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'Marks. Set. Go?': Pupils' perspectives on ability groupings in relation to academic self-concept and self-efficacy.

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Abstract

Children's academic self-concept and self-efficacy are key precursors for positive motivational and performance traits to develop, but in what way are these characteristics affected by the implementation of ability groupings in schools? Placed within a varied background of established research and literature, this research seeks to gain insight into pupils' perspectives on ability groupings with reference to their identify as a learner, their motivation to learn and their understanding of the practice in itself. The mixed-method research design adopted across a sample of Year 3 and Year 6 children indicated that children across the sample understood the premise of ability grouping, but that it was perceived to prioritise the needs of children in lower achieving groups. Moreover, the divisive, homogenous nature of ability groupings were shown to damage some pupils' self-perception – in some cases leading to maladaptive patterns of learning – and to diminish the importance of the individual.

'Marks. Set. Go?': Pupils' perspectives on ability groupings in relation to academic self-concept and self-efficacy.

Introduction

Ensuring development of the 'whole child' has long contributed to the foundations of educational theory, documentation and reform. At the forefront of this consideration, especially in recent years, stands pupils' social and moral development and, more specifically, their academic self-concept and self-efficacy; an individual's image of himself in terms of academic capacity and his perception of his ability to achieve academic goals. Children's self-concept and self-efficacy "both predict motivation, emotion, and performance" (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003: 1), highlighting the importance of pupils maintaining positive perspectives of themselves in order for positive motivational and performance traits to develop.

In the classroom, therefore, practices must be implemented that actively promote such positive self-perception, alongside ensuring attainment levels are achieved. In this light, organisational aspects of the classroom, namely the grouping of pupils by ability, have become a contentious issue. Research conclusions regarding the effects of ability grouping on pupils' self-perceptions vary widely and it is these perceptions that may ultimately result in lower motivation and performance, especially for particular groups of children.

Based on the statistic that "in the UK one in six pupils are divided according to their academic ability by the age of seven" (The Guardian, 2012, 9 February), consideration of ways in which ability grouping and academic self-perception are related seems worthwhile. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to gain insight into pupils' perspectives on ability grouping and compare this to their self-concept and self-efficacy in order to identify possible statistical relationships. In particular, this research aims to consider the following questions:

1. Does grouping pupils by ability alter their identity as a learner and impact their motivation to learn?

2. Do pupils' perceptions of the concept of ability and ability groupings change with age?

To begin, a review of literature surrounding the subject will be considered as a means to identify key threads of the argument that will later inform data analysis.

Literature Review

The development of ability grouping in the primary classroom

Implementation of ability grouping practices first gained popularity during the 1930s as a result of the Hadow Report (Board of Education, 1926), which encouraged schools to stream pupils as a means to ensure effective selection for secondary education. Streaming is the process by which pupils within an age phase are placed within the same fixed, ability-based groups for all lessons. This practice also seemed consistent with the concept of inherited, fixed intelligence that was popular with psychologists at that time. However, the effects of ability grouping practices in reference to academic merits were later criticised, most notably by the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council For Education, 1967), which found that pupils in the lower streams not only exhibited low self-esteem, but also were not greatly compensated for this in terms of increased academic achievement. Indeed, the report noted that "streaming can be wounding to children [...] No more certain way could be found of alienating children from school" (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967: 292). In contrast to previous research, the report advocated a return to mixed ability teaching, as it "produces a happy school and an atmosphere conducive to learning" (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967: 291). The report recognised the importance of the 'whole child', their social well-being and their self-perception as factors equally important for their education, whilst simultaneously presenting research that brought the validity of ability grouping for attainment purposes into question.

The introduction of the National Curriculum as part of the Education Reform Act in 1988 continued to highlight the importance of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, but no longer promoted use of mixed-ability teaching. In 1997, The government White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' stated: "unless a school can demonstrate that it is getting better than expected results through a different approach, we do make the presumption that setting should be the norm in secondary schools and worth considering in primary schools" (Department for Education and Employment, 1997: 38). In contrast to streaming, setting is the grouping of children across an age phase according to their ability in each lesson. This preference for ability-based

teaching was more explicitly referenced in 2007, wherein one of the actions for 'urgent improvement' in the school reform plan was to "deliver more teaching by ability which stretches the strongest and nurtures the weakest" (Conservative Party, 2007: 9), clearly advocating an ability-based approach to classroom management and teaching.

However, since this time and despite the change in government, reference to ability grouping practices have remained inexplicit. The most recent reference is, in fact, not published in official documentation, but rather in response to a report by The Guardian newspaper, in which a spokesperson from the Department for Education is reported to have commented:

> "It is for schools to decide how and when to group and set pupils by ability as they are best placed to know and meet the learning needs of their pupils. Research shows that when setting is done well it can be an effective way to personalise teaching and learning to the different needs of groups of pupils."
>
> (The Guardian, 2012, 9 February)

Within this statement, there is no question as to the implementation of ability grouping, rather, the question comprises logistical features; the "how and when". Here, the focus of 'effective' practice centres on personalising learning to *groups* of children, which is of course a central theme, but makes no mention of the focus on the *individual* and, more specifically, their SMSC wellbeing. Almost as if to remedy this, the requirements laid out in the forthcoming National Curriculum for 2014 state that "every state funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which [...] promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils" (Department for Education, 2013: 5). However, where schools' organisation is based upon ability grouping, the development of the 'whole child' is arguably subdued, to the detriment of pupils' intellectual progression. It is from this perspective that research proposes the alternative approach of within-class ability grouping, whereby pupils are grouped according to attainment within their classes, rather than year groups. Research has argued that "within-class ability grouping is seen as a means of raising attainment that avoids the social and emotional disadvantages of streaming" (McIntyre & Ireson, 2002: 249) and it is this perspective that will now be considered.

Perceived advantages of within-class ability grouping

Effective evaluation of classroom practices comprises consideration of advantages for both teaching and learning, and a review of ability grouping is no exception. From the teacher's point of view,

ability grouping can be an invaluable organisational tool to increase time spent actively teaching focus groups, rather than instructing the whole-class. "On average pupils spend less than a sixth of their time in interaction with their teacher and much of this is as part of whole-class teaching sessions" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 94). Based on an assumption of equally shared time between all ability groups, within-class groupings may allow teachers greater access to the learning of all pupils, as the organisation "provides teachers with the opportunity to meet the needs of groups of pupils, of different abilities, through the modification of learning objectives and pace of instruction" (Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998: 57). Tracking the progress of groups of children is simplified and teachers can more easily implement altered instruction to meet the needs of these groups of children, starting from where the learner (albeit a group) is and promoting strategies to ensure progress is made by all. It has thereby been proposed that the main advantage of ability grouping is its "flexibility" (Hallam et al., 2002: 98), as teachers are easily able to adapt their instruction and restructure groupings according to formative assessments, ensuring all children are achieving their full potential.

Furthermore, the organisation of pupils into such ability groupings is argued to increase communication and peer support, whilst "working cooperatively may [also] increase pupil motivation" (Hallam, 2002: 74-75). When seated with similarly able peers, pupils are provided with a like-minded forum in which to express their ideas, which may seem less intimidating than that provided by a mixed-ability grouping. By learning to support one another at an appropriate level, children not only consolidate their own knowledge, but develop skills that are key to their SMSC development and, therefore, increase avenues for the nurture of a positive self-concept. As a result, pupils' attainment may increase, not least because they receive both extended peer and teacher support. This view is echoed by several studies related to ability grouping and achievement (Slavin, 1990; Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulson, Chambers & d'Apollonia, 1996), though the extent to which attainment increases solely due to the parameter of ability grouping, rather than the reduced group size and increased teacher input, remains unconfirmed.

Perceived disadvantages of within-class ability grouping

In contrast, many studies and researchers have shown preference for a mixed-ability approach to within-class grouping, as it is proposed to produce "improved attitudes towards school [and ...] given that motivation and positive attitudes are important to learning, such issues cannot be

ignored" (Norris & Aleixo, 2003: 61). It is these positive attitudes and motivations upon which positive academic self-concept and self-efficacy are built, without which pupils are less likely to achieve. It has been argued that pupils "compare their self-perceptions of their own achievements with the perceived abilities of other students in their frame of reference" (Ireson & Hallam, 2001: 46). Where within-class ability grouping is in place, this peer-comparison is enhanced.

For higher achieving pupils, reduced effort and complacency may ensue as pupils recognise they are already achieving at a higher level than some of their peers. For their lower achieving counterparts, the structure of their grouping may implement a ceiling to their aspirations; "grouping pupils by ability reduces access of the less able to parts of the curriculum, high-ability role models and examples of high-quality work which they might emulate" (Hallam et al., 2002: 80). This view is reminiscent of Vygotsky's social constructivist view of learning, in which "the only good learning is that which is in advance of development" (Vygotsky, 1978: 82). Where ability groups are in place, pupils will likely have less opportunity to benefit from their more able peers, contributing to negative academic self-concept and self-efficacy, both when they struggle to complete a task without direct teacher input and when they have little opportunity to validate their knowledge.

Further, in contrast to the claim that ability grouping provides "flexibility" (Hallam et al., 2002: 98) for learners, it is alternatively claimed that it promotes a fixed view of intelligence that is damaging to pupils' self-perceptions. In many cases, ability grouping in the classroom is based only on attainment in one subject, most often in English, yet pupils are defined by this grouping for all subjects. Not only does this create a hierarchy in which perceived 'intelligence' in one subject outweighs that of another, but it reduces the notion of effort as instrumental in achievement, negating positive aspects of academic self-efficacy as pupils' achievement appears increasingly defined and limited by the group in which they are placed. When considered in the light of the claim that "a child's chances of remaining in its initial grouping for the rest of its school career are 88-89%" (Dixon, 1999: 1), the possible negative effects of this reduced academic self-efficacy and self-concept seem suddenly more apparent.

Moreover, where pupils are reduced to these group labels and are treated as a group of learners, rather than as individuals, pupils are unlikely to receive the individualised teaching that they require to progress. This perception of groupings of children as homogeneous in their needs gratifies the

claim that within-class ability grouping is "divisive if used as a permanent way of grouping" (Pollard, Anderson, Maddock, Swaffield & Warwick, 2008: 294); it reduces pupils to groups of similarly achieving learners who come to think of themselves in predefined ways, rather than based on their own academic achievements and effort. As Wiliam explains:

> "Students who believe that ability is fixed will see any piece of work as a chance either to reaffirm their ability or to be shown up. If they are confident in their ability to achieve what is asked of them, then they will attempt the task. However, if their confidence in their ability to carry out their task is low, then they may well avoid the challenge."
>
> (Wiliam, 2011: 119)

Motivation, in conjunction with academic self-concept and self-efficacy, is therefore crucial to the development of effective learning behaviours. A study by Sukhnandan and Lee (Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998) found that ability grouping did not enhance performance, but could produce a negative effect on the motivation and self-perception of lower achieving pupils. These pupils, in particular, are vulnerable to the negative effects of ability groupings, as they are conditioned to have "low expectations of themselves [...] leading to self-fulfilling prophecies" (Hallam, 2002: 38). Where ability grouping is presented as a fixed, divisive model, there is a very real danger that children will adopt hierarchical labels of their self and moral worth based solely on the ability constructs with which they are presented, leading not only to negative self-perceptions academically, but socially and personally as well.

