

What students talk about when they talk about reading in a L2

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Why is self-concept relevant in a learning context?

Self-concept = beliefs about oneself

Links with:

- **Achievement**
- **Motivation**

Purpose and methods of research

- What elements make up students' L2 reading self-concepts?
- How do these self-concepts change over a course of study?
- How might L2 reading self-concepts vary?
- Students (104) on Grad Dip course in Management & Finance (2009/10)
- Questionnaire x 2 on reading and learning
- Interviews x 3 (3 high language, 6 low language participants)

Theoretical underpinning

- In self research, language is key – people talk about themselves
- Rom Harré's 'Singular Self' (1998)
 - Self is a frame for the discourse of the “flow of personal action” – or self-reflective discourse
 - Self views are constituted moment-to-moment in social interaction
- Self questionnaires and interviews = genres of discourse

Key findings from the quant data

Main themes...

Perception of competence
Perception of difficulty
Affect towards reading

reading associated
with learning

Value of reading

Assessment impacted
on self concepts

- Reading was seen as very important but its **value decreased over the period**;
- Perception of competence **increased significantly over the period** (I used these scores as a way of grouping interview data)

Integrating the data: the story of L2 reading

Academic context

Based on
Pollard &
Filer
(1996)

Who? Self-identity

- Cultural identity, material circumstances and significant others
- Intellectual, physical, cultural and linguistic resources
- General self-views
- Future life plan

What? Learning challenges

- What read?
- challenges/**difficulties** = reading for study, processes, language

How? Learning stance

- motivation (course, **value**, **affect**)
- Initial **competence**
- strategies
- persistence

How? Learning in the social setting

- new cultural context
- learning support
- resisting/ accepting instruction

What? Learning outcomes

- Assessment: **scores; impact on self-views**
- What was learnt (later **competence**)



Igor: high-high competence

Significant other:...first of all she really does believe in myself and she said you know it is just marks ... and if you really if you willing to learn something, you will, you will be able to do it by yourself because there are a lot of books for information. So it is not a problem because I always understood that my mother wouldn't punish me so I tried studying, I tried to do my best [uh huh] because I don't have feeling of fear

Challenge/stance

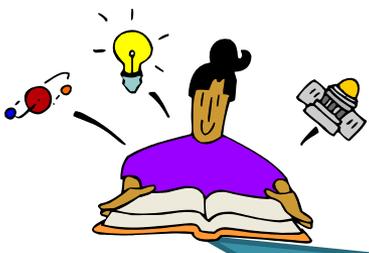
IG: ...I ... actually now I'm reading some ..er...books and magazines but as I said about science, also I'm reading about er ... oratory [uh huh] yes, it is quite interesting because the writer is erm teaching you how the great orators in the past er wrote their speeches, what method they used

Int: and you're reading this in English?

IG: yes [yes] all in English [uh huh] and also I read in Russian but but a little [um] because, because I enjoy reading in English ...

Int: so you're reading this stuff in English because ..

IG: ...because it helps me to improve myself it I find it interesting (term 2)



Emily: low-high competence

“...like a landscapes picture, there are hills, mountains, rivers, and just imagine that I go along the bank of the river when is very easy material with a lot of flowers (laughs) and then ... you go to the mountain, at the top of the mountain it's very difficult but the size is very...extraordinary, you can see a lot of things...and the sky, the cloud, many animals like the bear the giraffe or anything which is very excited... that is the refund if you try your best in the most difficult words...(it's) rewarding because the more difficult the more knowledge you can get from this...” [T2 motivation/affect]

so I have the way that I told you before, just step by step ...just take erm .. half an hour for one page that is very difficult and then let it out later tomorrow you can finish [um] it's .. the most .. I think ..the most.... the most perfect plan that I do for difficult material [T2] [Strategy]



Zac: low-low competence

Challenge/affect: Still also difficult is vocabulary and also some structure some long sentence, maybe when I finish read I don't know the meaning and I should read again again but also sometimes I can't understand it ... This kind of book is already make me more tired yeah because I should focus on the book and understand what the author to say ...sometimes it's difficult to understand so I should read it again and again, review it, its er is lots of time...[T2]

when you find the difficult you will worry about it and not exciting you... more reading is make the feelings sometimes is terrible sometimes is boring and you want to give it up... [T2]

Outcome...my aim is to study in the next October ... but now one course is failed...the university require score [right] so I can't stay here so I think I'm a loser (sighs) ah...for students the successful is you get the results what you want [yeah] yeah so I'm not good [T3]

Key features

Low - high comp

Read a lot but less outside course

Affect became positive

High-high comp

Read a lot – and widely outside course – were ‘readers’

Positive affect

Understood nature of task of academic reading (quantity, self-direction, analysis/criticality)

Focussed on information - less concerned with language – interested & rewarded by knowledge

Had or developed effective strategies for reading (e.g text structure knowledge, SQ3R)

Persevered with difficult, important (business) texts

By end of course: more confident, read faster, less reliant on dictionaries/ better able to guess; appropriate & effective study reading skills

Key features – Low-low comp

Read less – narrow range

Negative affect – also in L1

Focussed on language & comprehension, esp. vocabulary

Did not understand scale and nature of study reading

Did not overcome preoccupation with vocabulary

Did not find strategies that worked for them (resorted to L1); poor strategies for improvement

Did not persist

Poor self-discipline

Strong focus on performance goals (scores)

Lack of interest in reading for knowledge

By end of course: some small improvement but never understood what to do to succeed in reading for study

Some conclusions/implications...

- Students are not in an “asocial, timeless state when they engage in reading. They are social beings with a biography and aspirations that contextualise”* their reading experiences.
- On an academic course, L2 reading is linked to assessment → long term life goals
- Self- concept changed over the period – especially perceptions of competence
- Students’ self beliefs impact on their study success – it’s not just language!
- Spot possible failing students early on → better support



*Mann,
2000,
p. 315



The end

Thanks for listening!

Harré, R. (1998). *The singular self*. London: Sage

Mann, S. J. (2000). The student's experience of reading. *Higher Education*, 39(3), 297-317.

Pollard, A. & Filer, A. (1996). *The social world of children's learning*. London: Cassell.