

**RESEARCH AND METHODS OF IMPROVING  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM**

by

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM

One of the most vital and challenging roles of the school principal is to create an atmosphere of learning and trust. Since research indicates that a positive atmosphere is essential for effective teaching and learning, the school principal can help develop a positive school climate by being enthusiastic, encouraging and offering assistance to both teachers and students within the school.

Many children today enter school with damaged self images. They attend school while being exposed to unemployment, alcoholism and dysfunctional family problems which severely hamper their ability to learn. Children with low self-esteem drop out of school, get into substance abuse, become pregnant as teenagers, feel depressed, steal and cheat more, turn to alcohol, and use physical force more than those individuals with high self-esteem.

Students with high self-regard achieve at higher levels. Successful students feel better and take more risks than low self-esteem students. Successful experiences help students feel good about themselves and they then take more and different risks. The more students risk and feel good about themselves, the more esteem rises and the greater the achievement.

Self-esteem does not suddenly appear at age five, ten or twenty-five. Psychologists believe self-esteem begins to develop in infancy. They also believe that children between the ages of twelve and thirteen have the hardest time developing and maintaining a positive self-image.

Three groups of individuals, parents, teachers and peers, provide positive and negative feedback to children. Parents provide the primary source of self-worth. The second most powerful influence comes from teachers, and peers provide the third most powerful influence on children's self-worth. As a result, children usually

perceive themselves from the perspective of others and compare themselves to others.

## WHY STUDENTS NEED SELF-ESTEEM

Current research indicates self-esteem is a key factor in improving behavior and the academic achievement rates of students. Teachers intuitively know that when children feel better about themselves they do better in school. G.B. Gillman stated, "The development of a positive self-concept is a necessary prerequisite to academic achievement and should be a major objective of every school that is concerned with the development of productive citizens," (Battle, 1982, p.61). Charles Lipton offered the following remarks about the relationship of self-esteem and achievement. "The roots of desire to learn are deep and multibranching. The development of a self-worth and self value is one of the most important and significant of these branches. To know oneself and to value oneself contributes mightily to the development of an able learner, a curious learner and a mature learner," (Battle, 1982, p.62).

Some students feel school is a place where security, worthiness, significance and purpose are seldom found. Schools sometimes foster students into making negative judgments about their self-worth and these negative judgments often limit and shape their beliefs about themselves for the rest of their lives.

Self-esteem researchers believe that positive self-esteem building activities need to become an integral part of the classroom and school curriculum. Increasing a student's motivation, responsibility and achievement level can be enhanced when the student has a positive image of himself. Self-esteem can be changed and learned regardless of the person's age, and if it is learned, it can be taught. Henry Adams summarized a teacher's role with students when he said, "a teacher affects eternity, he or she can never tell where their influence stops," (Borba, 1986, p.1).

The importance of building positive self-esteem was stated in The Final report of the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social

Responsibility. "Schools that feature self-esteem as a clearly stated component of their goals, policies and practices are more successful academically as well as in developing healthy self-esteem," (Battle, 1982, p.76).

## DEFINITIONS

A wise man once said, "the most important thing a parent can give a child, more important than anything material is a sense of self confidence," (Berne, 1985, p.63).

Jim Beame, author of the book "Enhancing Self-Esteem, Kids Come First" defined self-esteem as "the degree to which I am satisfied with myself and my self-concept," (Beame, 1986, p.89). Nathan Branden in his book "The Psychology of Self-Esteem" states that self-esteem refers to "the perception the individual possesses of his or her own worth," (Krupp, 1991, p.62). An individual's perception of self-esteem develops gradually and becomes more differentiated as he or she matures and interacts with significant others. Michele Borba in her book "Improving Student Achievement and Behavior Through Building Self-Esteem" defines self-esteem as "the quiet confidence one has in oneself," (Borba, 1986, p.3). California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Social Responsibility developed the following statement in 1989. "Self-esteem is appreciating my own worth and importance, and having the character to be accountable for myself, and to act responsibly towards others," (Krupp, 1991, p.63). Andrea Brennan, a professor at Saint Francis Xavier University, states "self-esteem is the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself - it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy," (Yoder and Procter, 1988, p.112).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH HIGH AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM

The sense of self-value one possesses can vary rather radically. Difficult and different times, events, people and experiences can influence the degree of self-worth a person has at that moment. Individuals who possess a positive self-concept generally tend to differ from those individuals who possess negative self-concepts by a set of characteristics. S. Coopersmith, in his book Antecedents of Self-Esteem, listed seven characteristics normally displayed by students with a high self-value, (Battle, 1982, p.41).

