

REFLECTIVE POWER: BOOSTING YEAR 10 BOYS' METACOGNITION
THROUGH PEER FEEDBACK

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Abstract

Through my action research, I have come to understand that metacognition can be described as the capacity to reflect on and then manage one's thinking to reach a desired goal. I wanted to investigate the hypothesis that students' metacognitive skills of planning, monitoring and evaluating their performance in the classroom can be enhanced through cycles of feedback and reflection. Therefore, my research focused on how peer-provided feedback and self-reflection might develop boys' sense of agency, empowering them to take control of their learning. Specifically, I wanted the boys to take greater responsibility for their learning: to actively engage with the feedback process (by providing it for their peers and reflecting upon it) to help them improve their work. The participants in my project were the boys in my Year 10 English class, who planned, designed, and created their own response to an inquiry question based on our class text, the short-story anthology *Town* by James Roy (2007).

A series of feedback cycles embedded within the creative process enabled boys to voice their choices and thus experience a sense of agency (control of and investment in their learning journey). I collected data in the form of boys' feedback, reflective journals, photos, videos, interview and questionnaire responses, and observations and then thematically coded and interpretatively analysed the data. My findings suggest that peer feedback increased the boys' sense of independence and responsibility and worked to boost their motivation to create change. Furthermore, reflecting on peer feedback appeared to nurture a growth mindset in the boys – another indicator of metacognition.

Glossary

Peer feedback cycles: Refers to the practice of students providing written feedback to their peers and then collating and synthesising the feedback provided, reflecting upon ways it can help shape the next stage of their project. It is a loop of “feedback-and-forth” amongst the boys – they provide and receive feedback to and from each other to improve their work before submitting it for final assessment. In this action research, peer feedback is almost a synonym for formative assessment.

Metacognition: Originally defined by Flavel (cited in Nguyen, 2016) as “the human ability to reflect on one's knowledge and control one's knowledge and thinking” (p.76). Over the years, this has been further refined to include “self-reflective thinking processes” (Joseph, 2006, p.33). Metacognitive skills, particularly as they pertain to my action research, are the “ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate” one's performance (Joseph, 2006, p.33). Importantly, a focused effort on strengthening students' metacognitive

skills “empowers students to take responsibility for their learning” (Victoria State Government, 2019b, p.2) and thus their agency.

Student agency: Refers to the propensity to initiate change to create a desired future. Logan (2009) confirms that agency is developed through reflection and through voice in peer feedback, where students are “taking more responsibility for their learning ... [and the] opportunity to set the criteria” (p. 34). In other words, students who have the opportunity to exercise voice and choice in their own learning “have a greater chance of becoming resilient and independent learners” (Victoria State Government, 2019a, para. 4).

Introduction

In an ironic twist of a paradoxical quirk, it is a sign of a teacher’s success when they become redundant in the lives of their students. For me, the very disposition of being quietly confident that I am successful when I am no longer needed unmasks the power of student agency. And whilst the concept of agency has been a fundamental tenet of pedagogical practice for decades, if not centuries, it was considered a “top trend” in education in 2014 when embedded in the overall culture of a school (CORE Education, 2019). Regardless of its inception, the power of learner agency and its “cousin,” metacognition, cannot be underestimated, particularly because of the diverse and enduring benefits it has for students, including their development as “independent learners who control their learning and learn how to learn for life” (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2003, p.9).

Background

In an article on understanding boys (Gill, 2017), Professor John Hattie explains the power of feedback to unlock their learning potential. He notes there are two key components of impactful feedback: the provision of “where to next” information and listening to, or using, that feedback to enhance learning. When boys are given opportunities to really listen to the feedback they have been given, they can become agents of change. I undertook research in this area because I wanted to develop both the boys’ sense and expression of genuine agency (ownership, control ... *power*) over their learning through the development of their metacognitive skills. My action research, therefore, was designed to enable the boys to take greater ownership of the choices they make in their learning and improve the quality and use of peer and self-reflective feedback cycles. In other words, the boys’ own choices would be evident in their product and their voices would be reflected in the refinement of that product.

