

**School of Education - Continuing Professional Development
PMP Assignment Cover Sheet**

Name: Kate Kemp

Award: MA in Vulnerable Learners

Module Code and Title: PR 7102 Research and the Professional Student Number: 192167

Assignment Mode: Data collection, analysis and project proposal Credits: 15

Date of Submission: 28.10.12

Number of Credits already received (Including APL): 135

Abstract

Please write a brief abstract summarising your study. This should be no longer than 150 words.

The title of the proposed research project is ‘How can I contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of students with whom I work in the context of a BESD special school?’

The proposal describes the aims of the research and draft research questions and considers some of the theoretical concerns. It outlines the research approach and methods, discusses data collection and ethical issues and includes a proposed timeline of the project’s activities.

Ethics Statement

In this **outline** statement you should indicate the research ethics you have considered in carrying out this study. You should also explain how you have taken steps to accommodate these ethical considerations in carrying out your module assignment. The main areas covered by Bath Spa University’s Code of Ethics (Non-clinical) are:

- Informed consent
- Openness and honesty
- Right to withdraw
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Protection from harm
- Briefing and debriefing
- Intended dissemination

Please refer to your module handbook for further information.

I have read and conformed to the University’s Code of Ethics and the BERA ethical guidelines

In signing this form, you are confirming that you have read and understood the regulations regarding assessment and are aware of the seriousness with which the University regards unfair practice.

Signed... Kate Kemp..... Date.....28.10.12.....

PR 7102 Research Proposal - Kate Kemp

How can I contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of students with whom I work in the context of a BESD special school?

Research focus, rationale and draft research questions

The focus of this research is ‘emotional self-regulation’. ‘Self-regulation’ is a psychological term used to describe the process whereby an individual is in control of their innate impulses. ‘Emotional self-regulation’ therefore refers specifically to being aware of and learning to manage one’s feelings and emotions (Vohs and Baumeister, 2011). I intend to draw on theories of brain development and recent brain research (Phillips and Schonkoff, 2000) the experience and expertise of colleagues, the experience and thoughts of present and past students and my own experience and understanding to both improve my own professional knowledge and expertise and also contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of the students with whom I work. I intend one of the results of the research to be some practical recommendations for the school’s management to consider implementing.

I will be using a Living Theory methodology (Whitehead 1989 and 2008; Huxtable 2012) to examine and explicate my current professional practice. Living Theory is a form of self-study whereby the researcher asks questions such as ‘how can I improve what I am doing?’ As I gain a greater understanding of the subject of emotional self-regulation I intend also to consider my own emotional self-regulation and the part that it plays my ability to be an effective practitioner working with vulnerable and emotionally demanding young people.

I am the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) of a special school for students with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Not surprisingly a large proportion of the students in the school have significant difficulties managing their feelings and emotions. Many are prone to extreme outbursts of anger or distress. These outbursts can be a significant barrier to them making progress academically and also to their prospects of further education and employment when they leave school (Blakemore and Frith, 2005). An important function of the school, and of my job therefore, is to help the students become more able to recognise and manage their emotions. Additionally many of the students have Statements of Special Educational Needs specifying that the school needs to make provision to improve their emotional self-regulation.

In researching what my current and future contribution might be to improving the students’ emotional self-regulation some of the tentative research questions are:

What can I learn from the literature and accounts of practice relating to interventions to improve emotional self-regulation?

What does the term ‘emotional self-regulation’ mean to me and why am I concerned about the emotional self-regulation of the students with whom I work?

How does poor emotional self-regulation manifest itself in the students at the school?

What do we do at present in the school, and what do I do as SENCO, to improve the emotional self-regulation of our students?

What interventions and recommendations about the kind of environment most conducive to improving emotional self-regulation can I learn about from local experts in this field (educational psychologists, behaviour specialists, mental health practitioners) drawn from their own expertise and evidence-based practise?

What can I learn from our students, past and present, about how they are learning or have learnt to recognise and manage their feelings and emotions?

What part does my own emotional self-regulation play in being an effective practitioner?

What recommendations, based on all my research data, can I make to the school’s leadership about the most effective ways to improve our students emotional self-regulation?

Theoretical concerns

The Handbook of Self-Regulation (Vohs and Baumeister, 2011) contains a complex constellation of theoretical concerns in the research literature on emotional self-regulation. Koole, Van Dillen and Sheppes (2011) have this to say about theoretical concerns in research into emotional self-regulation:

‘.... goals account for only a limited number of emotion regulation processes. Some forms of emotion regulation operate on levels that are more elementary than goals, and they appear to be driven by powerful hedonic needs. Other forms of emotion regulation transcend single goals and seek to forge a union between passion and reason, mind and body and other dualities that may divide the human psyche. A complete understanding of human self-regulation thus extends beyond goals and includes the regulation of people’s deep-seated emotional needs and overall personality functioning.’ (p. 35).

