

Exploring Teachers' Self-Esteem and Its Effects on Teaching, Students' Learning and Self-Esteem

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The purpose of this study was to explore the teacher's self-esteem and its effects on teaching and student's learning and self-esteem. The study provided the contextual framework of the study, defined self-esteem, showed positive and low self-esteem, demonstrated how we can enhance the self-esteem of teachers in schools and how teachers' self-esteem enhances students' self-esteem. The results of the study showed that teachers' self-esteem is important for their success in teaching and that teachers' positive and high esteem positively affects students' self-esteem and enhances students' learning. The findings of this study will be used in the professional development of teachers with an emphasis of enhancement of their self-esteem for effective teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION AND THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Way in the 1990s, it dawned on me that "Self-esteem has become a household word. Teachers, parents, therapists, and others have focused efforts on boosting self-esteem, on the assumption that high self-esteem will cause many positive outcomes and benefits" as later studied by Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, (2003). At the same time, I was asked by parents that I needed besides teaching to enhance their young men's self-esteem for that was important for their success in and outside the classroom. In the same way, over the years, administrators, educators, and parents have been concerned about the students' self-esteem as a significant ingredient in the process of cognitive development, social development, cultural development, and learning (Cotton, 2001; Hawly, 1997; Katz, 1995). Amundson (1991) writes 101 ways parents can help students achieve; Cutright (1992) writes that self-esteem is the key to child's success and happiness; and Kramer (1992) rightly wrote showing that fostering self esteem can keep kids safe and sound. Although EQ Australia (2003) comes out with a new thinking that self esteem does not necessarily affect student academic performance, the emphasis has been on boosting students' self esteem in schools.

However, little attention is raised about the self-esteem of the teachers who arise early every day of every month of every of every year to prepare and to teach the children of our world. We wonder why our schools have suffered under the exodus of the teachers who seek other jobs; who retire early due to boredom and teacher burnout; who lack motivation and desire to work; who are stressed; who are emotionally exhausted; who see their work not only futile, but inconsistent with their educational goals; who are involved in a fast-track and demanding teaching profession; who lack control of the content they teach because someone else controls it; who decide to leave the classroom all together; and who do not have the positive image about themselves due to discouragements from lack of parental support, poor or lack of administrative support, and uprising of unmanageable classrooms due to students' behavior and

lack of interest in learning (Matheny, et al., 2000; Kokkinos, 2007; Friedman, 2000; Willis, 2006; & MacQueen, 2006; Malanowski & Wood, 1984; Farber. 1984).

Based on this contextual background the study provided the definition of self-esteem in details, showed positive and low self-esteem, demonstrated how we can enhance the self-esteem of teachers in schools, showed how teachers' high esteem can enhance students' self-esteem and finally it displayed why self-esteem matters.

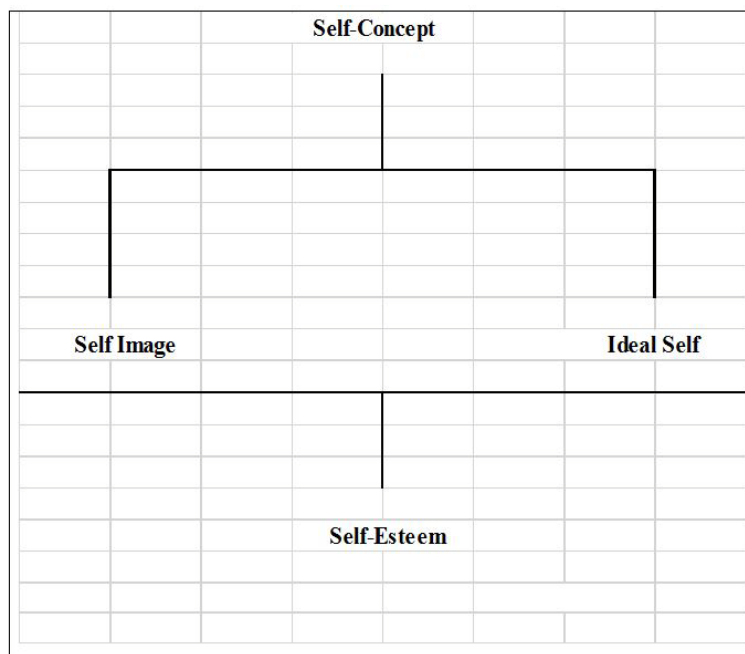
DEFINING SELF-ESTEEM

Understanding Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the focus of this study; however, we need to understand other terms connected to self-esteem such as self-concept, self image, and ideal self. Lawrence's (2006) study helps us understand the difference by defining each term. See Lawrence's (2006) flow of these terms in Figure 1.