Through the peer feedback cycles, I hoped to create a mind shift in the boys from being passive or compliant members of the class, blindly churning through the assigned tasks to “play the game” of school, to become active and engaged designers of their own learning path, keenly committed to designing, creating and crafting their learning in order to “write the rules” of their game of school.

Action Research Methodology

Action research was the most appropriate methodology for my project because the introduced instructional and pedagogical change would occur in the classroom in real-time and on the boys' terms. This methodology also allowed me to understand my own practices, in the context of these boys and their English lessons, so I could improve them for the benefit of my students (Mertler, 2017). This led me to investigate the research question: *How does peer feedback cycles strengthen boys' metacognitive skills in a Year 10 English class?*

It made sense to adopt methods of qualitative data collection, as my research was grounded in reflective practice. It was content-specific, focused on the development of particular skills, and the data gathered were language-based narratives using the boys' spoken and written reflections as well my own field notes and videoed observations. Importantly, the action research saw me handing over much of the decision-making to the boys and, in doing so, I was conveying to them that I was confident of their capacity to make their own choices and that their feedback and opinions were valid and valued. Giving students power over what they learn and how they show it is quite appealing to boys because it affirms their significance and worthiness in the group.

Strengthening metacognition through peer and self-reflective feedback loops effectively addresses what Adam Cox (2019) referred to in his *Cracking the Boy Code* plenary session as the greatest fear of boys – the question, “Am I worthy?” To address this fear, each boy in my research produced their own project in their own way. They were given liberty to express themselves as they wanted to and were reliant upon the helpful feedback of their peers that affirmed and validated that what they were doing was important and worthy, and was to be celebrated.

I introduced the purpose of my action research to the boys, explaining that for their final assessment they would design their own question and choose the format of their response based on their personal strengths and/or interests. I also explained that I would take a “step back” on providing feedback so that they could take a “step forward” and provide feedback for each other through a series of feedback-and-forth cycles and self-reflections. The boys would need to “step up” to this challenge.

Data were gathered continuously and in multiple ways via pre- and post-action surveys, my field notes and reflections of each lesson, videoed observations, samples of boys' peer feedback, boys' self-reflections on the feedback received, semi-structured interviews, and completed work samples.

Literature Review

A starting point for teachers to develop and investigate student agency is action research. Of the 17 key principles of action research identified by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), the one that resonated most strongly with me was the notion that action research “is a systematic learning process in which people act deliberately, though remaining open to surprises and responsive to opportunities” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 300). It is here that the process of conducting action research intersects so beautifully with

the development of agency, since, by its very nature, action research involves “setting advantageous goals; initiating action towards those goals; and reflecting on and regulating progress toward those goals” (Davis Poon, 2018, para.7). Interestingly, these components of action research define the concept of both student agency and metacognition and provided the planning framework for my project with the Year 10 boys. Students who are given the opportunity to exercise choice and their voice in the planning, drafting and assessment processes “have a greater chance of becoming resilient and independent learners” (Victoria State Government, 2019a, para. 4). Moreover, the strengthening of metacognitive skills, such as becoming more “reflective, and aware of one’s progress along the learning path” (Wilson & Conyers, 2014, para. 3) enables the development of “independent learners who control their own learning” (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2003, p. 9).

The fact that there is no single nor simple definition of student agency is a testament to its profound complexity. Agency is meaningful and deliberate “initiative or self-regulation of the learner” (Wenmoth, 2014, para. 4) that enables innovation, creativity and the ability to solve problems, which means that “learners *are in control* and *feel in control* of their own problem-solving process” (Williams, 2016, p. 2). I believe that student agency needs to permeate multiple aspects students’ experiences in order for there to be a gradual mind shift so they can become self-directed learners.