Research design

In view of the broad and varied views represented by key literature, briefly summarised above, consideration of within-class ability grouping appeared an ever more poignant research interest to pursue. The school in which the research was conducted implemented ability grouping for all lessons; maths was streamed across each year group, but all other lessons were seated according to within-class ability groupings defined by English (combined reading and writing) attainment levels. The ability-groupings in focus throughout this research comprised these within-class groupings. A mixed-methods approach to the research was adopted, based on the view that "the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell, 2006: 5). To achieve this, a combination of

questionnaires and interviews were adopted to "cross-check findings" (Bell, 2005: 116) through triangulation of data, promoting a collection of data that was both insightful and representative of the population.

Participants

Pupils from one class in both Year 3 and Year 6 were chosen as the subjects for this research. The outlines of the research were sent home for the attention of pupils' parents or carers and a consent form was attached (Appendix 1 and 2). In total, 32 forms were returned and, of these, 26 pupils – 13 from each year group - were selected for the research on the basis of the permissions that had been granted on the consent forms. These pupils comprised the population of the research and completed both of the initial questionnaires. From this, 3 pupils from each year group were selected for interviews to lend further insight into the quantitative data already collected. These children were primarily selected on the basis of their ability groupings; one child from the support (working below national age-related expectations), core (working within national age-related expectations) and extension (exceeding national age-related expectations) groups from both age groups. This use of "purposive samples", rather than randomised selections, where "a deliberate attempt to select participants with known characteristics" (Robson, 2007: 99) is adopted, was a key element of the research, as the parameter of ability groupings was key to making connections with the research question.

Questionnaires

Quantitative data was initially collected to identify pupils' goal orientations and their motivations to learn. This method was presented in terms of a 5 point emoticon Likert scale questionnaire, where the nine questions were adapted from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale (Midgley et al., 2000) (Appendix 3). An emoticon scale was used to increase accessibility for all pupils, especially in consideration of the high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), and also to "encourage a more positive attitude to filling it in" (Denscombe, 1998: 26) due to the aesthetically pleasing presentation. This quantitative data was then analysed in terms of goal orientations to indicate pupils' motivations for learning (Dweck, 1999), wherein the pre-coded answers were assigned number values to simplify the analysis of data.

All participants then completed a second questionnaire relating to attitudes towards ability grouping and learning (Appendix 4). The style of the questionnaire was consistent with the first in order to maintain continuity and avoid confusion. Data analysis also adopted a similar approach to the first, using data relating to pupils' motivations in comparison with their attitudes to ability grouping and learning, in order to produce visual representations. Both questionnaires were completed with respondents personally, with the view in mind that "you are likely to get better cooperation if you can establish personal contact" (Bell, 2005: 148). For many of the pupils, this familiarity had already been established in a teaching role, but for pupils outside of my classroom remit, this initial personal introduction aimed to promote a working relationship that might later aid conversation during interviews.

Interviews

The final aspect of data collection comprised interviews with a subsample of 6 pupils; 3 from each year group and one from each ability group therein (support, core and extension). The aim of the interviews was to gain qualitative responses to combine with quantitative data already collected, as an "interview can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses" (Bell, 2005: 157). Interviews were semi-structured and provided pupils with sentence starters to direct discussion towards points of interest relating to ability groupings and pupils' academic self-concept and self-perception.

Initially, I had planned to hold group interviews (Appendix 5), as I had hoped that this would deepen the level of insight through pupil discussion. On reflection, I concluded that the subject matter was personal enough that most children would be unlikely to share their thoughts in the presence of their peers, as, where "group members regard their opinions as contrary to prevailing opinion within the group, they might be inclined to keep quiet, or moderate their views somewhat" (Denscombe, 1998: 115). Further, this provided the opportunity for focused input with children on an individual level and simplified the audio recording process and subsequent transcription (Appendix 6). Once transcribed, interviews were then coded to provide evidence of key themes for use in combination with the quantitative data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are central in all forms of research, though particularly those involving children. I therefore made every effort to ensure that the methodology was inclusive, representative and approached sensitively, as "even with entirely benign intentions, actual consequences can be negative, and possibly harmful, for those taking part in the research" (Robson, 2007: 64). Preceding any interaction with pupils, I firstly presented my research proposal (Appendix 5) to the head teacher to gain permission to complete this research in school, following which I repeated the process with the relevant class teachers. My school mentor and personal tutor confirmed my understanding of the ethical implications through signing this form. I further demonstrated my commitment to ethical considerations through completion of the Ethics checklist (Appendix 7) and research across the British Educational Research Association (BERA) website.

Once the necessary school permissions had been obtained, I gave all pupils the opportunity to take part in the research through explanation of the process. Information and consent forms were then provided for pupils to pass along to their parent or carer. These forms outlined and sought permission for each stage of the research; questionnaires, interviews and audio recording (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). This process adhered to the BERA guidance that "researchers must also seek the collaboration and approval of those who act in guardianship" (BERA, 2011: 7). To ensure complete inclusion and full disclosure, I also worked with bilingual teaching assistants to produce a consent form that had been translated into Lithuanian (Appendix 2), as the pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the sub-groups fell into this linguistic category. All guardians were thereby provided with the relevant information to ensure ethical practice.

Once adult permissions had been gained, I verbally reconfirmed pupils' informed consent (*Voluntary Informed Consent*, BERA, 2011) and explained the research project to the pupils involved, ensuring that it was clear to participants that they were under no obligation to complete any aspect of the process if they did not wish to do so. The purpose of the research was presented as transparently as possible, though specific details were not divulged due to concerns that "the real purpose would preclude the study of the phenomenon researched" (Robson, 2007: 67); that is, pupils were made aware that the research regarded matters relating to their learning, but were not made aware of full research questions and ultimate aims. As "the confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research" (BERA, 2011: 7),

pupils were treated anonymously as Pupil A, B, C, etc., whilst data was stored confidentially across each stage.

The nature of this research was potentially damaging to pupils' academic self-perceptions, as it involved reflection upon their opinions of their academic standing and their learning orientations. I therefore made a conscious effort, particularly during interviews, to encourage children to feel comfortable and at ease when answering questions, but also continually reminded them that they could withdraw at any point. Ability groups were referred to as 'table groups' and opinions regarding ability, levels and attainment, both perceived and recorded, were at no point confirmed. Pupils were encouraged to discuss their positive attributes as a final stage of interviews, in order to end on a note of positive self-perception, especially in instances where they had shown contrasting opinions during the research. In all cases, pupils were provided with the opportunity to review their questionnaires and transcripts of interviews to ensure validity and full-disclosure of data. Pupils were reminded that this data would remain confidential.

Critical evaluation of findings

Motivation

The first stage of research concerned pupils' goal orientations, obtained through the adapted PALs questionnaire (Midgeley et al., 2000). The emoticon scores were converted into numerical values to produce quantitative data, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2. As identified in Figure 1 and represented in Figure 2, the majority of the population across all ability groups were identified as a mastery goal orientation, where the "students' purpose or goal in an achievement setting is to develop their competence" (Midgeley et al., 2000: 7). Initially, this suggested that pupils maintained positive motivations in their learning, that they recognised learning as important in itself, with over half of pupils in the extension group classified thus. However, analysis of the sub-group data indicated that over 70% of support group pupils in Year 3 were classified as mastery goal oriented, compared to only 50% of extension pupils (Figure 3). This decline in positive motivation between ability groups supports the claim that ability grouping can be negative for "those in high-ability groups, who may develop a crystallised view of their ability that may lead them to avoid challenges which are necessary for effective learning" (McIntyre & Ireson, 2002: 250).

This idea gains support upon consideration of the Year 6 PALs data, which produced a wider range of goal orientations than that of Year 3, including elements of performance-avoidance goal orientations, wherein the "students' purpose or goal in achievement setting is to avoid the demonstration of incompetence" (Midgeley et al., 2000: 9). While pupils in extension groups comprised almost 60% of the mastery goal orientations, they also accounted for over 30% of the combined mastery/performance-avoidance goal orientations (Figure 4). In total, almost one third of the Year 6 sub-group were categorised at least partially within a performance-avoidance goal orientation (Figure 4).

These inclusions of performance-avoidance goal orientations raise the question of pressure to achieve that may be perpetuated by ability grouping practices, in which those who are in higher achieving groups aim to avoid looking foolish compared to their peers. This proposal gains weight upon consideration of the attitude to ability questionnaire results (Table 3), in which all Year 6 pupils with some aspect of performance-avoidance answered either 'true' or 'very true' to the question *I like sitting with pupils who are the same ability as me*, yet answered between 'sometimes true' and 'not at all true' for the question *I feel clever compared to my classmates*. This data suggests that even higher achieving children are made to question their academic abilities due to ability grouping practices, preferring to share ideas with those children who are perceived to be at the same level as themselves to avoid damage to their 'reputation' as a higher achieving child in class.

