In many ways the next chapter is one of the most important in the book. Much of the psychological development of the individual is bound up with the emerging sense of self, the sense that the individual has a separate identity of which he himself is uniquely conscious. Yet in spite of its importance, the phenomenon of the self is one of the most difficult for psychologists to explain, so much so that many of them prefer to ignore it in their work altogether. The topic is conspicuous by its absence from many basic texts in psychology, where the emphasis is upon observable behaviour, and it is sometimes argued that there is in fact no reliable way of researching into it since we can only gain knowledge of another person's self-awareness by listening to what he is able to tell us on the subject himself. This method, known as the introspective method, has long been suspect amongst large numbers of psychologists because of the difficulties involved in checking the accuracy of the information thus gained. People may give us a deliberately false picture, or they may be unable to put what they wish to convey into words, or they may mean subtly different things by the words they use from what we take them to mean.

For the teacher, however, some understanding of how self-awareness develops and of the factors that influence it are crucial. Educational success depends in no small measure upon the view a child has of himself. He is not born with this view, but acquires it through experience, in particular perhaps through watching how other people react towards him and listening to the opinions they pass about him. Part of the role of the teacher is to help the child to think about himself positively, to recognize and develop his strengths, to formulate life goals that he thinks will enhance his self-concepts, and give him an awareness of personal value and worth. More is at stake here than simply success in the class. We are thinking of the child's life outside and beyond school, and of his personal development throughout his adult years.

In the section by Bannister which follows, the author deals first with the difficult problems of how we define the 'self', and goes on from there to look at the nature of self-
knowledge, at the idea of personal change and development, and at the obstacles that come in their way. It repays particularly careful reading, and the reader is advised to pause frequently as he works through it in order to reflect on the meaning of what is being read in terms of his own life experience and self-knowledge. By so doing he will find not only that his understanding is enhanced but that the implications of what is being said for the education of the young become more apparent.

What is self?  
D. BANNISTER

Definition is a social undertaking. As a community we negotiate the meaning of words. This makes 'self' a peculiarly difficult term to define, since much of the meaning we attach to it derives from essentially private experiences of a kind which are difficult to communicate about and agree upon. Nevertheless, we can try to abstract from our private experience of self qualities which can constitute a working definition. Such an attempt was made by Bannister and Fransella (1980) in the following terms.

Each of us entertains a notion of our own separateness from others and relies on the essential privacy of our own consciousness. Consider differences between the way in which you communicate with yourself and the way in which you communicate with others. To communicate with others involves externalizing (and thereby blurring) your experience into forms of speech, arm waving, gift giving, sulking, writing and so on. Yet communicating with yourself is so easy that it seems not to merit the word communication: it is more like instant recognition. Additionally, communicating with specific others involves the risk of being overheard, spied upon or having your messages intercepted and this contrasts with our internal communications which are secret and safeguarded. Most importantly, we experience our internal communications as the origin and starting point of things. We believe that it is out of them that we construct communications with others. We know this when we tell a lie because we are aware of the difference between our experienced internal communication and the special distortions given it before transmission.

We entertain a notion of the integrity and completeness of our own experience in that we believe all parts of it to be relatable because we are, in some vital sense, the experience itself. We extend the notion of me into notion of my world. We think of events as more or less relevant to us. We distinguish between what concerns and what does not concern us. In this way we can use the phrase 'my situation' to indicate the boundaries of our important experience and the ways in which the various parts of it relate to make up a personal world.