- I. **"ACT INDEPENDENTLY."** Individuals will make choices and decisions about such issues as time usage, money, jobs and they will seek friends and entertainment on their own.
- II. **"ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY."** They will act promptly and confidently and will sometimes assume responsibility for obvious chores or do so without being asked.
- III. **"BE PROUD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS."** Students will accept acknowledgment of achievements with pleasure and even compliment themselves about their acknowledgments.
- IV. **"APPROACH NEW CHALLENGES WITH ENTHUSIASM."** Unfamiliar jobs, new learning and activities will be interesting to students and they will involve themselves confidently in the new act.



- V. **"EXHIBIT A BROAD RANGE OF EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS."** The student will be able to laugh, giggle, shout, cry and express affection spontaneously, and in general, move through various emotions without self-consciousness.
- VI. **"TOLERATE FRUSTRATIONS WELL."** This individual will be able to meet frustrations with various responses such as waiting through it, laughing at himself, speaking up firmly, and can talk about what frustrates him.
- VII. **"FEEL CAPABLE OF INFLUENCING OTHERS."** Students will be confident of their impression and effect on family members, friends and even authorities, such as teachers, police and their bosses.

Persons with high self-esteem will express their feelings about themselves and others in many subtle ways; smile, return eye contact, stand straight, and extend their hand in greeting. When an individual has a positive self-concept image, that person feels more capable and thinks confidently, thus tending to behave in successful ways which further increases a sense of self-worth.

S. Coopersmith also listed a set of eight characteristics displayed by students with low self-value, (Battle, 1982, p.42). Students with low self-worth can have many of the following qualities.

An individual with low self-worth usually has a negative self-value and a low self-image. These individuals tend to receive excessive criticism, punishment, and the feeling of disappointment from the people around them. Also, they have a strong belief that they are powerless to attain what they want from life. People with a low or poor self-image often become withdrawn, depressed and angry toward life and view

themselves as not being valuable or lovable. Low self-image individuals have a strong conviction that whatever they do will be wrong and they look for ways to fail.

Students with low self-value can have many of the qualities listed below.

- I. **"DEMEAN THEIR OWN TALENTS."** They will say, "I can't do this or that," "I don't know how," "I can never learn that."
- II. **"FEEL THAT OTHERS DON'T VALUE THEM."** They will feel unsure, or downright negative about their parents or friends support and affection.
- III. **"FEEL POWERLESS."** Lack of confidence or even helplessness will pervade many of their attitudes and actions. They will not deal forcefully with challenges or problems.
- IV. **"BE EASILY INFLUENCED BY OTHERS."** Their ideas and behavior will shift frequently, according to whom they are spending time with. Furthermore, they will be frequently manipulated by strong personalities.
- V. **"EXPRESS A NARROW RANGE OF EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS."** Some of the emotional characteristics displayed will be nonchalance, toughness, hysteria and sulking which can be expressed repetitively. Parents and/or adults can predict which responses can be expected for any given situation.
- VI. **"AVOID SITUATIONS THAT PROVOKE ANXIETY."** The tolerance for stress, especially fear, anger or chaos provoking circumstances will be low.

- VII. **"BECOME DEFENSIVE AND EASILY FRUSTRATED."** They will be "thin-skinned," unable to accept criticism or unexpected demands and have excuses for why they couldn't perform.
- VIII. **"BLAME OTHERS FOR HIS OR HER OWN WEAKNESSES."** They will rarely admit to mistakes or weaknesses and frequently name someone else or unfortunate events as the cause of their difficulties.