Pupil	sex	Yeargrou p	avstupid (q1)	masilearn much (q2)	achgoodat work (q3)	masnews kills (q4)	avnotclev er (q5)	masunder stand (q6)	acheasy work (q7)	achlikcle ver (q8)	avnotinou sble (q9)	Total Mastery	mean mastery	Total PerfAvoid	mean perfavoid	Total PerfApproac	mean perfapproac
A	1	3.0	2	3	4	5	4	4	2	2	1	12.00	4.00	7.00	2.33	8.00	2.67
B	1	3.0	1	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	13.00	4.33	7.00	2.33	15.00	5.00
C	2	3.0	5	5	5	5	1	5	1	1	1	15.00	5.00	7.00	2.33	7.00	2.33
D	2	3.0	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	1	15.00	5.00	7.00	2.33	15.00	5.00
E	2	3.0	2	5	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	11.00	3.67	10.00	3.33	6.00	2.00
F	2	3.0	5	5	1	5	1	5	1	1	5	15.00	5.00	9.00	3.00	7.00	2.33
G	1	3.0	1	5	1	5	1	5	3	5	3	15.00	5.00	5.00	1.67	9.00	3.00
H	2	3.0	2	4	3	2	3	3	3	2	5	9.00	3.00	10.00	3.33	8.00	2.67
I	2	3.0	3	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	3	14.00	4.67	11.00	3.67	12.00	4.00
J	1	3.0	1	3	5	5	3	5	5	1	1	13.00	4.33	5.00	1.67	11.00	3.67
K	2	3.0	4	5	5	5	2	5	2	2	2	15.00	5.00	8.00	2.67	9.00	3.00
L	1	3.0	3	5	2	5	1	5	1	3	3	15.00	5.00	7.00	2.33	6.00	2.00
M	1	3.0	2	5	2	5	4	4	2	2	3	14.00	4.67	9.00	3.00	6.00	2.00
N	1	6.0	3	4	4	5	3	3	5	4	3	12.00	4.00	9.00	3.00	13.00	4.33
O	1	6.0	1	4	3	1	3	5	3	1	5	10.00	3.33	9.00	3.00	7.00	2.33
P	2	6.0	5	4	5	4	5	5	1	4	4	13.00	4.33	14.00	4.67	10.00	3.33
Q	2	6.0	5	4	5	4	5	5	3	3	5	13.00	4.33	15.00	5.00	11.00	3.67
R	2	6.0	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	4	1	13.00	4.33	9.00	3.00	10.00	3.33
S	2	6.0	4	5	4	2	3	5	4	2	5	12.00	4.00	12.00	4.00	10.00	3.33
T	1	6.0	3	5	5	5	5	5	3	2	3	15.00	5.00	11.00	3.67	10.00	3.33
U	2	6.0	3	5	2	5	2	5	2	1	3	15.00	5.00	8.00	2.67	5.00	1.67
V	1	6.0	3	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	4.00	1.33	7.00	2.33	6.00	2.00
W	2	6.0	1	4	3	4	2	4	1	1	3	12.00	4.00	6.00	2.00	5.00	1.67
X	2	6.0	5	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	5	11.00	3.67	11.00	3.67	3.00	1.00
Y	2	6.0	3	5	2	5	5	5	1	5	5	15.00	5.00	13.00	4.33	8.00	2.67
Z	2	6.0	5	5	3	5	3	5	1	1	3	15.00	5.00	11.00	3.67	5.00	1.67

Very true
True
Sometimes True
Not true
Not at all true

Table 1: PALs questionnaire raw data and mean scores for each goal orientation. Means are calculated to 2 decimal places. (Maximum mean = 5.00, minimum mean = 1.00)

Goal Orientation	Population	Year 3	Year 6	Support			Core			Extension		
				Whole sample	Year 3	Year 6	Whole sample	Year3	Year6	Whole sample	Year 3	Year 6
Mastery	50.00	61.54	38.46	44.40	23.08	7.69	50.00	23.08	15.38	57.10	15.38	15.38
Approach	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Avoidance	3.85	0.00	7.69	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	0.00	7.69	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mastery/Approach	15.38	23.08	7.69	22.20	7.69	7.69	10.00	7.69	0.00	14.30	7.69	0.00
Mastery/Avoidance	11.54	0.00	23.08	11.10	0.00	7.69	10.00	0.00	7.69	14.30	0.00	7.69
Approach/Avoidance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cannot be classified	19.23	15.38	23.08	22.20	0.00	15.38	20.00	7.69	7.69	14.30	7.69	0.00

Table 2: Percentages of pupils identified as each Goal Orientation, organised by year group and ability grouping parameters.

Percentages are correct to 2 decimal places.

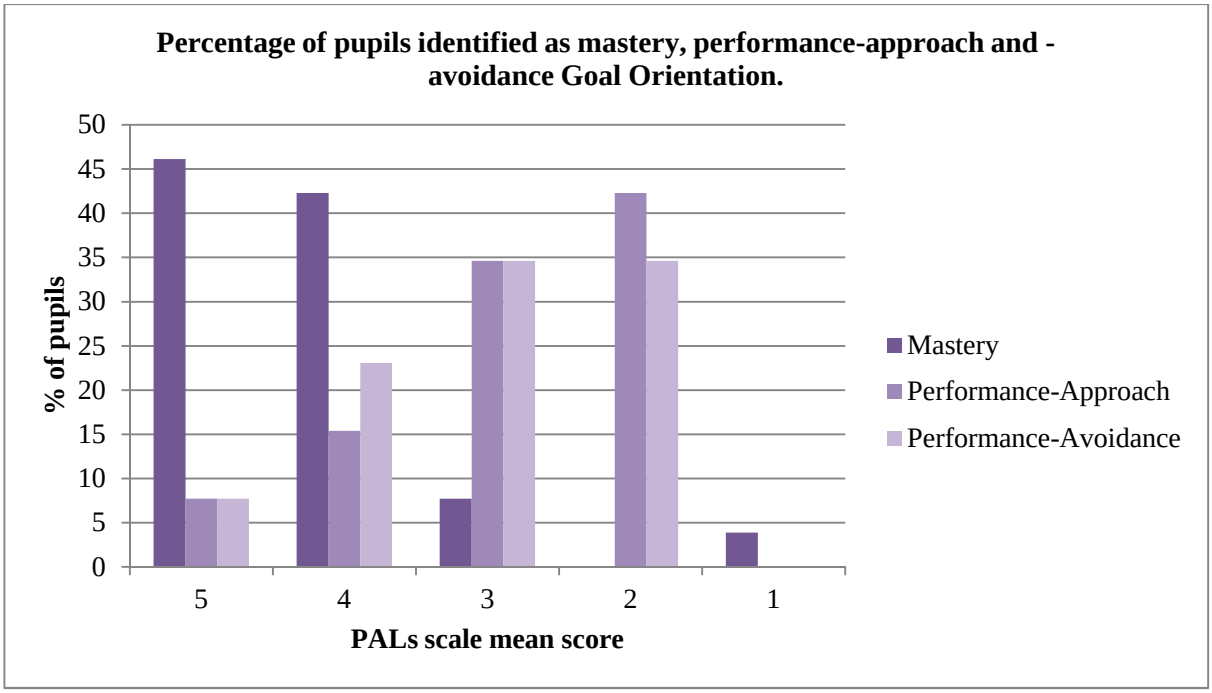

Figure 1: Percentages of the population scoring high to low mean scores on the Goal Orientation questionnaire. (Maximum mean = 5.00, minimum mean = 1.00, n=26)

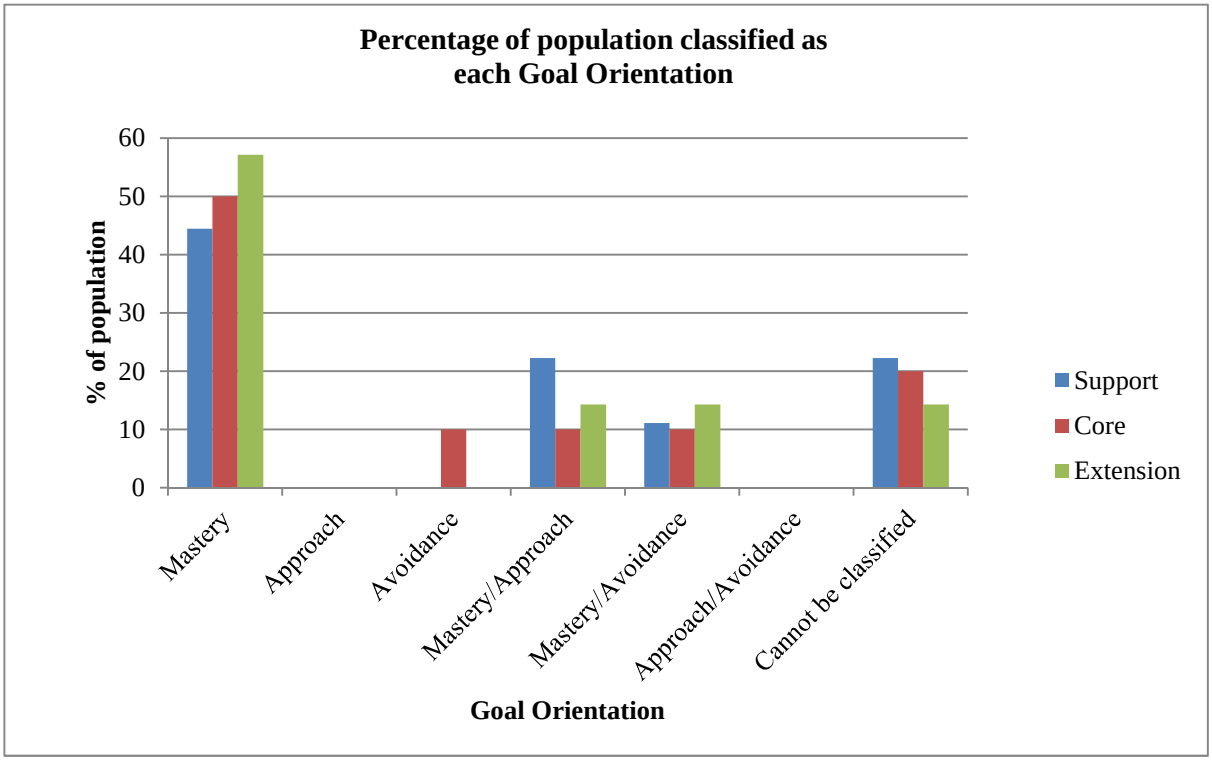

Figure 2: Percentages of the population classified as each of the goal orientations, organised by ability groupings. (n=26)

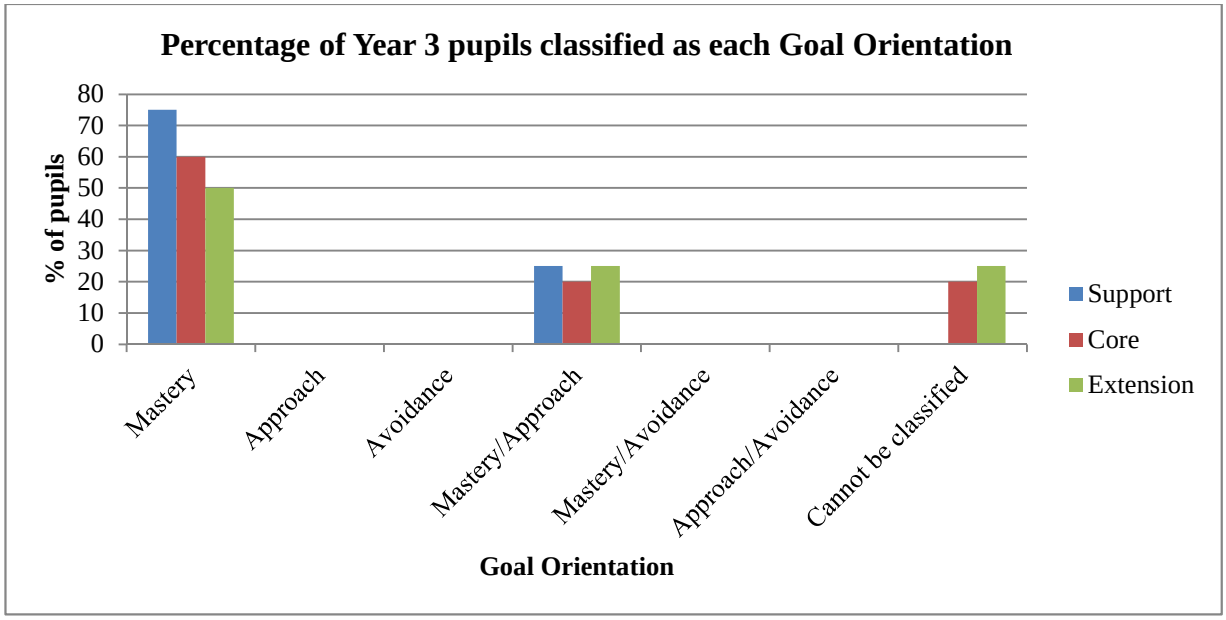

Figure 3: Percentage of the Year 3 sub-group identified as each Goal Orientation, organised by ability groupings. (n=13)

