Teacher's role in improving inadequate self-concepts of elementary school children

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THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN IMPROVING INADEQUATE SELF-CONCEPTS
OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

by
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CHAPTER I
THE TEACHER AND SELF-CONCEPTS

INTRODUCTION

It seems that a child's self-concept determines the amount of success he will experience. This idea led the author to investigate how the teacher could improve a child's self-concept and help him to maximize his successes and minimize his failures.

The teacher plays a significant part in the student's self-concept development. If a child sees himself as worthy and able in the eyes of his parents, his teachers, his peers, and especially himself, he is likely to enjoy satisfactory emotional and school adjustment.

This writer believes the teacher can and must help her students grow in self-esteem. Children have the right to enjoy life to the fullest. But if they are hampered by a low opinion of themselves and their ability, their participation in life becomes hesitant and painful.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this investigation was to present the findings of recent research related to the self-concept and the teacher's role in improving it.

This paper deals with these questions:

(1) What are the present and popular ideas relating the elementary school child's self-concept to his academic success?

(2) How can the teacher prepare herself to help her students grow in self-esteem?

(3) What are some programs that can be used in the classroom to improve self-concept?

LIMITATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION

This survey was limited to research dealing with the self-concept of grade school children. The writer's major interest focused on the primary school area, and especially with learning disabled children.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Self-concept and self-esteem are used interchangeably in this paper. The terms include how a person views himself and his ability. In other words, if he has a high self-concept or a high self-esteem, he views himself as a favorable and capable person. An individual with a low self-concept or low self-esteem, envisions himself and his abilities as inferior or lacking in desirability.
A learning disabled child is one who has
difficulties in academic and learning tasks, whose
achievement is below his potential, and who needs
special education assistance in order to succeed.\(^1\)

Learning disabilities will be shortened to
"L.D." for the purpose of this paper. The teacher will
be referred to as "she," and the student as "he."

SUMMARY

Children who enjoy academic and social success
appear to have a degree of confidence in their abilities.
Those who experience academic and social failures seem
less happy, more troubled and evidence dissatisfaction
with themselves by exhibiting inappropriate behavior and
negative attitudes.

The field of Learning Disabilities is based on
the premise that all students can learn if their teachers
can learn how to teach them. This idea has excited many
education students. A child cannot learn until he has
reached a certain degree of maturity. If he is not ready
due to an overwhelming amount of failures, negative atti-
tudes, and an incapacitating self-concept, why then can't
the teacher teach him how to improve his self-esteem?
This paper provides some "how to do it" information and
ideas on raising the L.D. child's self esteem.

\(^1\)Janet W. Lerner, *Children With Learning Disa-

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CHAPTER II

SELF-CONCEPT AND THE CLASSROOM

EXPECTANCY THEORIES

To learn is to change. Education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.\(^1\)

Self-concept is how an individual feels about himself. He has a good self-concept if he sees himself as generally well-adjusted, able to adapt to change, and usually able to meet with success. The self-concept is not the same as the self and in general, a map (self-concept) is not the territory (self) it stands for; words are not things.\(^2\)

Self-concept is formed by our relationship to the world, our society, and it to us. This is a slow process through which an individual comes to know and appreciate himself better, and as a byproduct to understand

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others better too. It develops first as child's play, for example, imitating his family, and later with the more sophisticated knowledge of society's rules, in interpersonal relationships and the individual's view of them. He learns to act appropriately in differing situations.

Teachers influence the self-concept of their students. When a teacher thinks highly of a student, when she feels he is capable and intelligent, she will work harder with him to prove him worthy of her expectations, so that he does live up to them. Conversely a teacher may expect little of a student, and so she spends less time and expends less effort on him, feeling his (what she considers to be) lack of ability to be unworthy of her extra efforts. This student is likely to perform poorly. The teacher has robbed him of a good self-concept, in denying that he has the possibility to achieve successfully. If he achieves in spite of her, often she may be displeased, for he is failing to conform to her opinion of him, and teachers do not like to be wrong!

Rosenthal found teachers to react this way in several studies encompassing lower-class, middle-class, and upper-class children. He concluded that a teacher's prejudices and opinions definitely effect her student's self-concept and learning achievements.¹ Davidson and

Lang came to similar conclusions and discovered that academic achievement was higher and the classroom behavior more desirable for those children who saw themselves as adequate in the eyes of their teachers. ¹

A student with a poor self-concept often prefers to avoid new situations and studies in which he feels he will probably again experience failure. He may immediately answer with an "I don't know," before the instructor has finished asking the question, or he may remain silent in hopes that the instructor will get tired of waiting and seek the answer from another.