1. *Self-Concept* is as an umbrella term means "the sum total of an individual's mental and physical characteristics and his/her evaluation of them" and it has three aspects which include cognitive, affective, and behavioral (p.2). Further, self-concept is an awareness of own self. It is the umbrella term where self image, ideal self, and self-esteem develop.
2. *Self-image* "is the individual's awareness of his/her mental and physical characteristics" (p.3).
3. *Ideal self* develops side by side with self-image, where a child learns that "there are ideal characteristics he/she should possess – that there are standards of behavior and particular skills which are valued" (p.4). Hence, from childhood to maturity one comes to contact with standards and values at home, at school, and the society from which they build the ideal self.
4. *Self-esteem* "is the individual's evaluation of discrepancy between self-image and ideal self" (p.5). Self-esteem could be global or specific. Global self-esteem "refers to an around feeling of self worth and confidence" (p.6); whereas, specific self-esteem "refers to a felling of self-worth and confidence with regard to a specific activity or behavior" (p.6).

FIGURE 1
SELF-CONCEPT AS AN UMBRELLA TERM



Adopted from Lawrence, D. (2006). *Enhancing self-esteem in the classroom*. Pine Forge Press

Dictionaries

According to Merriam Webster, Self-esteem is a feeling of satisfaction that one has in himself or herself, it is confidence and satisfaction in oneself, and self-respect (www.merriam-webster.com). The word esteem as part of self-esteem comes from Latin verb known as *aestimare* which means to value (Vocabulary.com). On the other hand, self needs no explanation as it refers to “you yourself” or we ourselves (Vocabulary.com, para.2). Further, self-esteem “is how we value ourselves; it is how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. Self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, our work – nearly every part of our lives” (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu, para.1). Hence, when we think on self-esteem we are dealing with how we value ourselves, and that self-esteem embraces the concept of our worth or pride in ourselves. However, we must not think that we become conceited which has a negative connotation on ourselves, but it means that we feel good about ourselves.

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Maslow’s Understanding of Self-Esteem

Self-Esteem Needs

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs starting at the bottom up shows that “humans as beings we have psychological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs” as shown in Figure 1 (p.327;). For the purpose of this study, I do not intent to expand on the rest of the human needs, but I will expand on the self-esteem needs area of the study in order to show its effects on teaching and learning. Maslow (1943) addressing the self-esteem needs pointed out that “All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions have a need for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others” (p.327). Hence, both teachers and students must have a sense of confidence in their teaching and learning, a sense of achievement, respect for other people, and a sense of the need to be unique (Maslow, 1943; Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Simons, Irwin, & Drinnien, 1978; & Poston, 2009). In psychology, self-esteem refers to “a person’s overall sense of self-worth or personal value” and often it is connected to “a personality trait” (Psychology.about.com, para.1).

Components of Self-Esteem

Moreover, Maslow (1987) in his discussion on the hierarchy of needs highlights self-esteem as one of human needs and shows that self-esteem includes self-respect, achievement, attention, recognition, self-worth, self-value, and reputation (McLeod, 2007) (See Figure 2). On the same subject matter of self-esteem, earlier Braden (1969) identified three vital components of self-esteem, showing that self-esteem (1) is a human need for our survival and normal healthy development; (2) arises from within us and it is based on our beliefs and self-consciousness; and, (3) occurs in conjunction with our thoughts, feelings, behavioral dispositions and activities. Hence, in teaching and learning we find that self-esteem is very important because it has great impact on teachers’ and students’ cognition, motivation to do things, emotion and behavioral attitudes (Baumeister, 2013).