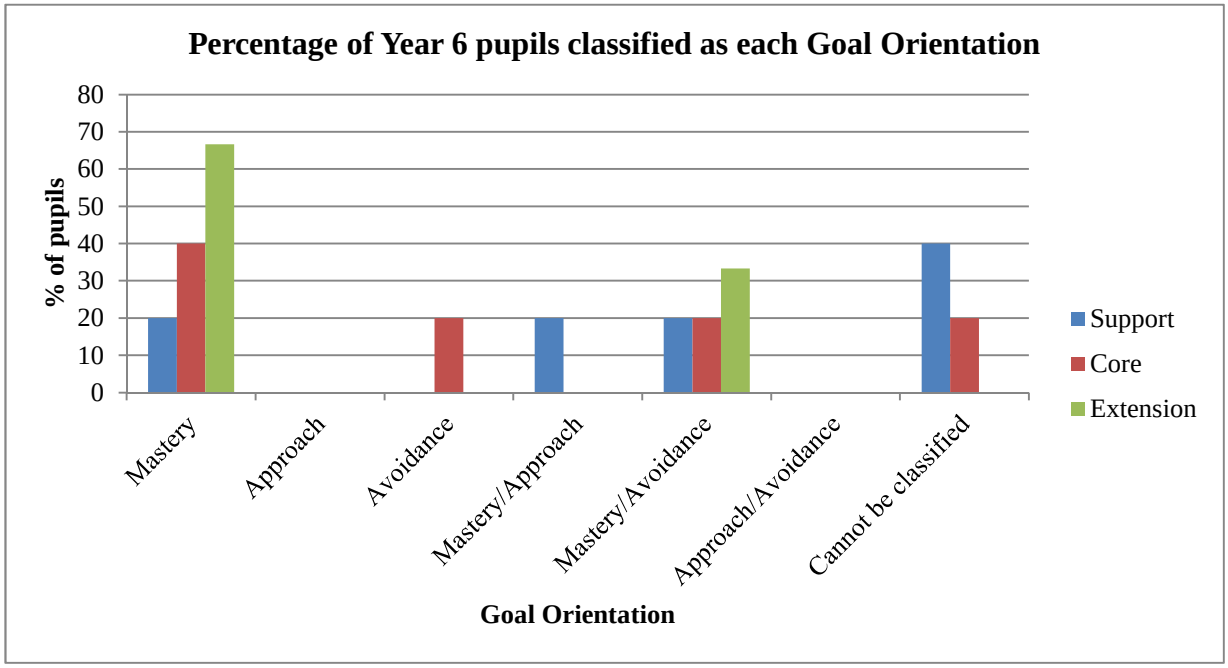

Figure 4: Percentage of the Year 6 sub-group identified as each Goal Orientation, organised by ability groupings. (n=13)

Attitude to ability grouping subscale	Population	Year 3	Year 6	Support			Core			Extension		
				Whole sample	Year 3	Year 6	Whole sample	Year 3	Year 6	Whole sample	Year 3	Year 6
I am happy to share my ideas with pupils on my table	3.35	3.46	3.23	3.56	4.00	3.13	2.90	2.80	3.00	3.71	3.75	3.67
I work harder if other pupils are doing more difficult work than me	2.62	3.38	1.85	2.25	2.75	1.75	2.85	4.20	1.50	2.67	3.00	2.33
I like sitting with pupils who are the same ability as me	3.04	2.15	3.92	3.00	1.75	4.25	3.20	2.40	4.00	2.63	2.25	3.00
I think I am the same ability as other pupils on my table	2.85	2.46	3.23	2.63	2.25	3.00	3.20	2.40	4.00	3.04	2.75	3.33
I don't think that I would learn more on a different table.	3.27	3.46	3.08	3.63	4.00	3.25	3.45	3.40	3.50	2.67	3.00	2.33
I feel clever compared to my classmates.	2.23	2.31	2.15	1.69	1.25	2.13	2.25	3.00	1.50	2.58	2.50	2.67

Table 3: Pupils' mean scores for the attitudes towards ability groupings questionnaire, where higher mean scores indicate a more positive attitude. Scores derived from Likert Scale numerical values. (Maximum mean = 5, minimum mean = 1, n=26)

Understanding of ability groupings

Interviews provided the most focussed information regarding pupils' understanding of ability grouping and it was clear that all children across the interview sample understood the premise of ability grouping, with one child commenting, "I think pupils are put into ability groups because...so that it is easier for the teacher to give more support to those who need it" (Pupil U). As in a study conducted by Smith and Sutherland, pupils recognised that the "main advantage of sets for most pupils was the possibility of increased teacher attention appropriate to their needs" (Smith & Sutherland, 2006: 74). However, children's references to this support, in all instances, focussed around support for lower achieving children, rather than for *all*. Indeed, the same pupil, later said "I would work harder if ...maybe if I had someone to help me to push myself that little bit further, just to try some of the harder questions." When asked if the teacher ever did this, Pupil U replied: "Sometimes. But a lot of the time she works with the children on other tables to help them to understand what we are doing, because they need her help more than we do." This account stands in contrast to one of the positive arguments for ability grouping, that it "provides teachers with the opportunity to meet the needs of groups of pupils, of different abilities, through the modification of learning objectives and pace of instruction" (Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998: 57). Indeed, it contributes to the opposing argument that ability grouping can be "divisive" (Pollard et al., 2008: 294), rather than inclusive, and prioritises the needs of children in lower ability groups.

This separation was further addressed, in particular, through the interviews and the sentence starter "When the work I am given is different to other pupils, I feel..." The Year 3 responses were mostly unconcerned, referring this differentiation to avoiding copying and "making sure that everyone works things out themselves and does their own work" (Pupil E). In this sense, the younger pupils were less aware of the differentiation of work between the groups, though they understood that the groupings were in place and allowed some pupils to receive further support. In the Year 6 interviews, however, a different picture emerged. The pupil from the support group, Pupil V, replied: "...I feel fine. I get easier work sometimes because I can't do some things because I'm only on blue table. I need help from [the TA] or [the teacher] or other children from other tables." When asked if he ever sought help from children on his table, the emphatic reply followed: "No, because they won't know either, because they're on blue table" (Pupil V, Appendix 6). The structure of this answer is important in itself. The pupil believed that he could not do some things because of the group that he was in, not that he was in this group because he struggled with some

things. The pupil believed that his inability to achieve was on some level a direct consequence of his table grouping, which then negatively affected his self-concept, self-efficacy and enveloped him in a system of both self-fulfilling prophecy and learned helplessness,. This learned helplessness, outlined by Pupil V's comment that he required help from someone whom he perceived as more able, "is a reaction to failure that carries negative implications for the self and that impairs students' ability to use their minds effectively" (Dweck, 1999: 6). The research suggests that the grouping practice has a similarly negative effect for pupils across the spectrum, both creating high expectations that are unsupported by the teacher and lowering their self-efficacy to the degree of negative confirmation cycles.

Attitudes to, and reflections on, ability groupings

Pupils' attitudes towards ability groupings were collected through a further emoticon Likert scale and converted to numerical values, from which the mean score for each pupil and each ability grouping was calculated (Table 3 and Table 4). Figure 5 represents this information in a histogram, wherein higher numerical values indicate a more positive attitude towards ability groupings. Interestingly, Year 6 pupils' mean scores (support: 17.50; core: 17.50; extension: 17.33) remained fairly consistent across the ability groups, suggesting that within this sub-group, attitudes to ability grouping was not widely affected by the pupils' ability group, despite some negative self-perceptions surrounding the topic in interviews. In this sense, Year 6 pupils disconnected their attitudes to ability groupings from their self-perceptions, suggesting that intrinsic factors were more accountable.

However, in Year 3, Figure 5 clearly indicates a difference in attitudes between the ability groupings. Of this data, the support group entered the lowest mean score at only 16.00, compared to 18.20 for core pupils and 17.25 for extension. Across the population, Year 3 support pupils also recorded the lowest mean score for the question *I feel clever compared to my classmates* at just 1.25 (Table 3), suggesting that a negative attitude to ability grouping may contribute to poor academic self-concept. As previously discussed, support children also showed the lowest self-concept during interviews, with the Year 3 support child stating: "I would like to be on a table with some of the smarter people because then they could share their ideas. I feel stupid when I can't put my hand up...like...like I don't know anything compared to them" (Pupil B).