Human babies are extremely immature at birth in comparison with other species and can do very little for themselves (Music, 2012). Their survival therefore depends on the physical and emotional care given to them by those adults around them. Despite their physical immaturity human babies demonstrate significant abilities in being able to get the responses from their caregivers which they need to survive. For example babies are primed to relate to people and faces (Walton and Bower, 1993) and have been shown to have a clear preference for their mother’s voice (Kisilevsky et al., 2009). Babies of only two days old can imitate a range of facial expressions (Field, 2007) and in this way engage the attention of their caregivers.

Babies who are responded to promptly and without too much anxiety learn to trust that the world is a safe and reliable place (Gerhardt, 2004; Music, 2011). When distressed babies are soothed by a responsive caregiver they learn not to be overwhelmed by their emotions and begin to be able to manage their own feelings. However, babies who are not responded to in such a way can find it much more difficult to develop self-control as they grow up (Minde, 2000). Maternal depression or stress, premature or particularly sensitive babies can contribute to difficulties in developing the attachment necessary for self-regulation to develop.

Child development research has increased hugely in recent years, not least because of technological advancements (such as MRI) which have made it possible to study the living human brain. Much more is now known about the plasticity of the brain and the body's hormonal systems (Blakemore and Frith, 2005) and how both can alter throughout life in response to psychological, environmental and societal factors. Stress and trauma have a marked effect on the hormonal system as well as on brain pathways (Gerhardt, 2004). Childhood attachment problems, as described above, can affect a range of capacities such as executive function and the ability to form relationships (Minzenberg, Poole and Vinogradov, 2006) and thus prove a significant barrier to making progress in education and later life.

Aims of the research

In the broadest sense the aims of my research are to contribute to fulfilling the Mission of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Objects of the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

BERA seeks to *'encourage the pursuit of educational research and its application for both the improvement of educational practice and for the public benefit'* (BERA, 2011). AERA seeks *'to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good'* (Ball and Tyson, 2011).

My aim is to produce research that is consistent with these aims. In doing so I intend to demonstrate a way of working and researching that can advance knowledge about education and promote research to improve educational practice and serve the 'public good'.

As this research is being funded by a grant from the National Scholarship Fund for Teachers scheme I intend to meet the aims of the scheme which include *'bringing about a culture change to create expectations within the sector about the importance of scholarship throughout a teacher's career'* and to *'share learning, knowledge and expertise across the school system'* (NSFT, 2011).

More specifically my aim is to improve my own knowledge and understanding of emotional self-regulation, to reflect on my own practice and to use the knowledge I have gained to contribute to the improvement of the emotional self-regulation of our students.

Choice of, and rationale for the research paradigm, research approach and methods

My understanding of a paradigm is that it is an intellectual perception of a model or pattern of how things work in the world. Kuhn (1962) is often attributed as the originator of the idea of a paradigm to refer to theoretical frameworks within which all scientific thinking and practice operates.

The paradigm I am researching within is that of 'Living Theory' (Whitehead 1989 and 2008; Huxtable 2012). Living Theory is a paradigm in which individuals are believed to have the capacity to produce valid explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.

I have chosen this paradigm because it is appropriate for me as a practitioner-researcher. I will be generating new knowledge as a result of my research and this in turn will enable me to generate my own 'living theory' about how to improve the emotional self-regulation of our students.

Living Theory goes beyond other action research approaches such as Winter (1989) and Elliot (1991) because Living Theory educators take responsibility for researching the reality of their practice and creating their own living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996) using their ontological and social values.

I will be using my methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) to develop appropriate research methods for the collection and analysis of data. Methods will include action/reflection cycles which explain my values in practice. In these cycles an individual expresses concern because their values are not being lived as fully as possible, imagines ways forward, chooses an action plan, acts and gathers data to make a judgement on the influence of the actions, evaluates the influence of the actions and modifies concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluations. (Whitehead, 1989).

As this research will be grounded in my practice rather than the existing literature I will draw on literature in as much as it informs my theorising and my developing insights.

My central question is what contribution can I make to improve the emotional self-regulation of our students? Using an action/reflection cycle this question, and its possible answers, are constantly under review as I acquire new knowledge and understanding from my reading and discussions with professionals and students.