FIGURE 2
MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



Adopted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, (1943); Maslow & Lewis, (1987), & Poston, (2009)

In application to teaching and learning, if teachers and students see what they do deserves praise, then they have no self-esteem problems; but if they see that what they do is not worthy of praise or recognition, then they might have a low-esteem problem. Therefore, if as teachers we have positive self-esteem, we have strength and we are flexible in taking charge over what we do including running our own lives, and we are “growing from our mistakes without the fear of rejection” (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu, para.1); whereas, if we have low self-esteem the opposite is true in that we lack strength, we are rigid and dogmatic in our views, we do not grow from our mistakes, and we are afraid of rejection. How do positive and low self-esteem look like?

POSITIVE AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Positive Self-Esteem

If teachers, students, parents, administrators, and all of us, have a positive self-esteem, the following signs will be demonstrated:

1. Confidence
2. Self-direction
3. Non-blaming behavior
4. An awareness of personal strengths
5. An ability to make mistakes and learn from them
6. An ability to accept mistakes from others
7. Optimism
8. An ability to solve problems
9. An independent and cooperative attitude
10. Feeling comfortable with a wide range of emotions
11. An ability to trust others
12. A good sense of personal limitations

13. Good self-care
14. The ability to say no (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu).

Low Self-Esteem

If we have low self-esteem, we shall have these signs:

1. Negative view of life
2. Perfectionist attitude
3. Mistrusting others – even those who show signs of affection
4. Blaming behavior
5. Fear of taking risks
6. Feelings of being unloved and unlovable
7. Dependence – letting others make decisions
8. Fear of being ridiculed (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu).

ENHANCING TEACHER’S SELF-ESTEEM

How then can teachers enhance their own self-esteem? This is a vital question because if teachers want to gain or boost their self-esteem, they need to start with developing an attitude of accepting mistakes and planning on growing them. There is no way we can deny our mistakes and expect to grow! Enhancement of low self-esteem could be realized if teachers affirm the following:

1. I respect myself and others
2. I am lovable and likable
3. I am confident, and it shows
4. I care about myself
5. I am creating loving, healthy relationships
6. I am a good friend to myself and others
7. I accept myself just as I am
8. I look great
9. Life is good, and I like being a part of it (www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu).

HOW TEACHER’S SELF-ESTEEM ENHANCES STUDENTS’ SELF-ESTEEM

As early as 1969, Carl Rogers, writing on *Freedom to Learn*, showed how teachers’ high self-esteem can enhance students’ self-esteem in and outside the classroom by examining four major items including: teacher self-esteem, desirable personal characteristics, communication, preferred teaching style, and everyday contacts.

Teacher Self-esteem

Engendering High Self-Esteem to Students

Rogers (1969) showed that when teachers demonstrate high self-esteem in their daily teaching, they can engender high self-esteem in their own students. Lensen-Botter (n.d) in answering whether teachers can influence the self-esteem (image) of their students showed that teachers can really influence their students’ self image by “Accepting Self-esteem as a dynamic system;” and this could be accomplished by: (1) improving teachers’ competencies to influence self-esteem in students as a dynamic system; (2) equipping teachers to deal with cultural and personal differences of students – for they already come from diverse historical, socioeconomic, political, religious, racial, and cultural backgrounds; (3) help teachers and students to develop in the right way; (4) enhance interpersonal communication skills, professional pedagogic attitudes; and, (5) teachers to make concerted effort to influence zone of the proximal development to change students’ self-esteem (p.388).

Self-Esteem and Teacher Personality

In order to enhance their students' self-esteem and academic achievement, teachers should be engaged in unconditional teaching of all students. This is accepting students for who they really are without any strings attached; hence, this means teaching the whole student. The truth of the matter is that when students know that they are unconditionally accepted by their teachers, they are "more likely to be genuinely interested in learning and to enjoy challenging academic tasks" (Kohn, 2005, para.8; Makri-Botsari, 2001). Moreover, teachers concerned about the well being of their students in the processes of enhancing self-esteem and learning are adaptable, are enthusiastic, are fair, have high expectations for their students, have good humor, are patient, are responsible, are agreeable, are caring, are friendly, are honest, and are respectable (Gao, & Liu, 2013; Baumann, 2006-7; Zhang, 2007; Gao & Liu, 2012)

Teachers can examine the following areas in the process of embracing positive self-esteem in and outside the work place: desirable personal characteristics, communication, preferred teaching style, and everyday contacts.