Pupil	sex	Year group	try best (q1)	give up (q2)	share ideas (q3)	better than me	sit same ability (q5)	am same ability (q6)	different table (q7)	clever compared	help classmate	work hard (q10)	praised (q11)	extra work	TOTAL ABILITY	Mean Ability	TOTAL LEARNING	Mean Learning
A	1	3.0	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	2	3	4	5	3	18.00	3.00	23.00	3.83
B	1	3.0	5	1	5	5	1	1	5	1	5	5	5	5	18.00	3.00	26.00	4.33
C	2	3.0	5	3	1	3	1	1	2	2	5	5	5	1	10.00	1.67	24.00	4.00
D	2	3.0	5	1	3	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5	5	24.00	4.00	26.00	4.33
E	2	3.0	4	3	4	5	2	4	4	3	3	5	3	2	22.00	3.67	20.00	3.33
F	2	3.0	5	1	1	3	1	1	5	2	1	5	1	5	13.00	2.17	18.00	3.00
G	1	3.0	3	3	5	5	3	1	5	3	5	5	1	3	22.00	3.67	20.00	3.33
H	2	3.0	4	3	2	3	1	2	2	2	5	3	2	2	12.00	2.00	19.00	3.17
I	2	3.0	5	2	4	3	5	3	5	5	4	5	4	5	25.00	4.17	25.00	4.17
J	1	3.0	5	1	5	3	1	3	3	1	5	5	5	5	16.00	2.67	26.00	4.33
K	2	3.0	5	1	3	2	2	3	4	1	5	5	5	5	15.00	2.50	26.00	4.33
L	1	3.0	5	4	4	2	1	2	3	1	5	5	3	5	13.00	2.17	27.00	4.50
M	1	3.0	5	1	4	3	2	3	2	2	5	5	3	4	16.00	2.67	23.00	3.83
N	1	6.0	4	3	2	2	4	2	2	4	3	3	5	4	16.00	2.67	22.00	3.67
O	1	6.0	4	3	4	1	5	5	3	1	4	2	4	2	19.00	3.17	19.00	3.17
P	2	6.0	5	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	5	5	4	22.00	3.67	26.00	4.33
Q	2	6.0	3	3	5	2	5	5	5	2	2	4	5	3	24.00	4.00	20.00	3.33
R	2	6.0	4	1	2	2	5	3	5	3	3	5	4	3	20.00	3.33	20.00	3.33
S	2	6.0	3	2	4	1	5	2	1	3	4	1	4	5	16.00	2.67	19.00	3.17
T	1	6.0	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	2	4	4	3	5	18.00	3.00	21.00	3.50
U	2	6.0	5	2	4	1	2	3	1	2	5	4	2	3	13.00	2.17	21.00	3.50
V	1	6.0	3	1	3	1	3	2	2	2	3	3	5	1	13.00	2.17	16.00	2.67
W	2	6.0	5	2	3	1	4	3	4	1	3	4	2	5	16.00	2.67	21.00	3.50
X	2	6.0	3	5	1	1	3	3	2	1	3	3	4	1	11.00	1.83	19.00	3.17
Y	2	6.0	5	3	3	4	5	4	5	1	5	5	4	3	22.00	3.67	25.00	4.17
Z	2	6.0	5	1	3	2	3	4	2	3	5	5	5	5	17.00	2.83	26.00	4.33

Table 4: Raw data representing answers to attitudes to ability groupings and learning questionnaire. Means are calculated to 2 decimal places. (Maximum mean = 5.00, minimum mean = 1.00, n=26)

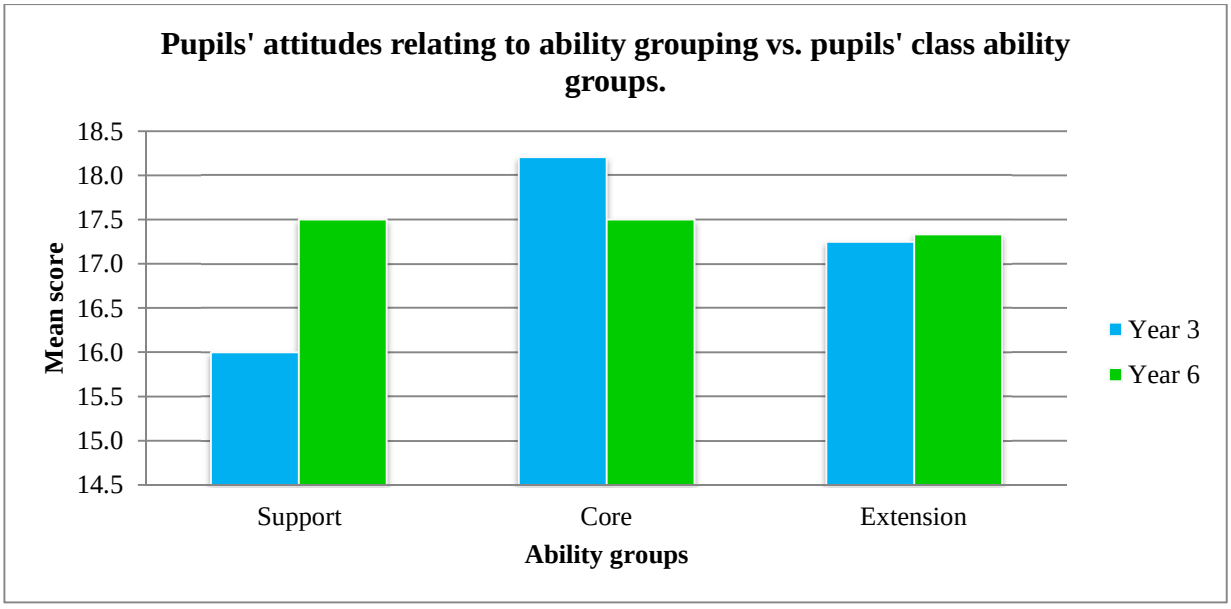

Figure 5: Comparison of pupils' attitudes to ability groupings mean score and their respective ability groups. (Maximum mean = 30, minimum mean = 6, n=26)

Ireson and Hallam argue that pupils "compare their self-perceptions of their own achievements with the perceived abilities of other students in their frame of reference" (Ireson & Hallam, 2001: 46), which could be used productively through the social constructivist approach proposed by the pupil and advocated by Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978). However, where this frame of reference is organised by ability, the comparisons are likely to be more damaging, as it "makes visible perceived differences in ability [and] enables pupils to more clearly identify their place in the pecking order" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 58), further increasing the damaging effect on pupils' self-concept.

Attitudes to learning showed similar results across the age range and ability groupings (Table 5 and Figure 6), which is consistent with the similar motivation styles recorded across the population (Figure 1). In order to identify any relationship between attitudes to ability grouping and attitudes to learning, these variables were plotted on a scatter graph for each year group (Figure 7 and Figure 8) and a line of best fit was included. The Year 3 data showed no correlation (correlation coefficient = 0.009). The Year 6 data showed a weak positive relationship between the attitude to ability grouping and attitude to learning (correlation coefficient = 0.207), a subtle suggestion that the more positive the pupils' attitudes to ability groupings, the more positive their attitude to learning. This was perhaps informed by the more knowledgeable account of ability grouping

presented by Year 6 pupils during interviews. Overall, this aspect of the research drew no significant results.

Pupil	Ability Group	Goal Orientation	Attitude to ability Mean score	Attitude to learning Mean score
Year 3				
A	Support	MASTERY	3.00	3.83
B	Support	MAST/APP	3.00	4.33
C	Core	MASTERY	1.67	4.00
D	Core	MAST/APP	4.00	4.33
E	Core	NO CLASS	3.67	3.33
F	Core	MASTERY	2.17	3.00
G	Core	MASTERY	3.67	3.33
H	Extension	NO CLASS	2.00	3.17
I	Extension	MAST/APP	4.17	4.17
J	Extension	MASTERY	2.67	4.33
K	Support	MASTERY	2.50	4.33
L	Support	MASTERY	2.17	4.50
M	Extension	MASTERY	2.67	3.83
Year 6				
N	Support	MAST/APP	2.67	3.67
O	Support	NO CLASS	3.17	3.17
P	Extension	MAST/AVOID	3.67	4.33
Q	Core	MAST/AVOID	4.00	3.33
R	Core	MASTERY	3.33	3.33
S	Core	AVOIDANCE	2.67	3.17
T	Core	MASTERY	3.00	3.50
U	Extension	MASTERY	2.17	3.50
V	Support	NO CLASS	2.17	2.67
W	Support	MASTERY	2.67	3.50
X	Core	NO CLASS	1.83	3.17
Y	Support	MAST/AVOID	3.67	4.17
Z	Extension	MASTERY	2.83	4.33

Table 5: Population data collected from quantitative questionnaires. Pupils' identities coded for anonymity purposes. Higher mean scores indicate a more positive attitude. (Maximum mean = 5, minimum mean = 1, n=26)

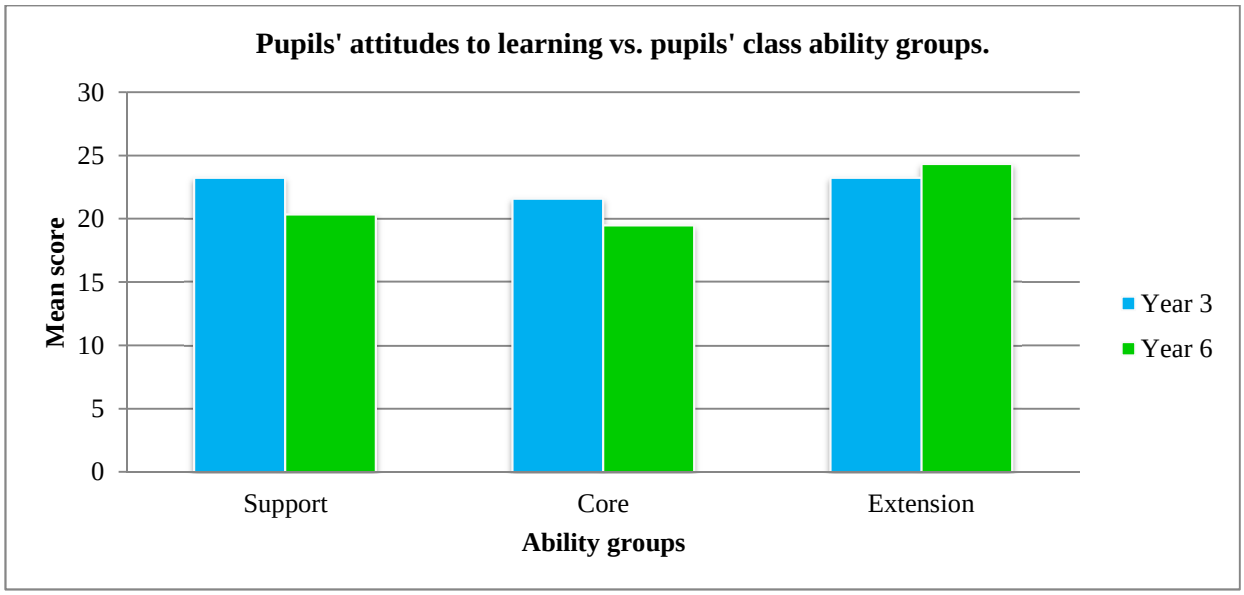

Figure 6: Comparison of pupils' attitudes to learning mean score and their respective ability groups. (Maximum mean = 30, minimum mean = 6, n=26)