By combining the dimensions of agency, together with Bandura’s list of intrinsic qualities (intention, self-efficacy, forethought, self-regulation and reflection) that need to be present first, within a supportive social context (Bandura, 1982), it becomes clear that the development of student agency is not a once-off or tick-a-box skill. Rather, it is staged, supported, and revisited regularly; it is a disposition, a capacity, a repertoire of beliefs and behaviours that, over time, become learned habits that feed belief and thus, expression of self-efficacy. Moreover, the development of student agency is akin to the strengthening of metacognition – the “ability to think about your thoughts with the aim of improving learning” (Wilson, 2014, para. 2).

When boys were asked during interviews and group discussions in an Australian investigation into boys’ education what they would change about school if they could, “the dominant responses revolved around greater choice and a greater sense of control” (Martin, 2003a, p.29). Furthermore, a “boy-friendly” curriculum is one that emphasises student self-responsibility, is socially supportive and encouraging of risk-taking, and values difference (Lingard, Martino, Mills & Bahr, 2002). Valuing difference means not only listening to what the boys are saying, but understanding, appreciating, and respecting boys’ opinions and perspectives. Reichert (2019) reminds us that what enables a boy to feel valued as a person is to value him as a person; to really hear his voice. Providing boys with choices gives them “some ownership of what they [are] studying and ... a sense that the teacher [respects] them” (Martin, 2003b, p.56). The literature confirms that having agency and being metacognitive involves students actively “making a plan for learning, monitoring their learning path, and recognizing when it might be useful to change course” (Wilson, 2014, para. 1).

Developing agency and metacognitive skills in boys is about deliberately embedding “boy voice and choice” in productive pedagogy that is intellectually demanding (involving hypothesising, generalising, synthesising and evaluating), is connected to their lives, and has a positive impact on improving their learning (Lingard et al., 2002). In other words, being metacognitive is about being made deliberately aware through explicit opportunities to reflect on “one’s progress along the learning path” (Wilson, 2014, para. 3) and thus, becoming more conscious and prepared to make necessary changes to create a desired future. Agentive instruction must strive to combine all of the above elements of enabling boy voice and choice if it is to have any influence. Consequently, my action research involved embedding the four characteristics of agency outlined by Davis Poon (2018) within a supportive classroom environment through cycles of peer- and self-reflective feedback to improve the boys’ metacognitive skills. Furthermore, I extended Logan’s (2009), study, which emphasises the importance of peer- and self-assessment practices to improve learning, by adding the element of “feedback synthesis” as part of self-reflective assessment in a bid to encourage more active use of the peer-provided feedback.

The strength of formative assessment through peer-provided feedback and self-reflection lies in its capacity to foster self-regulation, encourage deeper learning, and develop agency (Brooks, Carroll, Gillies & Hattie, 2019). Formative feedback cycles that guide us in “how to learn what we wish to learn and ... tell us how well we are doing in progress to get there” (Boud, 2000, p. 5) promote both student agency and metacognition in three ways: awareness of requirements and taking steps to better meet them; personal initiation and direction of efforts; and self-efficacy and lifelong learning (Ndoye, 2017). Specifically, “when self and peer assessment are used in a formative manner, they provide the necessary conditions to engage students in their own learning” (Ndoye, 2017, p. 256). Bain (2010) found that dialogic feedback, or a cycle of feedback-and-forth between students at key stages of their learning, validates their voice by encouraging reflection, evaluation and action on matters that concern them. Ultimately, I wanted to research whether the boys in my Year 10 English class strengthened their metacognitive skills and unmasked the power of agency when they “learn with and from each other” (Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 1999, p. 2) through peer feedback, setting their own goals, initiating action towards those goals, and reflecting upon and regulating progress toward those goals.