Proposed outline of the key research methods and activity

Part 1, context

- a) *I will review current literature and be able to answer the following questions for myself and for the reader: What do psychologists mean by 'emotional self-regulation'? How does it develop in babies/small children? What is the effect of having poor emotional self-regulation in an educational context?*
- b) *I will describe the context within which I work, the pupils who attend the school and the nature of their difficulties in accessing education. This will include reference to the different categories of BESD (eg ADHD, attachment*

difficulties, family issues). It will also include current thinking and policy around SEN and in particular BESD. I will include case study(ies) of pupils to demonstrate what poor emotional self-regulation looks like ‘in action’

- c) *I will research my own practice and clarify my values and concerns.* I will use a reflective research journal and draw on conversations with my critical validation group (see below). I will also review my previous writings for evidence of improved practice and understanding. I will consider the development of my own emotional self-regulation and consider how this relates to my work and our students.

Part 2, consulting ‘experts’

- a) *I will conduct semi-structured interviews* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989) *with a variety of professionals in the area to draw on their expertise with regard to emotional self-regulation. The focus of the interviews will be what they would recommend as suitable programmes and a conducive environment for improving emotional self-regulation.* Interviews will be carried out with Educational Psychologists, CAMHS team, Behaviour Outreach specialists, Early Years specialists as a minimum. These interviews may be carried out individually or in teams.
- b) *Consulting with current pupils.* I would like to gain an understanding from some of our current pupils about what they find helpful/unhelpful about what we do at present. I think this will be an important part of the research but will need to discuss with their teachers and my supervisor in order to devise a suitable method of consulting them. I will aim to have a sample from across all 4 key stages
- c) *Follow up of ex-pupils.* I know 2/3 young people who I worked with in the past and who are still around in Bath. I would like to include their reflections on their time at school and their views on how they were (or were not) helped to manage their emotions. These could be included as small case studies.

Part 3, conclusions

- a) *I will draw all of this data together and analyse it for common themes.* I may need to go back and consult further literature/current research in the light of what I have learned. I will also present my tentative findings to my validation group (see below).
- b) *I will make recommendations for the school relating to programmes we might implement and guidelines for ensuring the school/classroom environment is most conducive to improving pupils’ emotional self-regulation taking into account the various kinds of BESD pupils that we have.* I will need to consider how to share the recommendations. Are there some that I can implement myself or does it need to be a whole-school strategy?

Although this outline is presented sequentially I think it likely that the different parts of the research will overlap, particularly in relation to improving my own practice. As Whitehead and McNiff (2006) say:

‘episodes of practice lead to episodes of thinking, which in turn lead to new insights that inform new episodes of practice. Nor are these episodes linear or separate from their contexts. Action, reflection and learning can go on virtually simultaneously, as a person does something and in the doing thinks ‘I should be

doing this differently'' (p117)

I anticipate that new knowledge I have gained and ideas that I have had may alter the direction I travel in and prompt new questions.

Discussion of researcher effects and ethical issues

I will ensure that the conduct of the research is consistent with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and will be working on the principle of informed consent for all my data collection. Following the interviews with professionals I will send them my notes of the interview for their comments and agreement for their views to be used. All case studies from current and past students will be anonymised and will be subject to the same scrutiny process. Where students are under 18, consent will be obtained from their parents as well. Similarly if questionnaires are used I will obtain consent from all participating students and their parents. I will also ensure that any school staff who are involved in the research are clear about the nature of the research and their part in it.

The purpose of the research is to improve my own knowledge and understanding and, as a consequence, make informed recommendations to improve the emotional self-regulation of our students. As a practitioner-researcher I will use my own research diary to help me critically reflect on my findings and develop new understandings. I am aware that I will be asking questions of students and professionals most of whom I know well. Answers to my questions therefore will be considered within the context of the ethical relationship I have with the students and other professionals. Will the students, for example, be trying to please me (or not as the case may be!)? Such questions will be addressed through my own critical reflections.

I am also fortunate to be a member of a critical validation group to which I will be able to present my findings as they progress. The purpose of these groups, of between three and eight peers, is to consider the validity of the researcher's interpretations using Habermas's (1976) four criteria of social validity. I will therefore be able to submit my findings for this validation group to consider:

- their comprehensibility
- that I have evidenced my assertions of what I believe to be true
- that I have understood the cultural context within which the research is taking place
- that the explanations are authentic

How will the data collected be analysed?

Data collection and analysis will be an ongoing process. All new information will add to previous information and will influence what steps to take next. In my extended essay (Kemp, 2010), submitted for the National Award in SEN Coordination, I discuss the idea of 'embodied knowledge'.