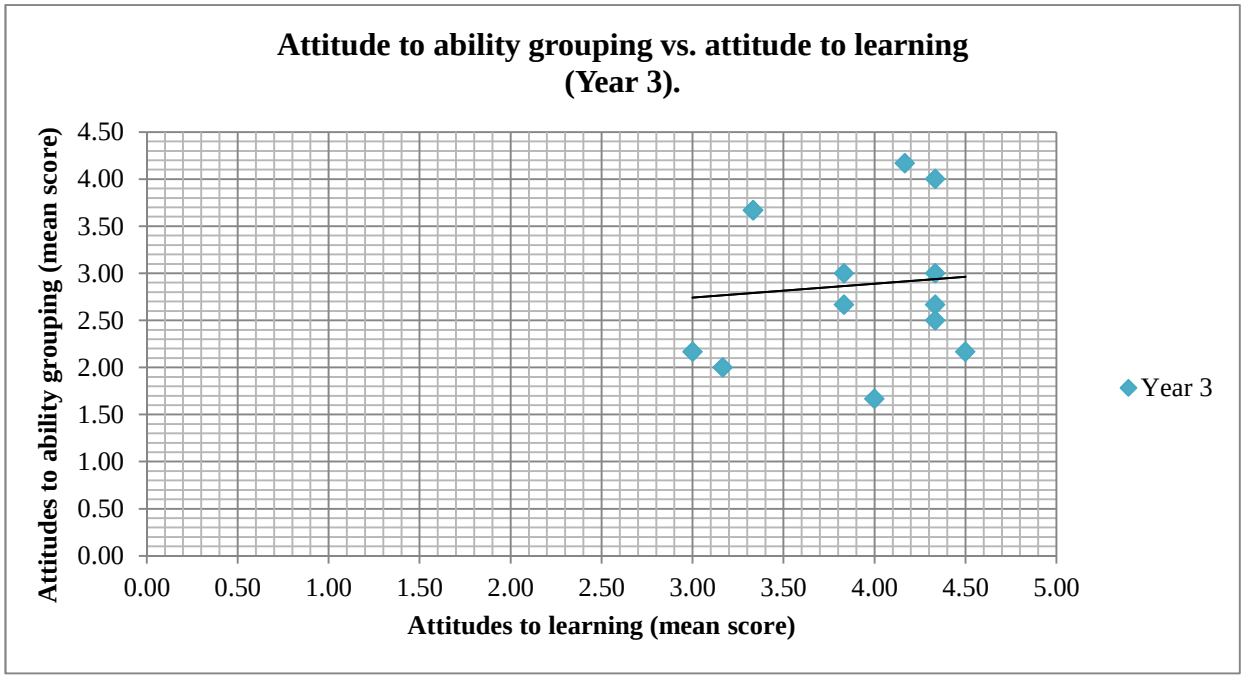

Figure 7: Scatter plot representing Year 3 pupils' attitudes to ability grouping mean score against their attitudes to learning mean score. A line of best fit is included.

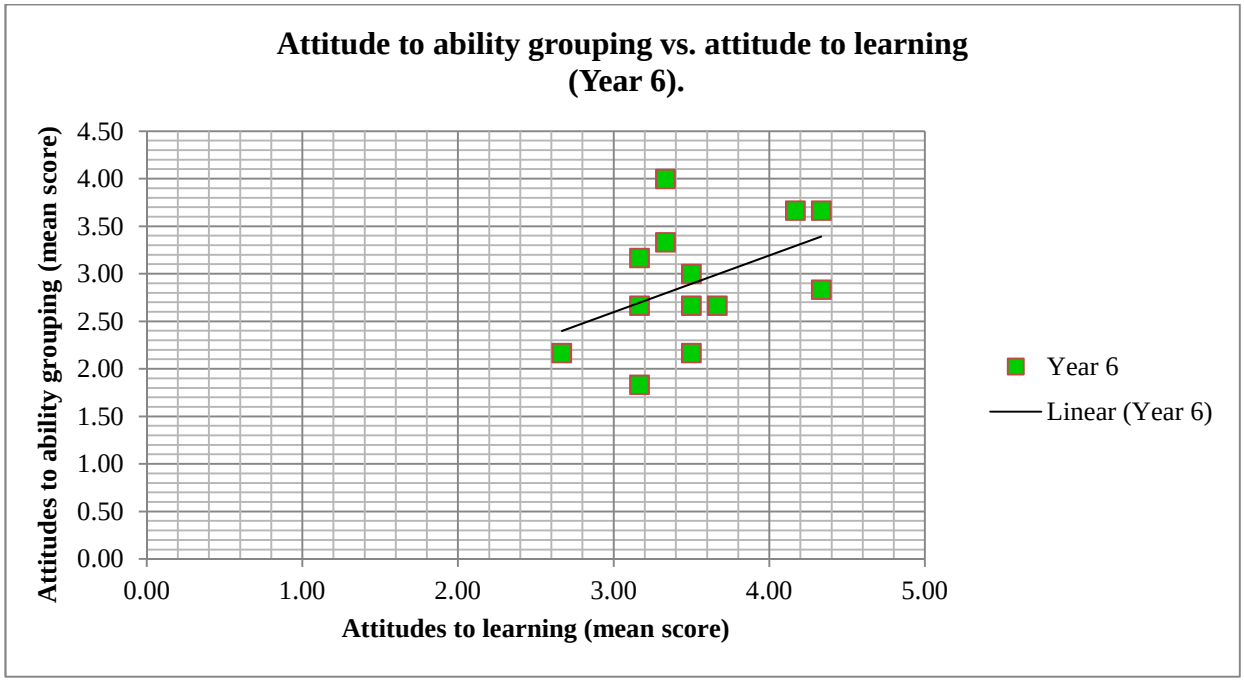

Figure 8: Scatter plot representing Year 6 pupils' attitudes to ability grouping mean score against their attitudes to learning mean score. A line of best fit is included.

Summary of findings

From the research, Year 6 pupils presented a more positive view of ability groupings (3.92 mean score compared to 2.15 in Year 3 - Table 3) and were also more aware of the purposes of ability groupings. However, implicit in this understanding was the recognition of the more divisive aspects of this grouping, in that they understood the grouping system and that lower achieving children received more support from adults. This disadvantaged children in the extension groups, as they recognised that their learning was secondary to that of support and core children, whilst also creating a premise for the higher proportion of pupils categorised as performance-avoidance goal oriented. Simultaneously, children in support groups demonstrated more negative self-concepts that, in some cases, lead to attitudes of learned-helplessness.

These extremes of effect, the extension and support groups, is perhaps indicative of the data that shows core group pupils to have demonstrated the most positive attitude to ability grouping of the population at 3.20, compared to the population mean of 3.02 (Table 3). Where these pupils are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the groupings, they presented generally positive views of the organisation, with one child commenting: "I feel like I am the same level as pupils on my table, which makes me happy because then we can talk about things to do with the work and nobody feels left out" (Pupil E). While this comment may appear to support the implementation of ability grouping, it also shows that ability grouping "legitimises the differential treatment of pupils in relation to their ability. It acknowledges that there are differences in ability and that it is acceptable to treat pupils with different abilities in different ways, which carry advantages for some pupils" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 59). Although the impact of the ability grouping may not initially appear to be damaging, the views that it promotes within pupils' self-concept and their attitudes towards the abilities of other pupils can be socially and emotionally damaging and divisive. Only where the lower order needs of self-esteem are met can pupils then progress to addressing their intellectual needs (Maslow, 1943). The learning environment therefore needs to be positively centred to allow such progression up the needs hierarchy, wherein engaged and effective learning can prevail.

Critical analysis of research methodology

The mixed methods approach to the research methodology was effectively implemented and data collected was both insightful and easily adapted for use. The decision to use one-to-one interviews rather than group interviews was positive, as much of the data was personal to the children and required a level of confidentiality from peers. The method of interviewing, rather than a written or scale response, was justified, as the sensitive nature of the topic was highly based within pupils self-perceptions, wherein "the nature of emotions, experiences and feelings is such that they need to be explored rather than simply reported in a word or two" (Denscombe, 1998: 111). The semi-structured approach to the interview allowed adaptation of base questions, depending on pupil responses and insights, and allowed further questioning to "let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher" (Denscombe, 1998: 113). This produced qualitative data that was fit for purpose and gave good insights into pupils' perceptions of both ability groupings and their place therein.

To support these opinions further, a validated series of questions related to academic self-concept and self-efficacy could have accompanied the qualitative data. The questionnaire questions produced were not previously tested as a means to prove accuracy, so the results based on these questions are not indisputable. Further quantitative data would have provided another layer of comparison to confirm correlation between variables and may have informed the questions posed during interview to narrow the questioning focus. Moreover, more explicit questions regarding ability could have been posed to the whole population at the questionnaire stage, rather than only during interviews. This would have produced a more accurate overview of pupil perspectives of ability groupings, rather than being based primarily on the qualitative sample data and select questions from the quantitative questionnaire.

The methodological value of the results is largely based upon the participants involved, where the sample should be representative of the population. "If this is the case, it is then possible to make statistical generalizations about aspects of the population" (Robson, 2007: 98), based on a fair and representative sample. In this research, the sample was limited by the consents gained and also by the parameter of the participants' ability groupings. As a result, the samples were relatively small, with only 13 children in each subgroup and only 6 chosen for interviews. As far as possible, this subsample was intended to be an accurate representation of the population, but the limitations imposed by the ethical considerations and those of the research questions suggests that this data may not be accurate for generalised conclusions. Furthermore, "the grouping of pupils is only one of several factors affecting the learning environment in the classroom" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 6) and considerations such as teaching style, quality of teaching and curriculum approach are all possible influences on pupils' perspectives. In this light, it is very unlikely that any small-scale research project could fully account for all variables, though in this instance, every effort has been made to ensure accurate, fair and representative data collection and analysis.

Implications for future practice

Throughout the completion of this research project, it has been clear that "there is no one best way of organising pupils for all purposes" (Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher & Vile, 1981: 46), although it has illuminated the varying pitfalls of implementing a within-class ability grouping system. Above all else, it is clear to me that ability groupings, though possibly advantageous for the logistics and organisation of the classroom for teaching, are not equally favourable for *learning*. Where research

has previously contested the advantages and disadvantages for pupils in higher and lower achieving groups in particular, it has been clear to me that ability groupings cast a negative shadow on most pupils involved.

The research indicates the possibility of maladaptive patterns of learning developing, both in the form of negative confirmation cycles and detached attitudes to learning and motivation. Where a system designed to meet the needs of all pupils only attends to the needs of the few, and does so in a way that promotes negative self-concepts and learned helplessness, it cannot possibly be considered a success. The proposal that "within-class grouping provides teachers with the opportunity to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities, while reducing the problems inherent in managing individualised learning" (Hallam, 2002: 74) is certainly questionable in view of this research, but also appears to circumvent the key point. Learning is implicitly an individual process; no two children learn in the same way and methods should not be in place that diminish the importance of the individual, as is often the case in the homogeneous groups created by ability grouping.