Research Context

The Hutchins School in Hobart, Tasmania is a non-selective, independent, Anglican day and boarding school for approximately 1100 boys from Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12. Established in 1846, Hutchins is one of the oldest continuously running schools in Australia and is a long-standing member of the IBSC. Consisting of three sub-schools on a shared campus, Hutchins is located in a middle-to-high socioeconomic area and the majority of students are from an English-speaking background.

My Year 10 English class, comprising 21 boys aged 14 to 16 years, participated in my action research. I selected this group because of the interesting mix of personalities, strengths, learning needs, social skills and academic aspirations. Over the six-week period of this project, we met during our normal timetabled

lessons for English twice a week for a double period of 100 minutes. My project's instructional change fell within their unit of study.

All boys were invited to participate in the research action through an information pack that was provided to students and their parents or carers. Informed consent detailed the project's background, objectives, authorisation of media, and anonymity of participants. All boys were informed they could withdraw from the project at any time without consequence and all identifying features of boys' names were removed from the collected data and reporting to ensure their anonymity.

The Action

The crux of my action research was to investigate the influence of peer-provided and self-reflective feedback on the boys' sense and expression of agency, as measured by the strengthening of their metacognitive skills – their capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning.

My action research ran over six weeks - each week the boys were required to provide their peers with specific, helpful feedback to feedforward to the next stage of their project, and to synthesise this feedback in a self-reflection about what their next steps might be to improve their work. It was a three-stage process.

Stage 1: Question Formulation

My action began with a questionnaire to gauge the boys' initial impressions of giving and receiving feedback. Following the pre-action survey, the boys collaboratively created inquiry questions centred on their class text, *Town*, an anthology of short intertwined stories by Australian author, James Roy (2007). I provided explicit instructions on how to compose a “dense” question that addressed the relationship between the text and its contexts. The boys shared their co-created questions and then, individually, selected one question that appealed to them, to pursue for their project.

Stage Two: Choice of Format

Each boy brainstormed several ideas for how he planned to present his response to his chosen question. At this point, feedback from at least five peers was sought in the form of a simple voting slip. Peers ranked their top three preferences of format and also had space to pose a clarifying question or to explain their choices. Logistically, the desks were arranged in a horseshoe shape to enable boys to move easily from one project plan to the next. After voting for five different projects, boys returned to their own desk to collate and reflect upon the votes, noting what was most popular, if this matched their expectations or surprised them, and anything else relevant.

Stage Three: Creation

Following this first feedback loop, boys used their next lesson and homework sessions to draft their response in time for the next feedback loop. This time, the focus of feedback was on how the response met the desired intention. The feedback tool used was Perkins (2003) “Ladder of Feedback” (see

Appendix), a structure the boys were already familiar with, as it provided the student-assessors with a script for giving helpful, specific, and positive feedback. Again, the boys collated the feedback responses provided and uploaded their self-reflection—a synthesis of the feedback—and steps they needed to take to further improve. Lesson and homework time were allocated to heed the feedback to further refine their work before the third and final feedback loop prior to submission. This was a quick “√” and “→” comment, whereby peers read the works and provided one positive comment (the √) and one helpful suggestion for what might be adjusted, moving forward (the →). Each feedback cycle dovetailed the components of metacognition as well as the four components of student agency and related skills as defined by Davis Poon (2018).

Figure 1

Snapshots of Boys Engaging in Peer Feedback Using the Ladder of Feedback Tool



The lessons were structured so that the Wednesday morning session was allocated to planning, creating and refining, in preparation for Monday afternoon’s peer-feedback and the reflective synthesis of that feedback.

Data Collection

The data collection process began with a simple baseline activity—a pre-action survey of open-ended questions to gauge the boys’ initial impressions and perceptions of their metacognitive skills in English and of giving and receiving feedback. One question in the survey also asked the boys to consider the extent to which they felt competent to set goals, plan purposefully, and to work productively, independently, and with perseverance.