## DOES SELF-ESTEEM AFFECT ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL?

Considerable evidence has been documented to indicate that a relationship exists between increased self-esteem and academic achievement. Gail Dusa, (Canfield, 1990, p.48), and her associates at Silver Creek High School in San Jose, California conducted a four year study of self-esteem. The freshman class of the school was divided into two groups. The experimental group of ninety-three students was taught by teachers who adhered to three operating principles. First, all students were treated with unconditional positive regard. Second, teachers and students were encouraged to be all they could be. Third, teachers encouraged all students to set and achieve goals. The last condition was that the group participate in a forty minute activity every other Friday throughout their freshman year to build self-esteem. The control group of students, also ninety-three in number, received no treatment, but was monitored along with the self-esteem group for four years. At the end of the four years, G. Dusa's findings were:

	<u>Self Esteem Group</u>	<u>Control Group</u>
1. Days of absenteeism per pupil per semester.	1	16
2. Percentage of students who completed 90% or more of their homework.	75%	25%
3. Percentage of students who participated in 20 or more extracurricular activities.	25%	2%
4. Percentage of class offices held by groups between freshman and senior years.	75%	0%
5. Percentage of students who graduated from high school	83%	50%

Dusa concluded that to raise the self-esteem of students, you must first start with the school staff. The main way students learn is through modeling and imitation. If teachers have low self-esteem, they are likely to pass it on to their students. Teachers and the support staff of the school need preservice and inservice training on self-esteem before students' self-esteem can be enhanced.

Helen R. Hadley, an elementary school counselor, conducted a research study to establish the impact that self-esteem has on academic growth. In her study she cited the work of E.R. Gerler, whose research study found dramatic improvements in reading scores after students participated in a self-esteem curriculum. Also Hadley cited the research of H.W. Marsh which documented self-esteem as a responsible agent for the general academic achievement and growth.

Hadley conducted her own study with one hundred-sixty-five male and female students in the second grade from one elementary school during the school year of 1984 through 1985. Group tests before and after intervention were administered using the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale to measure self-esteem. The data from the Spring 1984 and Spring 1985 Stanford Achievement Test reading scores were used to measure improvement in reading achievement for the experimental and control groups.

Intervention consisted of a twelve week self-esteem program appropriate for second grade students. This self-esteem curriculum was presented to three classrooms for one half hour a week for twelve weeks before the second SAT was administered in 1985. The remaining four classrooms did not receive the self-esteem program and were identified as the control group.

The pre and post test SAT scores were analyzed and revealed a statistically significant increase in reading achievement by the experimental group compared to the control group. The score increases by the experimental group on listening comprehension were double that of the control group.

Several implications arise from Hadley's study and she used the research data of D.N. Aspy, R.N. Roebuck and A. Brennan to support and validate her research conclusions. They found that students can be expected to perform better when they are reasonably happy and confident. D.N. Aspy and R.N. Roebuck in 1982 reported that children with high self-esteem have improved attendance, cause less vandalism and have fewer disruptive incidents than those students with low self-esteem. Finally, Hadley believes that schools need to educate the "whole child," the cognitive as well as the affective domain.

Andrea Brennan conducted a research study to support the view that social interaction and participation influence the students' self-value.

Brennan sent out a questionnaire to a random sample of two-hundred and two female students in five area high schools. Four subdivisions of self-esteem were identified: Evaluation of Group Interaction, Leadership Qualities, Self Satisfaction and Self Fulfillment. The measures were established by adding the individual scores. Each question consisted of a nine point scale ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (9). After analyzing the questionnaires, the results agreed with the hypothesis that through involvement with others, learning about others and self, increasing self-confidence and defining one's role in society, a person establishes positive self-regard.

Many factors help determine and develop an individual's self-esteem. Socioeconomic status, height, weight, grade point average in school and church attendance were found to influence self-esteem.

Self-esteem, especially a student's, is dependent on many variables; participation is one of these. A person enters an activity with a certain level of self-esteem. If the activity is a positive experience, esteem is increased. This in turn may lead to greater participation in the activity or in new ones. Past participation is the foundation for present participation and serves as a guide to future endeavors.

It is hypothesized by many investigators that increased student participation leads to increased self-esteem. The data from the research supports this hypothesis. Student participation increases perceived self-value such that the people not only feel comfortable with others, but with themselves as well. As persons meet others, initiate and maintain peer relationships, they improve self-esteem. Participating in a variety of experiences also serves to enhance self-image.