Wylie has indicated that the self-concept is learned through a combination of rewards and punishments related to one's actions and characteristics. ² The child discovers who and what he is by his successes and failures, and by others' reactions to him, and their treatment of him. ³ For example, if he thinks his teacher likes and respects him, he may come to think of himself as likable. However, if he feels his presence is annoying and bothersome to his teacher, he may come to feel that he is a nuisance and unacceptable. The child, therefore, begins

¹Yamamoto, The Child and His Image, p. 84.
to develop a self-concept in reference to the feelings which are reflected by those individuals who mean something to the child. This results in continuous feedback and the eventual formation of personal attitudes which comprise the personality of the child. Therefore, it behooves the teacher to always approve of the child. When the child's behavior is unacceptable, he should be told that he is important, worthwhile and likable, but that the behavior he is demonstrating is not acceptable. This has to be shown through body language too, for if a child is told he is liked, but experiences adverse feelings towards him, he will know he has been lied to. He will come to distrust the person who lied to him.

The child may behave in a certain way in order to receive the kind of treatment to which he has adjusted. The child who has met with success will most likely continue the behavior that promotes success, and the child who has adjusted to failure will also continue in his behavior patterns.

A child who sees himself as a failure, even though he doesn't want to be a failure, will continue in the failure pattern because he sees himself as such in others.

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1Quick, "Toward positive self-concept," p. 468.
2Ibid., p. 469.
attitudes towards him. He comes to believe they must be right. And if they are right, why attempt success when, he believes, he can only once again succumb to failure. It becomes simpler not to try, or to give an appearance of an attempt to try, but in reality to settle into the dubious comfort of failure, a situation where he never tries, and therefore never succeeds.

Success produces and promotes more success, while failure leads to continued poor achievement. Unfortunately, American schools emphasize individual accomplishment, language skills, competition and independence. This is a big order for children who are forced to attend school with an ailing self-concept. These are the children who feel they can't beat the system so they quit trying.

Those who fail suffer in three ways; (1), they're punished for their lack of success, for example, having to do their homework after school instead of being allowed to play with their friends or having to do it during recess; (2), they suffer a social devaluation; and (3), a self-devaluation.

When we realize what we do to our children, the pressure we put them under, it's not difficult to understand why so many young people resort to aberrant behavior.


When an adult fails in a job or is fired, he merely picks himself up and looks for employment in which he won't fail. A child is not as fortunate. With our compulsory education, he is not allowed to quit when he fails, and school becomes his jail. Imagine what would happen to an adult who was forced to attend to a job where he daily faced failure for twelve long years. He might very well go crazy! Children are more resilient. However, when they are forced to attend school, minus a background that includes the love, admiration, and respect of their family, teachers and peers, they all too often cannot withstand the pressure.

A good practice for a success aspiring teacher would be to evaluate her expectancies periodically for their validity, and to be wary of possible judgments transmitted by cumulative records and prior teachers. Avoid being pre prejudiced by records. They tell us the child "did not" succeed, not that he "could not" have succeeded. Weiner asks us to examine our attitudes, our expectancies of children, as well as of ourselves, and then to be sensitive to the myriad factors that influence school data.¹

Evans cites two implications of teacher expectations: (1), favorable teacher expectations tell the child his teacher has faith in his ability to learn; and (2),

teachers who believe in the abilities of their children will be less quick to find fault with them when their academic progress is slow, but will instead question how effective their teaching methods are with that particular child. Without a periodic and thoughtful examination of her expectancies, the teacher may unconsciously stereotype her own behavior and victimize the children she is charged to serve.¹

**MAINSTREAMING**

Traditionally many classroom teachers have referred their problem students in the hopes of having them transferred to special classes. Teachers prefer to have homogeneous classes as they are easier to teach. Current law and practice demand mainstreaming students while providing for their special needs. This is a practice whereby the student with special needs either goes into the regular classroom or stays in it (having never left it) and receives supplemental help in his problem areas either by the skilled classroom teacher, a resource or special education teacher, or by another such as an aide who works under the supervision of a professional.

Reger defines mainstreaming as assigning handicapped children into the regular classroom with special assistance provided to help maintain progress and prevent

failure. Mainstreaming can often be integral to a student's healthy self-concept formation. Children like to be like their peers, and when handicapped children are segregated and labeled, their differences are highlighted to the detriment of their self-concept. A child who is labeled "retarded" and placed in a special class for the retarded, will come to be regarded by others and eventually by himself, as retarded. He is likely to attempt little as he feels little can be expected from someone so labeled. Schommer told of a case at St. Colletta's in Jefferson, Wisconsin, in which a student was discovered to have been misdiagnosed as retarded. When asked why he had always acted retarded, he replied that everyone there was expected to act that way.

Mainstreaming affords the child the right to be like everyone else with the added opportunity of having his differences attended to. The teacher who embraces mainstreaming and who provides for the success of that handicapped student is an unsung hero. She has enabled that child to grow in self-respect and has saved him from the devastating effects of failure. She has taken on no easy assignment, but surely the rewards will far outweigh her efforts.


BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Within the past decade there has been a major shift in the area of behavior, from seeking to discover the cause of the behavior in order to cure its problems, to trying to help young people learn more effective ways of behaving. Behavior management is an attempt to change undesirable or inappropriate behavior by replacing it with more appropriate behavior. This is an educational process through which the undesirable behavior is defined. What is it? What should it be? The behavior is then studied to see if there is something that either precedes it or comes after it which makes it rewarding. Does Billy hit Janie because she first hit him, or teased him? If he isn't provoked, perhaps he does it for the attention he'll get following the attack. After thoughtful study of the situation, a treatment program is arranged and undertaken. This is followed by an evaluation of the treatment for effectiveness, and if necessary the whole process is revised in light of new information, and begins anew.¹

Behavioral modification, by ignoring unacceptable behaviors and reinforcing, by means of social recognition, only acceptable behaviors is applicable to the classroom setting. There is no reason to believe that the requirements of the behavioral modification technique exceed the training of any classroom teacher; the main requirements seem to be patience, fortitude, and ability to recognize the type of behavior and to consistently maintain the reinforcement program.²

¹Lecture by Marc Ackerman, Behavior Management, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1 October 1974.

Hewett points out how much more difficult it is for a seasoned teacher, than for one who learned the behavior modification procedures early in her education, to incorporate it; however, the real value of this process is that the teacher is saying, "I care, I will not let you fail." And how the child feels about himself, others, and learning is a major concern of the educator. Behavior modification is a plan that organizes the teacher's efforts and increases the probability that her efforts will be successful and rewarding.

DISCIPLINE

So often, what we do to correct a child is responsible for his not improving.

Children thrive best in an atmosphere of genuine love, undergirded by reasonable, consistent discipline. Children look to their teachers to maintain discipline and order. In classrooms where children are allowed to behave exactly as they please without adhering to any rules,

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2Ibid.


very little, if any learning can take place. All the children are likely to be unhappy and uncomfortable with the situation. They may fear for their well-being, for if the teacher can’t protect them from the unruly, who can?

Adherence to a standard is an important element of discipline. It is a great mistake to require nothing of children, for the principal ingredient of any successful task or enterprise is invariably discipline.¹

When children are discouraged they misbehave, have no respect for order, and learn very little.

Children should be motivated to learn what they need to learn. When a problem arises, the teacher immediately asks herself some questions. Was the assigned work too difficult for some, or was it too easy and consequently boring? Was the lesson preparation adequate? Was the presentation stimulating and exciting? Was it too long or too short? Have the pupils been given sufficient time to finish, and are there opportunities for fast workers to do challenging enrichment?²

Dreikurs and Cassel offer ten points for the teacher who wishes to promote acceptable behavior in a happy learning environment:

1. You are warm, friendly and kind but firm.
2. You act and speak with confidence and sincerity and express a sense of humour naturally.
3. You always have work well planned before the class starts.
4. You treat all the pupils with equal respect by listening to their opinions and considering their feelings.

¹Dobson, Dare to Discipline, pp. 104–105.
²Dreikurs and Cassel, Discipline Without Tears, p. 9.
5. You are encouraging at all times, in order to
develop or restore the self confidence of your
pupils. By distinguishing the deed and the
doer, you never damage your relationship with
the children. You may object to what a child
is doing but not to the child himself. Never
deny him the right to be respected as a person.

6. You are as impartial as possible. You try not
to favour the pleasant likable child or reject
the one who is provocative or deficient.

7. You are able to integrate the class as a whole
or divide it for group instruction in order to
get optimum learning.

8. You encourage group discussion and participation
in decision-making, set boundaries for expected
behaviour, and maintain these boundaries with
effective stimulating teaching.

9. You are not mistake-centered, but always accent
the positive by marking only the correct answers.
You give recognition for any genuine effort.

10. You involve all pupils in the chores and respon-
sibilities of the classroom.¹

Nagging, preaching, repeating directions and
criticizing are a waste of time. Where discipline is
concerned, quiet action is always more effective than
words. The teacher, after the child's parents, is the
first person to motivate interest toward educational
pursuits, and she is responsible for setting a positive
atmosphere in which his attitudes and achievements will
grow with continuous progress.²

The teacher should be aware that she may feel
annoyed, defeated, hurt and/or helpless by her students'
aberrant behavior, but she should not display these
feelings to the detriment of the child. Rather she should

¹Dreikurs and Cassel, Discipline Without Tears,
²Ibid.
be firm, ask the child for his aid, and praise him for his appropriate behavior. Above all, she should avoid discouragement with herself by seeking the positive.¹ She should seek her emotional release outside of the classroom such as in some form of intense physical activity like jogging, tennis, swimming, golf or even walking.

**ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

It has been stated that success is absolutely necessary for the child to learn, and that if the teacher expects the student to succeed, he probably will.