Data collection, both formal and informal, continued over the six-week period of my action. During each lesson, I recorded field notes of the boys’ actions, interactions, questions, and behaviours. I also collected their works-in-progress and journaled reflections, either in hard copy or online. During the feedback cycles, I took photos and videos, which enabled me to capture moments and dialogue that I possibly would have

missed. At the conclusion of my research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the boys, in pairs or trios, and recorded and transcribed these.

As the bulk of the research data gathered came directly from the boys, both the credibility and transferability of the results were considered sound. Mills (cited in Mertler, 2017) asserts that data validity is an essential component of action research, for it is crucial that the data collected accurately measure and reflect that which was intended. Moreover, the descriptive validity and factual accuracy are assured because the data have not been distorted, manipulated, nor fabricated in any way. The dependability or trustworthiness of the research was assured through the triangulation of data collection methods, the extended period of time allocated to the action research, member checking, reflexivity, and peer debriefing (Mertler, 2017).

Data Analysis

Following the steps outlined by Löfgren's (2013) video guide, responses from the pre- and post-action surveys, and the transcripts of the interviews and observations were collated and coded for underlying themes, patterns and trends. Comprehensive interpretation of these data led to a clearer understanding of the boys' perceptions of feedback cycles and the impact they have on the boys' learning.

Discussion of Findings

From my thematic coding in response to my research question on how cycles of peer feedback and self-reflection strengthen the metacognitive skills of the Year 10 boys, three broad themes emerged: (1) peer feedback increased the boys' sense of independence and responsibility, (2) peer feedback improved motivation to create change, and (3) reflecting on peer feedback nurtured a growth mindset – another indicator of metacognition.

Peer feedback increased boys' sense of independence and responsibility

From my initial coding and analysis of the data, I was able to distil the major advantage of embedding peer feedback cycles within my English program. In the interviews, all of the boys responded positively to the way the peer feedback enabled them to voice their views, concerns, and suggestions to others, and to choose which parts of the feedback to heed.

The experience of increased independence and responsibility when giving and receiving peer feedback was a sentiment repeated in the collected data. Of the seven boys who directly spoke about independence, one reflected that “having that choice ... made you a lot more independent and understand what you were doing more, because you're doing it to answer a question for yourself as well as for the task.” Here, where the boys worked to refine their inquiry question, the cycles of peer feedback directly strengthened their metacognitive skills, especially their awareness of purpose, as they could, in the words of another boy, “understand what [they] were doing more,” both of the task itself and its relevance to their lives – “you're doing it to answer a question for yourself.” Others, however, found the nudge towards greater self-awareness to be challenging, as the reflection process of the feedback cycle was unfamiliar, overwhelming, and “a bit confusing as well, because we didn't have, like, a structure... We decide what we

get to do and if we decide on the wrong thing to do then we know it's going to reflect." One boy compared it to his experience in an IB school where "it was always 'pick the bullet you're going to shoot your foot with!'" Another boy found the reflective synthesis challenging because "sometimes it can be hard to decide what you're going to do and sometimes you do need a set of instructions to abide by and follow." On the flip side, the experience of being independent and having total ownership and responsibility for the direction of their own project was considered valuable. I was cautioned, however, by a boy's comment: "Don't have it all the time – every now and then, an essay's not too bad!" Such awareness of the benefits of having a variety of learning tasks suggests that the boys' metacognition was strengthened as a result of engaging in cycles of peer feedback and self-reflection.

Related to the increased independence and responsibility was a sense of freedom or "openness" offered through cycles of peer feedback, with one boy confirming that, "since it was so open, it just had that freedom that people in the class really liked," and another who saw the process as "a chance to do our best in an area that we are capable of ... so thanks so much!" It would seem that the opportunity to be open and frank with their peers in a safe, supported and structured manner was a positive experience for both the giver and receiver of feedback, as it felt (to this boy, at least) "like you have freedom to do whatever you are capable of and what you would like to do the best."

