develop a clear sense of purpose. Without that it will be more difficult for you to promote self esteem as part of your practice. The language you use, your non-verbal communication and the types of interactions you display to other adults in the school give an indication of the degree to which you are committed to ensuring that relationships and communication are valued and acknowledged. Pupils will be aware of the quality of relationships they observe. Acknowledge yourself and all your positive qualities and successes every day!

Further reading