If these goals are to be accomplished, the teacher must then assess her students individually in light of their assets and deficits. By assets is meant their personal and educational strengths, and deficits refers to their areas of weakness. With this knowledge she can then plan a program for them in which they cannot fail.

For example, if a child is in the third grade, and is doing third grade work in all areas except math in which he knows only simple addition, she would begin with addition.

She might discover his interests and work addition into them, such as baseball or camping. If you wanted each member of your team to have a ball, and you only have three balls, how many more would you need? She

¹Dreikurs and Cassel, *Discipline Without Tears*, p. 41.
might have him tutor a first grader who is having trouble with addition. She might work with play or real money. Perhaps giving him the daily job of discovering how many are present and absent in the classroom would help him. Seek to enlist his cooperation in these efforts, and to convince him of the necessity of learning math.

Mitchell states that today's teacher must diagnose problems, prescribe activities for individual needs and devote her attention to the learning activities of individual students rather than to the collecting of information. She inspires, motivates and develops awarenesses.¹

Try to ensure that your students are physically, mentally and emotionally ready for the learning environment. If you suspect they're not, consult with the school nurse and the parents.

Children learn best by doing. Emphasis on improvement with practice rather than criticism of initial failures should be the rule. Patience on the part of the teacher will encourage the child to be more patient with himself and others.²

Mistakes are not tragedies. It is of particular value for the teacher to admit her errors, for by example a child learns that mistakes are human, and that it is better to learn from errors than to be defeated by them.³

³Ibid.
A teacher is limited in her quest to excite her students to successful learning only by the extent of her warmth, creativity and ingenuity. When she feels her own resources are exhausted, she has her peers and her educational and professional literature to explore for further ideas. Talk to the child, get to know him and his parents better. Perhaps in them you'll find the key to solving his problems. Whenever possible, actively engage the parents in their child's education. Tell them how great their son is and why he is great. Let the child realize that you sincerely like him, and that you're confident he can accomplish the given task.¹

**TASK ANALYSIS**

Teachers who seek success for their students must continually grow in their knowledge of children and the learning process. This is absolutely necessary if the teacher is to effectively evaluate her students and plan appropriate learning programs for them. Bateman suggests planning an objective, doing a task analysis, teaching the behavior, and then evaluating its success. In doing a task analysis, she advises teachers to study a task by watching a successful learner do it, to seek to discover possible failure areas, to have your students set their own goals, and then to make up your mind what

¹Quick, "Toward positive self-concept," pp. 470-471.
you will teach your students and stick with it. She recommends a generous use of repetition, rhythm, review and rehearsal.¹

When the objective and the instructional sequence are known, the next step is the most obvious and difficult: arrange the environment so that learning occurs, is retained, and is worthwhile to the child.²

Evaluate each child's progress in reference to his previous accomplishments and put positive comments on his work. Negative remarks and too many checkmarks pointing out mistakes only reinforce the child's feeling of inadequacy, and discourage positive attitudes and any further attempts to improve.³ Remember that the child learns most readily from someone he likes and from whom he feels acceptance.⁴


²Barbara Bateman, "Educational Implications of Minimal Brain Dysfunction," The Reading Teacher 27 (April 1974): 665


CREATIVE DRAMATICS, PUPPETRY

Children can grow in self-esteem through experiences in creative dramatics. It is especially useful for increasing the child's abilities in areas in which other more traditional methods have not effected sufficient learning.¹

Creative dramatics is a nonstructured activity which provides participants with an enjoyable means for self-expression. Typically, a leader guides children in creative dramatics sessions by first providing a stimulus such as music, a poem or a story. She then leads a discussion of the stimulus during which she seeks reactions to it, and then initiates an activity derived from the stimulus. The activity can be anything from simple rhythmic movement to improvised dramatization of a story or poem. What they do is unimportant. Why and how the children respond or react is significant.²

Creative dramatics is of inestimable value to the child suffering from poor self-esteem, for it is an activity at which he cannot fail. There are no rules to remember, no criteria for right or wrong. All that is required of him is to contribute his ideas and exercise his imagination. It gives him the opportunity to develop confidence in himself, to express his ideas without fear of intimidation, and to grow in emotional stability.³

Creative dramatics can also take the form of choral speaking, acting or dancing out nursery rhymes, songs, or plays, pantomining such as in games of charades in which a word or phrase to be guessed is acted out silently using gestures and body English, or in puppetry.

²Ibid., p. 412.
³Ibid., p. 413.
Puppetry is an excellent form to use in a beginning creative dramatics program. Children who are too shy or self-conscious to perform before others will more easily express themselves with puppets. A teacher might have available in the classroom some of her own puppets, and allow the children to use them in their own imaginative ways during their free time. A permanent stage or house where the children could play with their puppets is also helpful.¹

Children can make their own puppets using socks, paper bags, boxes, mittens, tin cans, balls, or almost anything.