## METHODS OF IMPROVING STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM

Teachers know that when children feel better about themselves, they do better in school. The simple fact is that "many children today are not receiving enough positive, nurturing attention from adults either at home or at school," (Elkind, 1990, p.194). Child psychologist James P. Comer has stated, "what parents say to and about our children and how we say it has an impact on how children feel about themselves. Parents and teachers can encourage self-esteem through praise, guidance and appropriate constructive criticism," (Comer, 1987, p.44). David Elkind, a clinical psychologist, believes that "parents need to let children know perfection is not the norm in real life. Parents need to tell their children of the many stupid things they have done in their past and have overcome," (Elkind, 1990, p.195).

The challenge facing schools is great, but there are day to day things educators can do to increase children's self-esteem and, in so doing, improve a student's prospects for success. Following are four plans and ideas on self-esteem which are explained.

- I. Jack Canfield is the president of Self-Esteem Seminars located in Culver City, California. He believes in a ten step model to help students increase their self-esteem and become what he believes are "winners in life."

**Step 1.** "Assume an attitude of 100% responsibility." Canfield introduces the following formula: **E** (events) + **R** (your response to them) = **O** (outcome). When students do not get the outcomes they want, the author urges them not to blame external events and other people, but to take responsibility for changing their responses. He emphasizes that we are responsible for our behavioral responses and that we have choices to make.



**Step 2.** "Focus on the positive." In order to feel successful, you have to have experienced success. Many students, because they feel they have never done anything successful, need to be coached about identifying successful accomplishments in their lives that they did not recognize before. Many students equate "success" with winning a medal or getting rich. Adults and teachers need to help students remember their accomplishments, not their failures in life.

**Step 3.** "Learn to monitor your self talk." Each of us has about 50,000 thoughts about ourselves per day. Students and adults need to learn to replace negative thoughts with positive self talk. "I can learn that," "I am smart," and "I accept myself" are examples of positive self talk. Jean Yoder and William Proctor in their article The Self Confident Child state, "a person should emphasize the can do language and adults should encourage children to emphasize the positive rather than the negative in their own conversations," (Yoder and Proctor, 1988, p.114).

**Step 4.** "Use support groups in the classroom." For some students, it is possible for them to come to school for a whole day and never be in the center of positive attention. Sharing ideas, talks and the use of support groups help students overcome the feeling of alienation and rejection. Nancy Samalin, the author of the article Children and Creativity, believes talking groups "is an effective way of learning to respond in a caring way, is the first and necessary step in helping children feel competent," (Samalin, 1987, p.76). William Glasser in his book "Quality Schools" believes that teachers and administrators need to spend two minutes per day listening to the students talk about their lives without the other students and adults being judgmental. "When students

talk, they learn that it is a positive healing experience to talk about their feelings and they become bonded to their fellow students," (Glasser, 1988, p.17).

**Step 5.** "Identify your strengths and resources." A vital part of improving self-esteem is the broadened awareness of one's strengths and resources. An example of this technique is to have students in their support groups write down and tell each other what they see as their positive qualities and strengths. The child needs to be realistic as well as being positive. It is very important to help students note those areas that need more development if they are to achieve their goals. Children need to choose words or phrases that build up and encourage rather than using words that tear down their self-esteem. Raymond Wlodkowski, the author of the book "Motivation and Teaching," states "the greatest evil that can befall man is that he should talk or come to think ill of himself," (Wlodkowski, 1978, p.48).

**Step 6.** "Clarify your vision." Without a clear vision, there is no motivation. Creativity is generated by doing what one most wants to do and is enhanced by taking the risk to live how one most desires to live. Nancy Samalin's philosophy is "learning is driven most quickly by the pursuit of what most interests the individual," (Samalin, 1987, p.74).

**Step 7.** "Set goals and objectives." Students need to be taught how to set measurable goals and objectives for themselves, family, school and community. The students share their goals with the rest of the class, support one another as they work toward them, and celebrate any completed goals. Many students set unrealistic goals for themselves and feel rejected and hurt

when they do not meet their high goals. When students feel important and the goals they set are attainable, they will work harder and longer to reach the goals. Real learning occurs when a student develops a sense of mastery over the material.

**Step 8.** "Use visualization." When we hold a clear vision of our goals, as if they were already achieved, the action releases creativity, increases motivation and alters our perceptions of ourselves and our environment. Students need to spend five minutes per day visualizing each of their goals as if it were already achieved.