Peer feedback improved motivation to create desired change

Another advantage of peer feedback cycles discovered in my analysis of the data was the boys' increased motivation and "care factor" to do well. When asked to elaborate on why he enjoyed the project, one boy concluded: "When you're doing something that you like and you want to do, you're going to put more effort towards it and you're gonna try harder coz [sic] you enjoy the subject and you enjoy what you're doing so doing the work isn't going to be a job for you, it's going to be more pleasure."

After reviewing and analysing the data collected from written observations, photographs, videos and the boys' own reflections, it was obvious that the boys enjoyed the social aspect of the peer feedback cycles, especially seeing what others were doing, and preferred peer feedback to self-reflections, mainly due to the benefit of its reciprocal nature. Moreover, a frequently iterated response to my interview question about which type of feedback the boys preferred was the "Ladder of Feedback" tool, citing its scope, specificity, and its capacity to helpfully improve their work as the main reasons, as well as: "you have quite a detailed explanation about what's actually happened" and "it has a heap of good questions and it's easy". One boy liked how this tool "showed you what you did well, ... what you would need to improve on and also ... things that might be confusing in it," whilst another boy remarked, "because you got a whole range of different feedback from a variety of different students ... they noticed different things about your work ... that you can improve on ... that's what I found really helpful and probably the best." These responses suggest a high level of engagement with not only the feedback but with wanting to improve and refine their work to their full potential.

Reflecting on peer feedback nurtured a growth mindset

Despite my analysis of the categorised data of the survey responses revealing a clear preference for peer feedback, with 8 out of 12 boys identifying this preference and only three boys who preferred self-reflection, my overall interpretation was that it is the self-reflective aspect which holds the key to boosting boys' metacognitive skills in English. During my action research, I did not provide any formal feedback at all; I only assessed their final product and, as this was their culminating task for the year before their exam, there was no real need for me to provide feedback to feed-forward. Having received extensive formative feedback from me all year, it was now the boys' turn to provide that for each other.

My findings indicate that motivation to succeed and metacognitive skills were enhanced when the boys were given the time and opportunity to actively engage in the self-reflection component of peer feedback loops. Being able to mull over the peer feedback, to seriously consider it all, and decide what feedback to heed in order to improve their work, is what strengthened their agency.

My analysis of the data also suggested that peer feedback cycles with embedded self-reflective synthesis helped provide the boys with specific points about how to improve their work, with one boy remarking on its helpfulness to "make sure that it's correct before [they] submit it so [they] have a chance of getting a better grade." The value of feedback, it appeared, lay in one boy's capacity to "take into account all those little bits ... to fine tune coz [sic] at the end of the day it is the little things that matter" to achieve their highest standard. Analysis of the boys' self-reflections where they synthesised the peer feedback received, showed a pattern of heightened self-awareness and a more articulate direction for moving forward to improve their work. The boys made refinements, tweaks and even a total overhaul of their original idea based on the feedback, which suggests how influential and instructive targeted feedback can be. If metacognition is the ability to plan, monitor and evaluate, then it seems that being given time to reflect on peer feedback and act on it is the crucial step towards strengthening boys' metacognitive skills.

By coding the survey responses and interview transcripts, I found that the boys favoured feedback to grades, the latter being perceived by one boy as simply a "benchmark of where you're at ... they tell you how you went." In contrast, feedback that feeds forward seemed, by its very nature, more future-oriented and fostered a growth mindset for all boys. This was highlighted in the interviews especially, where one boy admitted that he would much prefer to not receive grades at all because "when you get your marks back and kids come up to you and they're like, 'What did you get? Did you get an A? Did you get a B?' But in my case, I'm not there yet and so I'd say, 'I did pretty good!'" The fact that this boy was fully aware that he is "not there yet" (my emphasis) confirms this finding. For others, the feedback provided a sort of "roadmap" to reaching a particular destination (a grade standard) and is what the boys use to not only feel good about "what I did well" but also to see "what I can do for next time." Perhaps the most affirming finding came from the boy who concluded that, "if you want to get better and improve, you have to look at the feedback."