With puppets, skits or plays can be presented depicting historical, special holiday, or current events, such as a Thanksgiving play, or a Christmas pageant. It can be used in role playing and the simulation of contemporary social issues of acceptable or unacceptable behavior by acting out conflicts and problem situations that occur in the classroom. Puppetry can be used to stimulate language communication skills and social interaction. It can be used for therapy and in modifying behavior, and it's an excellent vehicle for story telling.²

¹Bruno J. D’Alonzo, "Puppets Fill the Classroom with Imagination," Teaching Exceptional Children 6 (Spring, 1974): 142.

²Ibid: 143-144.
In 1970, the Bread and Puppet players set up a workshop for children at the Psychoeducational Center at Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, to make puppets, create plays and perform in them. Dialogue was spontaneous, the only requirement being that it approximated the story line. They played to any audience that was available. Each child was enabled to contribute in a positive manner, and to channel to constructive use those behaviors that might be completely handicapped in the classroom or in a social relationship. The structured workshop promoted growth in appropriate behavior, as the children were able to enjoy success, pleasure, and self-esteem due to their accomplishments.¹

Children have derived religious, educational, therapeutic, and entertainment values from puppets throughout the ages. The contemporary teacher should not ignore the use of puppetry as an educational tool.²

The first requirement for effective creative dramatics is to keep it simple. Several groups of children can work simultaneously; however, the maximum number in a group of children should be ten. Provide adequate uncluttered space in which to operate. Maximum benefits can be derived


from two or three thirty- or forty-five minute sessions a week. Strive to encourage positive comments and to stimulate ideas. When criticism is voiced, determine how the deficits can be overcome. Through creative dramatics, the teacher will find her students growing in self-confidence and greater academic growth.¹

CREATIVE WRITING

Writing has been and is an essential part of the school curriculum. However, the creative aspect of it has been much stifled by a multitude of sins taking the aspect of innumerable bloody corrections smeared all over the earnest efforts of a young impressionable mind. If praise was given, it often constituted such a small portion of the total comments, that its value was lost.

This author believes that creative dramatics and poetry are intertwined with creative writing, and that they should be limited only by the child's ability to imagine. The teacher who believes this will concentrate on the child's efforts and dismiss his errors for remediation in another setting.

Good poetic ideas often come as fast as one can write; in the rush to get them down there may be no time for commas or for respecting a margin. All these matters

can be attended to after the poem is written.¹

Treat your students as artists. Be excited about their writing. Expect them to enjoy it and they'll catch your enthusiasm and have fun. Avoid words and phrases that tell the child what to say and rob him of the use of his imagination. Remember that it is easier for children to write as if they were the rain than it is for them to describe it, and that their degree of literacy does not form their imaginations.²

For each poem do and give examples to make the idea clear, and to put the children in the mood for writing. Koch, in giving the Color Poem, asked them to close their eyes; then he clapped his hands, and asked them what color that was. Almost everyone raised his hand: "Red!" "Green!" "White!" He then asked them what color Paris was; London; Rome; Los Angeles. He had them close their eyes again and said certain words and certain numbers asking what color those were. His point was to get them to associate colors freely with all kinds of things before writing the poem. Almost always, part of his preparation was reading other children's poems aloud. The effect of these stimulations were vividly apparent as the class wrote immediately and eagerly after partici-

²Ibid, p. 133.
pating in them.  

When embarking upon poetry, use the children's language such as "I Seem To Be, But Really I Am," rather than "My Seeming Self," or "My True Self." "I wish," is preferable to "I desire." Avoid words which might take him away from important parts of his experience such as "make-believe," and "imagine."  

Koch writes,  

One bar to free feeling and writing is the fear of writing a bad poem and of being criticized or ridiculed for it. There is also the oppression of being known as not one of the "best." I didn't single out any poems as being best or worst. When I read poems aloud I didn't say whose they were, and I made sure that everyone's work was read every so often. If I praised a line or an image I put the stress on the kind of line or image it was and how exciting it might be for others to try something like that too. That way, I felt, the talent in the room was being used for the benefit of everyone.  

The teacher shouldn't correct a child's poems either. If a word or line is unclear, it is fine to ask the child what he meant, but not to change it in order to make it meet one's own standards. The child's poem should be all his own. And of course one shouldn't use a child's poetry to analyze his personal problems. Aside from the scientific folly of doing so, it is sure to make children inhibited about what they write.  

With children who couldn't write, Koch had them say their poems out loud. He would type them, and read

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1Koch, "Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry," p. 129.
2Ibid, pp. 126-127.
3Ibid, p. 128
them back to reinspire the students and to show them where
they were.¹

The educational advantages of a creative intellectual
and emotional activity which children enjoy are clear.
Writing poetry makes children feel happy, capable, and
creative. It makes them feel more open to understand-
ing and appreciating what others have written (litera-
ture). It even makes them want to know how to spell
and say things correctly (grammar).²

What could be more thrilling for a teacher of the
learning disabled than to have them bursting with exci-
ment over learning. Koch has done it, we can too.