**Step 9.** "Take action." To be successful, you yourself have to "do the doing." The author suggests constantly working with students to stretch into more and more action steps, doing things they previously did not think possible. Many students believe that difficult work is out of the question and do not attempt to do the work. Students need challenge in their classes. Challenging tasks can and should be invigorating and energizing. William Glasser in his article Self Importance Boosts Learning, lists four ways students and teachers can take action together. First, students and teachers need to plan together the goals of each chapter and unit. He firmly believes that choice equals responsibility. Second, students check their own progress and record their progress. This method helps the students see their own growth and progress. Third, students need to work together. In traditional classrooms, students are told to work alone and not to talk to other students. Glasser believes that when students talk and listen to each other, the learning and social support increases for each child in the group. "The more students talk the more they learn," is Glasser's philosophy, (Glasser, 1988, p.19). Fourth, encourage students by respecting a

student as a person. Teachers need to trust and believe in students and their ability to learn.

**Step 10.** "Respond to feedback and persevere." Students need to be inspired with stories of people like themselves who have gone on to do great things, often by working against the odds. Students need to be shown how mistakes can be used to grow, to use positive and negative feedback to their advantage and to persevere until they accomplish their goals. Parents, teachers and adults need to listen to children and what they are saying. When talking with a child, it is important to be a good listener, otherwise we may miss the chance to discover what the child's message is.

Jack Canfield believes his ten step model will increase a child's self-esteem and achievement rate when implemented by parents, teachers and administrators, (Canfield, 1990, pp. 48-50).

- II. Patricia H. Berne is a clinical psychologist and co-author of the book "Building Self-Esteem in Children." She believes that "self-esteem is as important to children as the air they breathe," (Berne, 1985, p.63). Berne believes that many children in our society lack self-esteem and many adults do not recognize the need for self-esteem. Children need to realize what adults, peers and other children appreciate about them in order to feel self-worth. As other people respect and value us, we develop the capacity for self-worth. Children need to have success in their lives and to be shown over and over that they are being held in a positive manner by the people in their world. When children feel good about themselves, they begin to see themselves as

worthy of respect and love from others. P.H. Berne believes in seven methods teachers and parents can use to improve a child's self-esteem.

Berne's first step in building self-esteem is "establishing success for the individual." To build a sense of success, create situations where failure for the individual is unlikely. Structure large tasks into a series of easy steps so that a sense of failure does not stop the child from wanting to try again. She states, "new situations should be comfortable, fun and interesting as possible with structured situations planned for a specific time with a successful outcome assured for each child," (Berne 1985, p. 63). Educators and adults need to be alert to what causes fear, embarrassment and hesitancy in each child. Rather than pushing them, teachers need to follow the children's lead. Often taking the route of a child's own interests leads to successful learning. Success builds self-esteem, especially when the chain of success remains continuous and unbroken.

The second method of developing self-esteem is to "state the positive." Typical student work receives the words "right," "wrong," "bad," "good," "OK" and "worse." Children are often not reinforced for what they do correctly, but evaluated in light of their failures. Two methods of marking students' papers positively are: first, putting the number of correct answers on the top of a test or paper instead of the number of wrong responses. Second, the correct answers on an assignment or test should be marked instead of the wrong answers. Teachers can use these two methods to help foster the positive rather than the negative grading methods in schools. Stating the positive on student work draws the students' actions to their strengths, not their weaknesses. Acknowledging the positive responses nurtures success.

The third of Berne's methods for improving self-esteem is to "capitalize on success." When interest has produced success, it is possible to use the experience to create new successes and to expand the child's interests. A child's success stories need to be shared with parents and other students. Sending home positive notes to a parent is an example of building success between the child and the teacher. Reading the note to the child before it is sent home to the parents helps develop a high degree of trust and honesty between the child and the teacher. Children will feel success is possible if you can help them build a history of successes.

The fourth manner of establishing self-esteem is to "watch for growth sparks." Children with low self-esteem tend to believe they cannot learn or successfully relate to other people. Often these children will not relate or learn successfully until a spark of interest is shown towards them. Many students defined as being "learning disabled" often have learned and use the negative mental block of "I can't do it" rather than actually having a low ability level. Glasser's philosophy is "All students need to believe that they can learn material in school," (Glasser, 1988, p.16).

