SELF-REFERENCING IN THE CLASSROOM WITH PROFESSOR SHEILA J. CUNNINGHAM

RESOURCES

Sheila and her team have established The Self Lab (**www.selflab.co.uk**), a research group based at Abertay University, with links to the Mini Me Lab (**blog.dundee.ac.uk/minimelab**) at the University of Dundee. There is a wealth of information on the Self Lab website about the team's research, including resources for schools and educators (**www.selflab.co.uk/schools-and-educators**).

CPD TRAINING

Sheila and the team are leading research into the positive effects of self-processing biases on children's learning. They can advise on strategies and methodologies to improve children's task engagement and performance, by capitalising on self-cues.

For more details on workshops and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions, please contact Sheila via her email address: **s.cunningham@abertay.ac.uk**

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

You may be interested in reading the following academic papers about applying self-referencing to educational tasks. Please contact Sheila (**s.cunningham@abertay.ac.uk**) if you require access to her lab group's papers.

• Cunningham, S. J., Scott, L., Hutchison, J., Ross, J., Martin, D., 2018. Applying self-processing biases in education: Improving learning through ownership. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 7:3, 324-351. **www.doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2018.04.004**

• D'Ailly, H. H., Murray, H. G., Corkill, A., 1995. The cognitive effects of self-referencing. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 20, 88-113. **www.doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1995.1005**

• D'Ailly, H. H., Simpson, J., MacKinnon, G. E., 1997. Where should "you" go in a math compare problem? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 562-567. **www.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.562**

• Turk, D. J., Gillespie-Smith, K., McGowan, L., Havard, C., Conway, M. A., Krigolson, Cunningham, S. J., 2015. Selfish learning: The impact of self-referential encoding on children's literacy attainment. *Learning and Instruction*, 40, 54-60. **www.doi.org/10.1016/j. learninstruc.2015.08.001**

Testing young children's learning in the lab. Credit: Josephine Ross

SELF-REFERENCING ACTIVITIES YOU CAN TRY IN THE CLASSROOM

MAKE IT ABOUT ME!

Can you name someone who shares your birthday? How about someone whose birthday is today? Most people find the second question more difficult than the first, because the answer to the first question is linked to information about you – it is self-referent. When you hear of someone sharing your birthday, that is likely to attract your attention and you can store the information alongside your own self-knowledge, supporting memory.

Think about how you could apply this effect in the classroom – how can you create a link between the information and the learner? With a bit of thought, many classroom tasks can be made self-referent by asking the learner to think about themselves. For example:

• Learning about biological structures: "Colour this picture to look like *your* eye, then label the structures within it."

• Learning about volume: "Which objects in *your* house could hold the largest and smallest volumes of water?"

• Literacy learning: "Write a paragraph about a recent event in *your* life. Now underline all the nouns and circle all the verbs in your paragraph."

• Learning about political processes: "Can you find a law change that has affected *you* in your lifetime?"

The Self Lab group, summer 2021.

LEARNING THROUGH OWNERSHIP

When we take ownership of an item, we pay more attention to it and are more likely to remember it than other, similar items. For example, when sitting in the staff room at lunch time, we are very good at tracking which of the many coffee cups on the table contains our own drink!

You can take advantage of this effect by using ownership games in the classroom, with objects or flash cards. You could:

• Arrange your learners in pairs and ask them to take turns to reveal flash cards (containing items you want the class to learn, e.g., spelling words, second-language vocabulary, science facts) laid face-down on a table.

• Each card has a coloured sticker that is revealed when the card is turned over, and the card is given to whichever player has ownership of that colour (e.g., player 1 collects all the cards with a red sticker).

• Once all the cards have been revealed and given to their owner, remove them and ask the pupils to remember what was on their own cards, and what was on their partner's – this can get quite competitive!

From the pupils' perspective, the game is exciting because it is about who collects all their cards first, and who can remember the information contained on them. From the teacher's perspective, the learners are engaging with the information shown on the cards, which will help them to remember it.

The game can be repeated so that everyone has a turn at owning each set of flash cards. This is an effective activity because pupils are engaged in monitoring the information they 'own', eliciting self-referencing and therefore supporting memory and learning.