ART, MUSIC, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND GAMES

This author dealt with these areas only briefly as
it is felt the teacher will provide appropriate information
to the Art, Music, and/or Physical Education teacher who
might be better qualified to work out a remediation program,
or assist her in doing so. Encourage children to perform
in these areas. They offer tension release as a side
benefit. If a child feels himself to be a success in even
one area, such as Art, it may be enough of a tool to use
in building his self-esteem. Again, seek to encourage him
in any appropriate efforts he makes.

Consider using these areas as reinforcers for
appropriate behavior.

The child with a sagging self-concept especially
needs to do well in the field of Physical Education, for

¹Koch, "Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children

often this area can help him to make and keep friends. No child likes to be shunned by the team captain, and not wanted on any team. The teachers can do much to help him increase his skills enabling him to become an acceptable teammate and thereby gain peer and social status.

Remediation of small and large muscle skills partially requires lots of practice in cutting, pasting, matching, sorting, copying, tracing, block play, walking, running, jumping, sitting, skipping, hopping, manipulating objects, jungle gym playing, throwing, catching, dancing, gesturing, balancing, drawing, constructing, reproducing and demonstrating how-to-do something.¹

Some children simply need to be taught to notice things, such as in completing a puzzle, or a strategy in tic-tac-toe. Analyze the task to discover how to go about the game, then study to see where the child falls down. Teach the child how to compete successfully. Making and keeping friends is more important in the long run than the academics, for the child is first of all a social being.

Moods, Emotions and Feelings

Assessing Child Behaviors

Hammer and Maine asks the teacher to keep in mind the following questions when trying to decide whether or

not a particular child really has an emotional problem:

Is the child's behavior or attitude extreme, excessive, or overly intense in comparison to other children in the class and other children that she has encountered over her years of teaching experience? Does the child fail to respond to the usual procedures that the teacher has typically found successful with other children? Does the child seem to block out the reality of what the teacher is trying to communicate to him? If he accepts the reality of what the teacher is trying to communicate, does his behavior seem to be so compulsive or his self-control so poor that he is unable to alter his behavior even though he has the desire to do so? Does the child disrupt the class to such a degree that the class can no longer function normally and adequately? In general, does the child evidence behavior that is usually inappropriate or out of context with the reality of what is going on?

Next the teacher must ask herself if she is capable of helping the child by herself, with assistance, or are his problems so severe that he needs referral for professional help. The teacher does this by determining the degree in which he differs from the others. If the child's problems are not too severe, she might seek the aid of the principal, the nurse, and the special education teachers in helping him to overcome his problems.

Many standardized tests have been and are being developed to assess personal, emotional and social skills. However, most teachers will not have had the training and experience necessary to use such techniques independently.

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In this area the teacher will have to rely on the school counselor and the school psychologist.¹

If the teacher believes the child to have a problem, she may wish to make a careful record of her observations, noting time of day, frequency, duration, events preceding and following the behavior. This will aid her in setting up a program to remediate the problem.

In studying any child, it is helpful for the teacher to ascertain her personal beliefs about the child's problem. She can thus avoid gathering data selectively to confirm her own unstated hypothesis. Since it is virtually impossible to maintain an open mind while interacting daily with a child, it is far better to admit what one believes about him and attempt to study his behavior in ways which minimize the influence of such biases.²

When interviewing a child for an informal assessment of his behavior it is better to speak first with the child when he is having a good day rather than after an instance of misbehavior. The teacher's genuine liking for the child should be communicated along with the teacher's honest dealings with the child. Children are perceptive enough that few assessment interviews can be successfully disguised as chats.³

The teacher can keep questions to a minimum by


³Ibid, p. 190.
asking about broad topics such as, "Tell me about your family," rather than, "Does your mother work?" Make notes following the interview. Recording the interview may be construed as an unethical and an unlawful invasion of privacy. Listen attentively to the child with sensitivity, avoid words and comments that create hate and resentment, state your feelings and thoughts without attacking the child.

The interview should be therapeutic. Ginott offers the following four-step sequence which may prove effective: 1. The teacher recognizes the child's wish and puts it in simple words: "You don't like to sit and do your work, you wish you could play instead." 2. She clearly states the rule: "But the rule in our class is, first you sit and do your work, and then you get to play." 3. She points out ways in which the wish can be at least partially fulfilled: "You can play during recess, the lunch hour, and after school." 4. She helps the child to express some of the resentment that is likely to arise when restrictions are imposed: "I can see you don't like the rule. You wish we didn't have that rule. You wish the rule said: 'Play first, and work later.' If you were the teacher, you would change this rule." The


teacher should remember that rules are accepted more readily when they are understood. "In school it's important to get your work done first, so that you can move on to new and interesting lessons."  