The fifth suggestion for building self-esteem is "value and acknowledge." Teachers and parents need to keep a portfolio of the child's work. Noting the dates the children did their work shows them their development and develops a sense of pride. Parents can attach their child's work to a refrigerator door and/or cabinets. These surfaces provide the visible history of a child's growth and accomplishments. By preserving children's work, it communicates the message to them that their work is worth saving. Parents and especially teachers need to understand that the display of work is not just for "A" work,

but for any work that shows accomplishment. Evidence of success that is visible and tangible has a strong positive effect on a child's self-esteem.

The sixth method of developing positive self-esteem is to "keep expectations realistic." Expectations can evoke energy and excitement when shared openly and fairly. Sometimes teachers presume that their way is the only way to do a task. Children need the opportunity to explore, recreate or redesign a piece of work. The teacher's "only way" method, which says to children, "You can only learn it the way I think you should," destroys confidence and creativity. Force destroys a child's confidence, creative ability and excitement. Within the structure needed by children, teachers need to let students explore and create their dreams and goals. Love by teachers allows the human genius to begin to grow.

Berne's seventh and last method of fostering self-esteem is "don't be boring." Some things that need to be done in life will always be tedious. The challenge facing a teacher is to find new and creative ways to relieve the boredom. A teacher can acknowledge when a task is frustrating or boring. When feelings are recognized, children often become less resistant.

Teachers can help students pave the way for success by helping and teaching children to look for creative alternatives and imaginative solutions to frustrations and problems. Self-image will grow and develop when children feel involved and in control of their lives. Boredom depresses esteem. Interest and excitement increase self-esteem.

Building a positive self-image is a process that takes considerable time, perseverance, care and patience. Building healthy self-esteem means helping children love themselves. A part of that is the loving that comes from parents and teachers.

- III. Another author who believes in building positive self-esteem is Ben Bisstle. B.J. Bisstle is a psychologist who wrote and produced the video tape "Building Self-Esteem in Children." Bisstle believes self-esteem is determined by three vital questions children ask themselves. "First, am I loved by the magic people in my life? Do parents, relatives and friends show love toward me? Second, do I feel capable? Can I make decisions for myself and live with the consequences? Third, do I have skills? Do I have skills necessary to compete with others in the world?" (Bisstle, 1990). Bisstle believes if the answer is yes to all three questions, the child has high self-esteem. If the answer is yes to one or two of the question, the child has low self-esteem. Children with low self-esteem often have up to eighty percent of their actions and work criticized and are frequently disciplined for their behavior throughout the day. Children with low self-esteem also believe that their negative behavior is determined by themselves and positive behavior is determined by their parents or teachers. Bisstle concludes that low self-esteem individuals often see themselves as victims. Victims need victimizers. A vicious cycle of blame, defensiveness and more blame ensues.

Bisstle believes parents and teachers can use ten methods or approaches to help children attain high self-regard. The first step in building this is to "give the child a good name." Often parents and teachers give names to children which have a negative meaning or image associated with it. He or she is



called "small fry," "chunky," "lazy," "slow" or "stupid." Bisstle believes a child should receive a good name such as "spirited," "energetic" or "creative." A special positive name indicates to children they are special and appreciated by the people around them.

The second step of building self-concept is to "give children an ear." Adults and teachers need to listen to children each day without being interrupted. Adults who listen to children discover their world and help them feel important by having an adult listen. Learning to listen and respond in a caring manner is the first and necessary step in helping children feel competent. When children see adults denying their beliefs and feelings, they begin to think that adults do not care about them. Bisstle recommends that each child and member of a family needs to spend ten minutes per day talking about themselves and the events of the day.

"Let children make decisions" is the third method of building self-esteem. Teachers and parents need to have children voice their opinion and be a part of the decision making process. Children need to be informed about the decisions and help determine the decisions at home and in school. Children need the power to solve problems and make correct decisions before they reach the stage of adulthood. To preach about the role of democracy in our country and the world and to run the home and school in an autocratic manner is a complete hypocrisy.

The fourth way of developing self-worth is by giving children "permission for their feelings." Children need to trust and believe in their feelings. Often adults tell children a bruise or bump on a leg does not hurt, or "this is just

puppy love at your age." All children have feelings and need the support of their adults about their physical and emotional feelings. The rejection of one's feelings as not being important or valuable is a major cause of low self-esteem.