This aspect of the ability grouping process has been especially revealing concerning implications for my future practice. It is all too easy to label children within the classroom, whether behind the facade of table names or through the approach to learning adopted for specific groups of children. Differentiated learning is, of course, a valuable tool within the classroom to ensure that all children are engaged and are progressing in their learning. However, I will ensure that pupils are not simply reduced to their attainment levels, but are celebrated for their successes and encouraged to evaluate their own achievements to identify further targets for improvement. Ensuring that the locus of control remains firmly in the pupils' grasp increases their ownership over their learning, emphasising the role of intrinsic motivations and malleable approaches to learning that are crucial to developing adaptive learning characteristics.

Inclusion for all pupils is highly valued, where all pupils are given opportunities to develop positive learning behaviours and perceptions of their self-worth and ability to achieve. "Research on collaborative group work has indicated that it is more effective when it is carried out in mixed-ability groups" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 98) and, therefore, I aim to use a mixed-ability approach to learning wherever possible. The divisive by-product of ability groupings is not conducive to a positive learning environment, whereas mixed-ability learning "can promote social

mixing and break down stereotypical views of other pupils" (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002: 101) as pupils develop collaborative relationships with one another and recognise the relative strengths of *all* members of the class, irrespective of perceived attainment. Though classification is a continuous and omnipresent process in schools, I must ensure that this does not take precedence in pupils' minds, or in my own mind as the teacher. The focus, no matter the style of teaching and learning, should always remain on the individual and ensuring that progress is made by all, academically, socially and morally. As Ollerton states, "teaching children who have wide ranges of conceptual understandings, work-rates, motivations, potentials, behaviours and aspirations, in inclusive, mixed ability classrooms is not just feasible, it is ethically desirable" (Ollerton, 2001: 40).

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Research consent letter (English)

Appendix 2 - Research consent letter (Lithuanian)

Appendix 3 - PALs questionnaire

Appendix 4 - Attitude to ability groupings and learning questionnaire

Appendix 5 - Researching Pupil Perspectives Project & Assignment Proposal Form

Appendix 6 - Coded interview transcript (sample)

Appendix 7 - Ethics checklist for research during PGCE placements

Appendix 1

Faculty of Education

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Research for an extended essay to be carried out by a teacher trainee at

Dear Parent / Carer,

I writing to let you know about a small-scale research project that is being carried out in your child's school and in which I hope your child will be involved.

I am . a trainee teacher currently working at . I am carrying out a small-scale research project as part of my Post-Graduate Certificate of Education course. The data from this research will be used in writing an examined assignment focusing on children's ideas about factors that have an impact on their learning. The subject that I am investigating is pupil perspective's on ability groupings in relation to their motivation to learn.

In order for me to collect information about this topic it will be necessary to carry out a short questionnaire and also possibly interview your child, making an audio recording of the interview ready for analysis. The questionnaire data and interview recordings that I make will only be used for analysis by myself. All of the recorded material will be destroyed at the end of the 2013-14 academic year. All references to the school and to the children involved in the research will be anonymised in the essay that I will write using the data.

In order for me to be able to carry out this work I need to ask for your written consent, on the attached form, to the collection of the material outlined above. I would ask you to return the attached form to me, via your child's class teacher, no later than Wednesday 11th December. If you have any queries about the work please do contact me via the school.

Thank you. I am very grateful for your help in enabling me to carry out this important part of my training.

Yours sincerely,

184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2PQ Telephone: 01223 767600 http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/

Appendix 1 continued

Faculty of Education

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Researching pupils' perspectives on ability groupings in relation to their motivation to learn.

School: _____

Teacher: _____

Child: _____

I hereby consent to my child being involved in the data collection for a trainee teacher research project, which will involve completion of questionnaires and a possible interview that will involve audio recording. I understand the nature and purpose of the research project, as communicated on the information letter that accompanies this form. I understand the purposes for which the data will be used, and that references to my child and their school will be anonymised in academic writing resulting from the project.

Specifically, I give my permission for:

Completion of questionnaires ☐

Interview ☐

Audio recording ☐

(Please tick the box to signify that you have given permission).

Signed: _____

Relationship to child: _____

184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2PQ Telephone: 01223 767600 http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/

Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Education

Studentės-praktikantės diplominio darbo tyrimas,

Gerbiami tėveliai/globėjai,

Noréčiau atlikti trumpą tyrimą savo diplominiam darbui ir tikiuosi, kad Jūs sutiksite, jog Jūsų vaikas būtų jo dalis.

Mano vardas esu studentė, atliekanti praktiką
Rašau diplominį darbą, kurio viena dalis yra tyrim
sužinoti mokinių nuomones apie tai, kas turi įtakos jų mokymuisi. Plačiau nagrinėti noréčiau darbo grupėse pagal gebėjimus ir motyvacijos ryšį.

Sudarysiu anketą ir apklausiu mokinius įrašydama pokalbius į diktofoną. Anketos ir interviu duomenis naudosiu tik aš ir gale 2013-14 akademinių metų sunaikinsiu. Diplominiame darbe nebus minimi asmeniniai mokinių duomenys tokie kaip: vardas, pavardė, amžius, klasė ir pan.

Kad galėčiau atlikti šį tyrimą man reikia mokinių tėvų sutikimo, kuris yra prisegtas prie šio laiško. Labai prašyčiau grąžinti sutikimo lapą klasės mokytojai ne vėliau kaip gruodžio 11 dieną (trečiadienį). Jeigu turite kokių nors klausimų susijusių su tyrimu, galite susitikti su manimi mokykloje.

Esu labai dėkinga už Jūsų bendradarbiavimą ir pagalbą.

Nuoširdžiai Jūsų,

Head of Faculty: Professor Peter Gronn *Acting Secretary of the Faculty:* Jane Bloomfield
184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PQ Telephone: 01223 767600 http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/

Appendix 2 continued

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Education

Tyrimas: Darbo grupėse pagal gebėjimus ir motyvacijos ryšys

Mokykla _____

Mokytoja _____

Mokinys _____

Sutinku, kad mano sūnus/dukra dalyvautų studentės tyrime, kuris sudarytas iš anketos bei interviu audio įrašo. Esu susipažinęs(usi) su tyrimo tikslu, kuris yra išdėstymas laiške prisegtame su šiuo sutikimu ir suprantu, kad duomenys bus naudojami anonimiškai ir sunaikinti kai tik baigsis 2013-14 akademiniai metai.

Sutinku, kad mano sūnus/dukra:

Pildytų anketą ☐

Dalyvautų interviu ☐

Dalyvautų įrašomame interviu ☐

Prašau pažymėti, su kuriuo variantu sutinkate.

Parašas _____

Ryšys su mokiniu _____

Head of Faculty: Professor Peter Gronn *Acting Secretary of the Faculty:* Jane Bloomfield
184 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PQ Telephone: 01223 767600 http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/

Appendix 3

We are very interested in what you think about learning in school and would like you to fill in this form. It is **not** a test, there are no right or wrong answers we just want to know what you think.

Below are some sentences, read each one then draw a circle round the face which best describes **what you think** most of the time.

<u>If you don't understand any question please ask your teacher to explain.</u>

It's important to me that I don't look stupid in class.

Not at all true		Sometimes true		Very true
				

In class I want to learn as much as I can.

Not at all true		Sometimes true		Very true
				

I like to show other children that I am good at my work.

Not at all true		Sometimes true		Very true
				

I want to learn lots of new skills this year.

Not at all true		Sometimes true		Very true
				

Appendix 3 continued

In class I try to stop other children thinking I am not clever.

Not at all true — Sometimes true — Very true

It is important to me that I really understand my work.

Not at all true — Sometimes true — Very true

I like to show other children that class work is easy for me.

Not at all true — Sometimes true — Very true

I like to look clever compared with other children in my class.

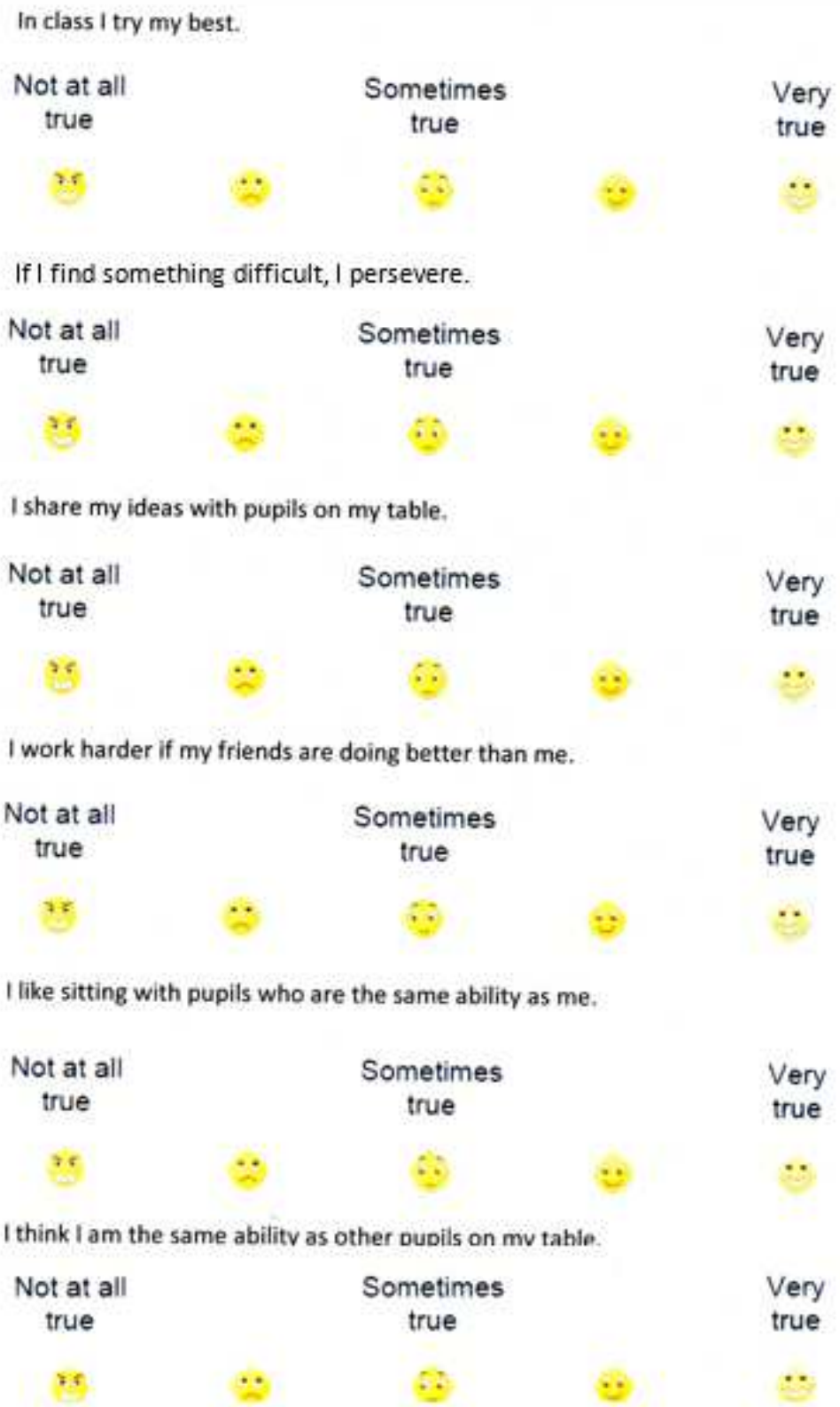
Not at all true — Sometimes true — Very true

I try to avoid looking like I have trouble doing my work.