Assure the child of confidentiality when using open-ended questions such as What I like most is..., When I get mad..., My mother..., My father..., What I want most is..., I am afraid..., I am happiest when..., My teacher..., Other children..., I wish I were better at...  

Generally teachers are uncanny about detecting children with problems; however, they should be on guard against trying to be all things to all students. A teacher is not a psychoanalyst; however, it is her job to detect inappropriate behavior, and to attempt to replace it with more satisfying behavior. He needs a teacher, not another mother, but you can be warmth and understanding to him.

ASSESSING TEACHING BEHAVIORS

Teachers who wish to promote positive emotional and social growth in their students, must first strive to promote it in themselves. It is unlikely that teachers with poor mental health can help their students grow in good mental health.

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1Ginott, Between Parent and Child, pp. 118-120.
Good mental health for a teacher depends on the following six realizations:

1. You guard your physical health with periodic check-ups because you are aware that the constant effort of teaching and maintaining good interpersonal relationships requires your maximum energy.

2. You like children and really enjoy teaching.

3. You understand and accept yourself with a sense of self-worth that protects you from being easily hurt or upset. You have the courage to be imperfect. You can accept criticism and even laugh at yourself sometimes.

4. You work for a sense of accomplishment and are stimulated to be imaginative.

5. You accept new challenges with confidence and courage, and always put forth a genuine effort.

6. You reserve time to take the opportunities for growth and development. Your lively interest in a number of activities keeps you young and alert. Recreation in some form of play or hobby is an effective means of emotional release and self-expression. It is better to swat a golf ball than a student.\(^1\)

Dangers to a teacher's mental health are over-anxiousness, being bored, hating the thought of going to school every morning, or feeling resentful toward your students or fellow staff members.\(^2\)

Fromm states that one who aspires to become a master in an art (such as teaching) must begin by practicing discipline, concentration and patience throughout every phase of his life; that they should be practised

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\(^1\)Dreikurs and Cassel, *Discipline Without Tears*, p. 21.

\(^2\)Ibid, p. 22.
not like a rule imposed on oneself from without, but rather that it becomes an expression of one’s own will; that it is felt as pleasant, and that one slowly accustomes oneself to a kind of behavior which one would eventually miss, if one stopped practicing it.

He also advises to live fully in the present, in the here and now, and not to think of the next thing to be done. Be sensitive to oneself so that you can be aware of your feelings without giving into them.

Braun suggests that teachers must believe in children so they will believe in themselves and that once the teacher has created her reality, the child in her charge will make his reality, a reality apparently grounded in the reality of the teacher.

Mueller suggests videotaping your teaching sessions. When viewing the tapes ask yourself: how am I at presenting material, at creating enthusiasm, at involving more students, at accomplishing my objectives and at reacting to children’s answers. View and discuss these tapes with your fellow teachers. It will increase your

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2Ibid, pp. 96-112.

self-confidence and your desire to improve, and the opinions and admiration of your colleagues will add to your self-respect.¹

**STUDY GUIDES**

Apparently programs designed specifically to teach an adequate self-concept are a hot item with the publishers. This would seem to indicate that they feel the market is ripe for their product. Unfortunately, it seems many of these elaborate programs also come with an equally elaborate price. Whereas this author sought to study as many programs as were available, interest was in the area that the teacher could afford, assuming that that may be the only way in which she could acquire the programs.

One of the nicest guides which could be used individually or in groups is a "write on" workbook entitled, *All About Me, Myself, and I*. It is priced at $12.50 for a set of 10. Trzcinski, a reading specialist, felt that a child's self-concept improvement was a prerequisite for remedial reading. The workbook is sequenced allowing the child to complete information about himself, his likes and dislikes, his world. When completed, it can serve as a keepsake.² The book is designed


²Betty Trzcinski, *All About Me, Myself, and I*, (San Rafael, Calif., Academic Therapy Publications, 1974).
for children who can write; however, it could also be used for nonwriters who might perhaps, just illustrate. The book could be read to nonreaders.

The Child's World puts out some materials with which to help children of Kindergarten through second grade grow in self-concept through an understanding of feelings, moods, emotions, and needs. The "Moods and Emotions" prints cost $7.95 and consist of eight large sturdy cardboard prints. On the front of each is the picture of a child expressing one of the eight emotions of love, joy, anger, frustration, compassion, sadness, thoughtfulness, and loneliness. On the back of each print are listed the aims of the lesson, how to elicit responses, a participation story, some background material, a rhythmic activity, a suggested project and resource materials. These excellent materials are easy to use and have the added advantage of being inexpensive.

