

Enabling Students To Engage With Autonomous Learning: The Assessment of Student Character Strengths



What are the aims of this project?

This project aims to facilitate the growth of self-confidence, self-esteem and other positive character strengths in our students, qualities necessary to enable them to fully engage with opportunities for autonomous learning and become real autonomous learners.

Specifically the project will increase student self-esteem by assessing their character strengths and providing them with feedback and information about how these strengths can contribute to developing their skills in learning to give them more confidence so that they can engage more fully in opportunities for autonomous learning.

The final result of this project will be a package for assessing student strengths and teaching material about the effective application of character strengths to develop autonomous learners.

What is the background / rationale?

There is a relatively large research literature examining the effects of various pedagogies on the development of autonomous learning. However, there is considerably less research, focusing on the personal qualities of students, which facilitate or impede their development as autonomous learners.

A personal sense of autonomy underpins autonomous learning as outlined in self-determination theory. This project adopts the perspective of the new school of Positive Psychology. This approach identifies and measures human strengths and has developed psycho-educational interventions to enable individuals to maximise the use of their personal strengths to increase their confidence and self-esteem. One of the core requirements of autonomous learning is confidence and this project aims to use measures and techniques from positive psychology to develop student confidence to facilitate their development as autonomous learners.

What are the benefits to student learning?

Learner autonomy needs to be conceptualised as a capacity for taking control of learning, which requires the development of a set of personal qualities and skills. Providing assessments of strengths allows students to recognise the positive qualities they already possess and receive positive feedback and information about the implementation of character strengths. It is predicted will this positive feedback plus knowledge about how they can apply their character strengths will initially boost their sense of self-esteem, which will give them increased confidence to engage in

autonomous learning. Obtaining external confirmation of personal strengths is particularly valuable for students who may not be very confident about their abilities. Positive psychology approaches engender a belief in one's own ability to tackle challenges which is very relevant for developing autonomous learners and this will be of great benefit to many students.

The assessment package can be delivered online facilitating dissemination across the university longer term. This assessment also provides valuable information for students PDP. This approach is more common in business but is relatively new in education, being implemented in some American Schools and one US university and would place Hallam at the forefront in applying positive psychology techniques to teaching and learning.

How will this project be evaluated?

140 first year psychology students will have the opportunity to have their character strengths assessed and complete a measure of self-esteem and well-being. They receive information about the importance of character strengths and a report on their strongest personal character strengths and then complete a measure of self-esteem and well-being to measure the immediate impact of positive feedback. This measure is then repeated two months later to assess for lasting changes.

Project Leader

Ann Macaskill
Email: a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk
Telephone: 0114 225 2497