Not at all true — Sometimes true — Very true

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 4



Appendix 4 continued

Appendix 5

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
Early Years and Primary PGCE Course

Researching Pupil Perspectives Project & Assignment
Proposal form

This form is intended to provide a starting point for discussions about your research with your personal tutor, your school mentor and other trainees.

Name... ...**Group**.. ...

Chosen Area

- Title and general aims of proposed research. (*Your title must include both the focus and an indication of the scope of the research. In expressing your aims, make clear your broad intentions for the research – in other words, expand upon your title so that your intentions for the research are clearly expressed).*

'Marks. Set. Go?' Pupils' perspectives on ability groupings in relation to academic self-concept and self-efficacy.

This research aims to investigate whether grouping by ability impacts pupils' attitudes to their learning, their perception of their academic achievement and their potential. The study will focus on pupils from Year 3 and Year 6 and will therefore provide the opportunity to consider if pupils' perception of ability alters as they progress through their schooling.

- Note relevant aspects of school context, where this is relevant to your research *(What's happening in school that might prompt/connect with/hinder your research?)*

- Pupils are seated and taught in ability groupings for all lessons.
- Pupils are streamed within their year group for mathematics lessons.

Key Academic Texts

Note here at least 3 texts that you have consulted in order to check that there is an extant body of research related to your intended work. These should include at least one relevant journal article.

Hallam, S. (2002). *Ability grouping in schools: A literature review.* London : Institute of Education, University of London

Hallam, S. (2003). Ability grouping practices in the primary school. *Educational Studies*, 29(1), 69-83. doi:10.1080/03055690303268

MacIntyre, H., Ireson, J. *(2002).* Within-class ability grouping: placement of pupils in groups and self-concept. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(2), 249-263.
doi: 10.1080/01411920120122176

Norris, C. (2003). Ability grouping in schools: attainment and self-esteem. *Education and Health*, 21(4), 59-63.

Smith, C. (2006). Setting or mixed ability?: pupils' views of the organisational arrangement in their school. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 6(2), 69-75.
doi: 10.1111/J.1471-3802.2006.00061.x

Proposed research question (s) - absolute maximum of 3

- You should consider whether these can be addressed through investigation or exploration in the time-frame provided for work on the RPP in school (no more than 3 half days)
- You may wish to devise a 'main' question and (perhaps) others that may be addressed in the course of the research

1. Does grouping pupils by ability alter their identity as a learner and impact their motivation to learn?
2. Do pupils' perceptions of the concept of ability change with age?

Appendix 5 continued

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
Early Years and Primary PGCE Course

Proposed research approach and methods

- Research approach. Methods. Probable ages and numbers of participants. Briefly consider why the methods you intend to use are suited to your particular enquiry.
- Provide at least one methodology reference.

1. PALS questionnaire to gain an overview of the population and children's goal orientation. This will also directly link to pupil's motivation for learning in school. This will be completed by the Year 3 and Year 6 classes. From the questionnaires, six children from each year group will be chosen for the remaining research; 2 support pupils, 2 core pupils and 2 extended pupils.

2. Likert scale questionnaire about academic self-efficacy, i.e. pupils' perceptions of their learning behaviour and academic ability. The questionnaire will also incorporate questions about pupils' academic self-concept, i.e. how pupils perceive their academic ability, also in relation to their peers. This questionnaire will provide quantitative data to compare and contrast with pupils' ability grouping, their suggested goal orientation and their motivation from the previous, PALS questionnaire.

3. Prompted consultation in focus groups, according to year group (Year 3 and Year 6, six children from each year group, as above), relating to general perceptions of ability. To facilitate discussion, pupils will be provided with sentence starters and general statements relating to ability and ability groupings. The open-ended nature of the statements aims to encourage children to provide genuine opinions in a non-threatening way, whilst the group aspect aims to promote discussion of ideas. This method will provide qualitative data to use in conjunction with the quantitative data, above, and will be compared and contrasted to test for correlation between pupils' perceived and recorded perceptions of ability, as well as their ability grouping.

Methodology reference:

Lewis, A., Lindsay, G. (Eds.). (2000). *Researching Children's Perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press

This proposal has been discussed with Personal Tutor and: is approved ☑
: needs minor amendments as discussed ☐
: needs to be resubmitted ☐

Signed .....Personal Tutor Date..25.11.13.....

Signed.....Class Mentor Date.....08.12.13.....

Please bring a completed draft copy of this form to the meeting with your personal tutor that will take place during the week beginning 25 November 2013.
You are required to discuss this work and to have this form signed by your Part 1b mentor during your school placement weeks in December 2013.

Note that this form should be an appendix to your essay. Please ensure that names of schools and teachers are not visible.

Appendix 6

Interview Transcript

Pupil V

Transcript Coding

Positive attitude to ability grouping	Positive self-concept / self-efficacy
Negative attitude to ability grouping	Negative self-concept / self-efficacy
LS – Interviewer	**PV – Pupil V**

LS: Hi, [Pupil V]. Are you still happy to talk to me today?

PV: Yes, that's fine.

LS: Great. Today, I'll give you some sentence starters and all you have to do is finish them off with whatever you think. Don't worry if you're not sure about any, it's not a test so you can't get anything wrong. Is that ok?

PV: Yeah.

LS: Ok, first one. I enjoy learning when...?

PV: I enjoy learning when...urm...when we're doing maths or English and we get to work in a group.

LS: Why do you enjoy working in a group?

PV: [Be]cause you get more ideas working in a group, you can listen to people, but sometimes share your ideas as well if you know something, like, good.

LS: We have different table groups because...?

PV: Sometimes the teacher splits us up because of our behaviour and some of us are silly when we work together. I hate splitting up from my friends though.

LS: Are there any other reasons, do you think?

PV: We sit as well by how well we're doing in lessons and stuff. So all the clever people sit together and I sit with the not clever people and there are other people in the middle.

LS: I do my best work when...?

PV: Urm. I do my best work when...when I'm happy and the lesson is fun, like, we have something fun to do.

LS: If I find something difficult...?

PV: I put my hand up and ask the teacher.

LS: If the work I am given is different to other pupils', I feel...?

Appendix 6 continued

PV: I feel fine. I get get easier work sometimes because I can't do some things because I'm only on blue table. I need help from [the TA] or [the teacher] or other children from other tables.

LS: Do you ever ask people on your table for help?

PV: No, because they won't know either, because they're on blue table.

LS: I think pupils are put into ability groups because...?

PV: So they can share ideas with each other and when we do work, the teacher can come round and explain to us at our tables.

LS: Compared to other tables, my table is...? This makes me feel...?

PV: I think I'm the table that's not clever. I can see because other tables know everything the teacher is talking about and I don't. It makes me feel unhappy because I wish I was on a table with people who had good ideas.

LS: Compared to other pupils on my table, I think I am...? This makes me feel...?

PV: They're more clever compared to me. I think so, anyway. The teacher is always picking them because they have their hands up and it makes me feel left out because I don't know anything.

LS: Compared to other pupils in my class, I think I am...? This makes me feel...?

PV: I'm not clever. It makes me sad that everyone is better than me. There's lots of different stages...urm...different levels and they're all better than mine.

LS: I think that other pupils think that I am...? This makes me feel...?

PV: They think that I'm angry sometimes, but some of them don't mind me. I try to help people sometimes, which makes me feel good, but I do sometimes get angry.

LS: I think that my teacher thinks that I am...? This makes me feel...?

PV: I think that [my teacher] thinks that I need help with my work because I sit on blue table. But, it makes me feel, like, happy, because I would learn more and I understand a bit better when she explains it to us as a group more and gives us more help.

LS: My favourite thing about school is...?

PV: Playtime and doing fun stuff, like indoor play and easy maths. Urm. I like doing about horror in English and doing sports, but not gymnastics because it's a bit like for girls.

LS: It sounds like you're good at lots of things in school and I've heard that you try really hard. The horror topic sounds like good fun, too. I think that's everything for today. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

PV: Urm, no, I don't think so. I think I said everything.

LS: That's absolutely fine. Thank you for talking to me again today [Pupil V].

Appendix 7

University of Cambridge - Faculty of Education
Early Years and Primary PGCE
Ethics checklist for research during PGCE placements

This checklist is intended for use ONLY by Faculty of Education students undertaking initial teacher education ('trainees') for classroom-based research carried during their formal professional placements as temporary members of school staff. The context of this research is that it will be undertaken with pupils in classes for which a qualified teacher has legal responsibility who acts as 'gatekeeper' and where the trainee's intended enquiry has been discussed with and approved by the responsible teacher(s) for the class(es) concerned.

Trainee name: _____

School/setting: _____

Questions to be answered by the trainee -please *clearly ring* the appropriate response.

1) Do you understand why educational enquiry must be scrutinized from an ethical standpoint before any research commences?	(yes) /no
2) Have you read and do you understand the current guideline on educational research ethics issued by the **British Educational Research Association?** **(available at http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/guidelines/ethica1.pdf)**	(yes)/no
3) Can you confirm that *to the best of your belief* the research you plan to carry out will NOT be to the educational detriment to any pupils involved, and that there is no reason to expect it to cause any harm to any participant –including damaging any pupil's confidence, motivation, interest or self belief in school?	(yes)/no
4) Can you confirm that you will have sought any necessary permissions - for example to record lessons, or to work with pupils outside of timetabled lessons- in line with the school's policies and procedures? This might include seeking permission from parents, with guidance from school staff.	(yes)/no
5) Can you confirm that you have discussed your research plan with your mentor and other staff responsible for any specific class(es), and that they have approved your plan?	(yes)/no
6) Can you confirm that any substantial change to your research design subsequent to completing this form, will be discussed for approval with your mentor (and other school staff if necessary) and shared by email with your partnership tutor?	(yes)/no

Trainee signature and date: _____ 25/01/14

Partnership Tutor name: _____

☑ I have checked that the trainee has responded 'yes' to all questions above.
☐ I have discussed issues arising from the trainee not responding 'yes' to one or more of the questions above, and am convinced that this project is ethical (as explained in notes overleaf)

Partnership Tutor signature and date: 30.1.14.