The fifth method of self-value development is "children must have rules and limits." Children need to know that all of their behavior is not acceptable. Behavior is greatly influenced by the event, people and occasion. Behavior at a basketball game should be different from that of a reading class in school. The rules and consequences need to be developed, demonstrated and understood by both the child and parents before an event occurs. Bisstle states "Children operate better with rules and limits that are unfair than with rules or limits that do not exist," (Bisstle, 1989). Children often test the rules along with the consequences and parents and teachers need to consistently enforce the rules in a dignified humanistic manner.

Bisstle's sixth method to help foster self-esteem is to "give children hugs." Children need to be shown that they are loved by the people in their world unconditionally. Children need a minimum of four hugs per day from adults, in order to feel loved and develop the self-esteem needed. Bisstle also believes this theory should be carried out by adults in the family. Often, when a child is acting uncontrollably, a hug is needed and required more than a spanking or hit. Hitting by an adult is not appropriate and helps promote physical abuse. Children never forget a hit from an adult.

The seventh method of building self-worth can be to "let children play and laugh." Children learn from their peers by playing and laughing. Adults need

to encourage their children to play and laugh. Laughter is one of the best methods of reducing tension and boredom.

"Permission for making mistakes" is the eighth method of improving a child's self-value. Children will make many mistakes in their lives and adults and teachers need to turn these mistakes into learning experiences. Children need the opportunity to explore and make mistakes without being ridiculed by their friends, parents and adults. Teachers, parents and adults need to focus on the number of correct answers on tests, schoolwork and responses, not the number of wrong answers. Excessive criticism, punishment and expressions of disappointment are extremely harmful to a person's self-esteem, while praise and appropriate constructive criticism help ignite it. Each child constantly needs a self-image boost throughout the day.

"Giving the truth" is the ninth manner of building and establishing a health self-concept. Children and adults need to stop lying to each other and give the truth. Truth is often more difficult to give than lying, but giving the truth leads to accuracy and strength between individuals.

Bisstle's last method is to give children "freedom." Children need the opportunity to explore, create and discover. By giving children the opportunity to discover, adults are teaching children responsibility. The most effective and most satisfied people have learned how to make choices and how to accept responsibility for whatever happens as a result of their choices. If the consequence is a good one, then the child has a good model for making a similar choice in the future. If the consequence is a bad one, then the child knows better how to choose the next time and avoid the same consequence.

Bisstle firmly believes and recommends that children need love, confidence and be shown understanding by the adults in their lives to grow and prosper. Children in Bisstle's opinion are our most "treasured asset."

- IV. Clare La Meres is an internationally known self-esteem expert and has authored three books, "The Winners Circle, Yes I Can," "Self-Esteem Lessons for the Classroom" and "Power: I've Got It." She has nineteen years of teaching experience in the high school system of Los Angeles and has many ideas on how to make self-esteem activities an integral part of every classroom curriculum.

La Meres has three basic premises about self-esteem. First, self-esteem can be changed regardless of anyone's age. Second, self-esteem is learned; if it's learned, it can be taught. Last, educators need to be willing to go outside of their comfort zone for children. Educators are in an incredible position of being able to invite students to see themselves as capable human beings. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated "unless you do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow," (La Meres, 1990, p. 27).

La Meres has numerous ideas on how to improve students self-esteem, some of which are herein explained. Her first idea is called "Standing Ovation." Students in the classroom get to cheer, yell and clap when an activity has been completed successfully. The yelling, cheering and clapping can last from fifteen to thirty seconds. When the group cheers and yells, each student is being praised and encouraged, so students are not competing against each other. Students are learning that enthusiasm, effort and cooperation between people are essential elements for success.

The next activity designed for the teacher's classroom is called "Power Poster." Students are to use positive words for each letter of their first and last name to describe themselves in creating a poster about themselves. An example would be the name Rich. R would be resourceful, I for intelligent, C for creative and H for honest. Each student then displays the poster in the room. This activity could be altered by having the students cut out pictures of their favorite activities, foods and people and adding them to the original poster.

Shaking hands with each student is the next activity to help develop self-esteem. The teacher shakes the hands of every student entering or leaving the classroom during the day. By shaking hands with each student, the teacher is getting the opportunity to interact personally with every student in their classroom. Handshaking helps the teacher and student remember that in school people and relationships are the first priority, not the lessons for the day.