The Child's World also puts out "Understanding My Needs." The prints include a positive self-image, to love and be loved, a need for security, to succeed, to know, to explore, to dream and a need to belong. "Developing My Values" are similar prints, again for

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1 The Child's World Catalogue, (Elgin, Ill., 1974)
2 Ibid.
$7.95, that will help the child to understand the importance of developing such positive values as being honest, being fair, showing kindness and concern, keeping rules, learning to control anger, showing courage, showing respect for others, showing responsibility and learning the value of work.¹

"Keeping Physically Fit" is another series of very good prints put out by the Child's World, Inc. They also publish *How Do You Feel?* by Francis Hook which will help young readers and/or listeners view children in situations similar to their own experiences.²

Educational Activities Inc. puts out records and cassettes with guides to develop self-concept, "Won't You Be My Friend?" "The Learning Party," and "Developmental Motor Skills for Self-Awareness." These range in price from $6.25 to $8.95.³

Highsmith Company Inc. puts out a series consisting of four records and study guides called, "Getting to Know Me."⁴ These are available for study at the Curriculum Library at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Anyone can view them but only U.W.M. students can check them out.

²Ibid.
³Educational Activities, Inc. Catalogue, (Freeport, N.Y., 1974)
Another very nice program is the "DUSO: Developing understanding of self and others." This is an extensive kit containing two storybooks, five cassettes, posters, activity cards, puppets and their props, role playing, and group discussion cards, and if requested a cassette player. The eight units consist of understandings revolving around Duso the Dolphin and Flopsie the Flounder. This kit may be viewed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Curriculum Library.

"Focus on Self-Development," is another series of kits and programs. Stage one: "Awareness," has been and is being happily used in the primary section at Linfield School in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Stage one is vast, therefore, the teachers are using it in part. They feel it is quite worthwhile. It costs $119.00, or $133.00 if you prefer the cassettes over the records. There is a "Stage Two: Responding Focus on Self Development," for grades two to four, and a "Stage Three: Involvement - Focus on Self-Development," for grades four to six.

Another good kit is "Our Feelings." This consists of six filmstrips and records or cassettes and a teacher's guide. It is aimed at the primary and inter-

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mediate level, and can be viewed at the Linfield School Library in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

This author read and heard about several other very nice programs; however, the costs of each of these exceeded a thousand dollars. It was decided that these were too costly to be of use to the average educator; therefore, they were not included in this paper.

It is felt that the preceding information on kits and programs is enough to give a teacher sufficient ideas to embark upon her own program, a program which need not cost her anything but a little time and imagination.

It is hoped that more teachers will make time in their heavy schedules to spend some thoughts with their students on moods, emotions, feelings, and understandings. It is a new subject area to consider, but one well worth the time involved.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY

This research was undertaken in the belief that programs designed to improve a child's self-concept could be of great value in the classroom. Whereas the author still believes this to be true, she is now of the opinion that a healthy self-concept depends upon expectations being kept within the child's range of ability to achieve, that his success must be programed, and that his efforts must be reinforced so that he will try again, and perhaps most important of all, that the teacher relay to the child her belief in him, and a feeling of care and concern.

It is also believed that the mental, emotional and physical health of the teacher play a significant role in the healthy development of the child's self-concept. In view of this, the author questions whether teacher-training institutions and school boards adequately screen their candidates. It is this author's hope that institutions that produce teachers are vitally concerned with their candidates' mental health; however, it often appears that they're far more concerned with their grades. Teachers should be people with healthy self-concepts, who
are hard-working and creative. They also need to be disciplined and know how to maintain discipline.

This author believes that the majority of teachers are sincere in their efforts to give their students what they need to live their lives as fully as possible.

It would be interesting, however, to discover how many teachers review their own self-concepts, and how many think of their students' self-concepts, and whether or not they do anything about it. It might also be interesting to learn if teachers respect their students as much as they wish their students to respect them. All of these are important factors in the development of the student's self-concept, and special programs will fulfill needs only if the other conditions are already met.

In other words, for a self-concept development program to be effective, the teacher must first hold high expectations for her students; she must program for their success, she might very well embrace mainstreaming, she would be wise to know and use the principles of behavior management, she should be able to maintain discipline in a positive manner, she would do well to use task analysis for her learners, she should encourage creativity and individuality in learning, and she herself should be personally, emotionally, socially, mentally and
physically healthy. Perhaps above all she should be a warm, personable person who respects all people, and who can instill in her students a love for learning.

These are lofty ideals and perhaps most of us do not come up to them in every measure, but what is important is that the teacher continually strive to be everything she should be, that she never settles into complacency but rather seeks to find new and better ways to be and act so that she can enrich the lives of her students and herself.

The way to do this is through frequent examinations of the goals and results of that educational process of which she is a part. School boards and teacher training institutions might continually review their teacher qualification requirements to continually improve and upgrade them. And whether or not schools use formal self-concept development programs, those involved in the educational process should be aware of the individual's needs to grow in self-esteem, and to be instrumental in helping them reach that objective.
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