'The idea of 'embodied knowledge' comes from the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Varela (1991) both of whom explored the integration of the physical or biological body with the phenomenal or experiential body. I use the term to mean the accumulation of thoughts, skills and beliefs that I have developed over the years as a

professional working with young people and their parents. These thoughts, skills and beliefs are in a dynamic relationship to one another. This is the knowledge that I carry with me and informs how I do my work and how I relate to the people I work with'.

During the process of this next research project I will be using data acquired from the various different sources described above to develop my 'embodied knowledge' about emotional self-regulation.

Word count: 2905

Appendix A

Proposed research project timeline

Oct-Nov 2012

Completion of literature review concerning current brain research and the development of emotional self-regulation

Setting up of interviews with professionals

Preparation of questionnaire for students and permissions agreed with their parents

Contacting ex-students to discuss their participation with the project.

Nov 2012-Feb 2013

Interviews with professionals and notes of interviews agreed with them

Questionnaires conducted with students

Interviews with ex-students conducted and written up as case studies

Mar-April 2013

Data analysis

Recommendations drawn up for submission to the Senior Management Team

Completion and submission of dissertation

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Appendix B1:

School of Education Research Ethics Approval Form

Student/trainee name:	Kate Kemp
Programme and/or module:	PR7102
Title of the proposed research project:	How can I contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of students with whom I work in a the context of a BESD special school?
Number and type of proposed participants (e.g. 30 children aged 6-7)	There are about 50 students in the school aged between 4 and 16. I will endeavour to have questionnaires completed by a sample across the age range. I intend to conduct interviews with a variety of professionals (eg school nurse, speech and language therapists, CAMHS staff, EPs). I intend to interview 3/4 ex-students now in their late teens and twenties.
How is permission being sought from the participants and/or their parents/carers?	At the beginning of the consultation with students phase I will write to all participants' parents to inform them of the research and ask them to let me know if they do not want there children to be involved. All students will be asked if they wish to be involved. All other participants (professionals/ex students/school staff) will be shown notes of the interviews conducted with them for their comments and agreement for their views to be used.
How is participants' anonymity to be preserved?	Every effort will be made to ensure students cannot be identified in the research unless permission has been specifically gained from them. Permission will be sought from older participants for their role to be identified if not their name.
Briefly describe the research methods proposed (e.g. interviews, classroom observations):	Questionnaires will be used with as many of the students who will agree to participate. Case studies of students may be used to illustrate certain points. Semi-structured interviews will be carried out with professionals and ex-students.
List the ethical issues associated with the research methods outlined above (e.g.	Confidentiality-names if students will not be used. Results of questionnaires will be anonymised. Every effort will be made to ensure subjects of case studies are not identifiable unless specific

confidentiality) and how you propose to deal with each of these.	permission has been agreed. Interviewees will not be identified by name unless that has been agreed. Informed consent-it will be made clear to all participants, and parents of students, the aims and scope of the research Right to withdraw-it will be made clear to all participants (and parents) that they have a right to withdraw from their involvement at any time.
Describe how your findings will be reported or disseminated:	The dissertation will be submitted to the University. Findings and recommendations from the research will be shared with the senior leadership and governors of the school and will be available for any staff, students or professionals who wish to read it. A final copy will be sent to the TDA National Scholarship scheme (the funding organisation).
I have read the School of Education Research Ethics Policy (please sign and date):	Kate Kemp, Oct 2012

Supervising tutor use only:

Comments on the ethical issues raised by the proposed research:	
<p>Please tick one of the boxes below: Either:</p> <p>1. I am satisfied that the ethical issues raised by the proposed research project have been addressed and give approval for the project to go ahead. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Or:</p> <p>2. The ethical issues raised by the proposed research project require referral to the School of Education Ethics Committee. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p>	

A copy of this form should be sent to the Head of Research in the School of Education as well as the Chair of the PMP.

Appendix C –Registration of PMP Project Title

Extended summary

How can I contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of students with whom I work in the context of a BESD special school?

The focus of this research is ‘emotional self-regulation’ by which I mean having an awareness of and being able to manage one’s feelings and emotions. I intend to draw on theories of brain development and recent brain research, the experience and expertise of colleagues, the experience and thoughts of present and past students and my own experience and understanding to both improve my own professional knowledge and expertise and also contribute to improving the emotional self-regulation of the students with whom I work. I intend one of the results of the research to be some practical recommendations for the school’s management to consider implementing.

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I will be using a Living Theory methodology to examine and explicate my current professional practice. Living Theory is a form of self-study whereby the researcher asks questions such as ‘how can I improve what I am doing?’ As I gain a greater understanding of the subject of emotional self-regulation I intend also to consider my own emotional self-regulation and the part that it plays my ability to be an effective practitioner working with vulnerable and emotionally demanding young people.