The fourth suggestion offered by the author is called "Good News Cards." The teacher can write a brief or lengthy note on the card to each student in the classroom. The note can praise the child about some special event, homework item, test score or tell the student that the teacher cares and appreciates effort shown. The card is then given to the child during the school day and a copy of the card is sent home to the parents of the child. This is a tremendous idea for starting or improving communication between the school and parents. This may be the first time a parent has received a positive comment about the child from school.

"Responsive Lecture Groups" is another idea developed for the classroom instructor who lectures and holds classroom discussions frequently. Students are divided into groups with each group ranging in size from three to four members per group. After approximately ten minutes of lecturing, the teacher stops the lecture and the student groups assemble together to discuss the notes and ideas presented by the instructor. This activity helps students check with each other for understanding and accuracy of what has been covered in the class.

Another idea developed by La Meres is called the "Victory Log." The student and teacher keep a log about assignments, projects scores on tests and effort. Student and teacher write down the grades for the week in each curriculum area and compare the child's work to the previous week's grades. This idea helps students to determine if progress is being made in each subject and whether all the assignments were completed. Teachers and students need to be very careful with this idea so that students can see that they are trying to improve their own grades and are not comparing their progress and grades with another student. Careful planning and structure is needed for this idea to develop and succeed.

La Meres has finalized three conclusions about self-esteem and learning. First, "if we like ourselves, we do better in all areas of our lives." Second, "if we feel liked by the classroom teacher, we perform better in the classroom." Third, "our greatest improvement comes from positive reinforcement," (La Meres, 1990, p.4).

The final idea La Meres has developed and discussed with fellow teachers is that learning needs to be an enjoyable activity. It is part of teachers' jobs to do everything they can to create a positive and enjoyable learning experience for the students each and every day. The number one way to motivate the student in your classroom is to motivate yourself. Teachers do make a difference and teachers need to pay attention to what those differences are. All teachers and instructors have "MBA's." That is, teachers **M**odel **B**ehavior and **A**ttitudes, and teachers get these actions and philosophies back from the students in their classroom

## SUMMARY

Self-esteem is about the way people feel. Teachers need to enhance self-esteem by influencing the way children feel. Teachers need to remember the goal of all self-esteem is to produce learning situations in which children experience a high level of personal satisfaction and at the same time, learn and retain the material that has been taught.

All children have swings in their level of self-esteem. Self-esteem can be influenced by the events and time through which a child is passing. The children's feelings determine how they will react to new and difficult events. Raising children's self-esteem must involve a variety of appropriate experiences over time that change the way they feel.

Research on self-esteem shows that children with high self-esteem have better interpersonal relationships and are more likely to be chosen for leadership roles in classes. Children with high self-esteem receive approval, both in the classroom and at home, for being what they are. Children with high self-esteem usually have the confidence to demonstrate their creative inner processes and expect to be appreciated for what they have accomplished.

Children with low self-esteem usually avoid situations that stimulate fear or anxiety. Low self-esteem influences children's relationships since their lack of confidence is pervasive throughout their lives. Children with low self-esteem usually demean their own talents and blame others for their failures. Children with low self-esteem keep their creativity to themselves. They expect to suffer from critical judgments about what they do or say.

Teachers and administrators in schools play a pivotal role in building children's self-esteem. The enhancement of a pupil's self-esteem is a vital concern for every teacher and school system and is just as important as intervening to improve



academic achievement. A teacher or administrator can instill new life into children and enhance their empowerment. Oliver Wendall Holmes has stated "A mind stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimension," (La Meres, 1990, p. 25).

Parents and school personnel willing to work in concert stand the best chance of helping students attain increased esteem. Research has indicated that a direct relationship exists between effective learning and teacher esteem; the higher the teacher's esteem, the more the children learn. Schools need to focus on and offer programs for building the esteem of teachers, parents and other school personnel if they expect those individuals to help children to a clear self-image. The children most likely to develop a positive self-image are those whose parents and teachers actively look for opportunities to give them what they need.

Teachers need to learn ways to address children's varying self-concepts. To fail to do so, to concentrate instead on children's disabilities and weaknesses, is to set the stage for the development of poor self-esteem.

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