Conclusions

Overall, the findings from my action research strongly suggest that peer feedback cycles had a positive influence on the development of the boys' metacognitive skills in the three ways highlighted in my analysis of the data. As learners, they developed their sense and expression of agency; the process of peer feedback cycles enabling the boys to enjoy greater independence in, and responsibility for, their learning. This heightened capacity to exercise their choice and voice, in turn, enhanced the boys' motivation to act on the feedback received, to create change, and to pursue their desired future – an improved project. The repeated cycles of feedback, reflection, and refinement served to bolster the boys' growth mindset, as they strived to improve their work with each iteration, getting closer to their goal every time.

Whilst the notion that we do not learn from an experience ... we learn from reflecting on an experience is a distillation of the insightful works of American philosopher John Dewey, it does hold true in this case. It was not until I deeply reflected upon the data that I could fully understand what my research might mean.

The implications of these findings for my practice are significant. I am now fully aware of the power of peer feedback cycles and the necessity of ensuring adequate time is given for boys to process, synthesise, and reflect on the feedback received. These two elements – structured peer feedback and self-reflection – now form an integral part of my planning and are embedded in my learning programs.

Furthermore, my findings are just the beginning. I would now like to take my research further and to embed the “feedback-and-forth” model of learning within a design thinking pedagogy in the English classroom, in an effort to extend the capacity for the boys' voice and choice to have a real impact on their personal learning journey.

Reflection

Throughout this professional journey, I feel I have grown tremendously as a professional: the breadth and depth of my practice has improved, and the scope of my potential has broadened. I have learned to harness the power of reflective practice, such that I now engage in far more meaningful reflection of my lessons with the view as to how they might be repeated or refined next time to promote deeper learning. I have learned to appreciate my own metacognitive capabilities and trust that my students are developing theirs. And I have learned to embrace the challenges of action research to improve my teaching and the boys' learning.

Initially, I felt overwhelmed by the scale of the project. However, through the pre-conference presentations on the various sections of the project, the ongoing support and advice from my Team Leader, Polly Higgins, and connections made with my co-researchers, my feelings of apprehension were allayed. I am also very grateful to my support network at home: my mentor, James McLeod, for his wise and always well-timed words; my critical (and complimentary) friend, Alison Farmer, whose confidence in me kept me buoyed; and my Headmaster, Dr. Rob McEwan, who endorsed my involvement in this project.

Now at the end of the journey, I am feeling rather proud of what I have accomplished – with the help of others: a profound sense of the power of agency to transform learning. As a result of my action research, I feel I can confidently say that my Year 10 boys are well on their way to being involved, self-motivated learners capable of functioning without constant supervision and reinforcement. Perhaps I am no longer needed in their lives because they are empowered to take control of their own learning ... and that is a good thing!

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APPENDIX

Ladder of Feedback – the boys reviewed their peers’ work-in-progress, filling in the ‘rungs’ of the ladder

LADDER OF FEEDBACK

SPECIFIC, HELPFUL AND KIND FEEDBACK



Step 5: Thanks!

Be grateful for being able to read his work so far:

-

Step 4: Suggest

Offer suggestions for how he might better meet the learning outcomes

(analysing and evaluating the idea of reputation in 2-3 stories and evaluating 2-3 characters)

-

Step 3: Concerns

Write any concerns you have about ideas or specific parts of his work:

-

Step 2: Value

Kindly express what you like about his project so far in specific terms:

-

Step 1: Clarify

Ask a clarifying question to be sure you understood clearly:

-

The Ladder of Feedback

Source: Perkins, D. (2003). *King Arthur's Round Table: How collaborative conversations create smart organisations*. John Wiley & Sons.