Desirable Personal Characteristics

The desirable personal characteristics of a teacher would incorporate acceptance, genuineness, and empathy.

Acceptance

The concept of acceptance is best exemplified when teachers do not pass judgment on their students. They are not only judgmental to students, but teachers also accept their own students as they are (Kuhn, 2005; Makri-botsari, 2001). Hence, instead of condemning students a good teacher will compassionate, will care for all students, and, will inspire students by making learning fun (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969).

Genuineness

In this case of genuineness, teachers are real, and they do not hide behind their teaching profession mask. Hence, they are not defensive, but spontaneous (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969).

Empathy

In the area of empathy, teachers are appreciating what it feels like to be another person, and listening to feelings of other people (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969). Good teachers will identify themselves with students in the way they treat them, understanding students when they do not comprehend the lesson, and being aware of what students are facing in real life situations in and outside the school learning environments (Feshback & Feshback, 2011). Empathy has been regarded "as an important aspect of teachers' professional preparation to teach in diverse school settings" (Warren, 2014, p.397).

Evidently, Feshbach & Feshback, (2011) were able to show that empathy as "an attribute of children has proven to be highly relevant to the educational process and educational outcome" (p.85). Hence, for teachers to enhance students' self-esteem in their classroom they need to understand the significance of empathy as they demonstrate their feelings to students by understanding and sharing their experiences and emotions in and outside the classroom (Feshback & Feshback, 2011). The reason is that in the classroom experience teachers play the role of a counselor, therapist, nurse, and to a greater extend they assume the role of a parent; and, as such it is assumed that "empathetic communication by the teacher will result in students experiencing greater understanding and acceptance, and that they will thus develop more positive attitudes toward themselves and schooling" (Feshback & Feshback, 2011, p. 85).

Communication

Irrefutably, teachers impart and transmit knowledge to students in and outside the classroom daily through communication. Communication involves verbal and non-verbal elements of human behavior (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Luhmann, 1992; Rogers, 1969).

Verbal Communication and Non-Verbal Communication

Verbal communication enhances students' self-esteem through use of words or phrases to encourage, to praise, and to value. With non-verbal communication, students are rightly sensitive to body gestures, postures, eye contact, tone, speed of response, etc. (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969)

Effects of Good Body Language

Ruland (2002-2015) showed that good body language improves classroom management, and that successful teachers blend both verbal and non-verbal communication. Ruland provides teachers with help regarding the enhancement of their own body language providing Dos and the Don'ts of body language in the classroom.

1. Stand up straight.
2. Avoid folding your arms, standing behind a desk, and using barriers.
3. Use the whole classroom.
4. Be aware of your facial expressions (or lack thereof).
5. Smile.
6. Make eye contact.
7. Adopt different poses.
8. Your hand on your chin encourages students to think about the answer and shows you are waiting for their answer.
9. Hands out and palms up shows that you are open to questions and answering in non-threatening way.
10. Observe wait time. Do not rush them; appear relaxed and ready to listen. (Ruland, 2002-2015).

Preferred Teaching Style

Self-esteem is enhanced when teachers use their preferred teaching style (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969). Stanford's (2014) study on *The Effects of Teacher's Teaching Styles and Experience on Elementary Students' Mathematical Achievement*, found that there is "a statistically significant difference in the AABE mathematical achievement scores of students who were taught in classrooms with teachers who reported delegator or facilitator as their predominant teaching style" (p.77).

Another study done by Sheikh and Mahmmod (2014) affirms that "different teaching styles have a significant effect towards the motivational level of students" (p.820); thus, signifying that students' self-esteem in terms of motivation to learn is enhanced by teachers' use of students' preferred teaching styles.

Everyday Contacts

It is certainly true that everyday contacts help in enhancing students' self-esteem. Hence, desirable contacts such as a word of praise, a smile, or encouragement are sufficient in effecting positive change in students (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2004; Rogers, 1969).

Ten Characteristics of a Good Teacher: Ways of Enhancing Students' Self-Esteem

In light of ways teachers enhance students' self-esteem in the process of teaching and learning, Miller's (2012) 15 years of working as English Language teacher and a trainer illumines our understanding of characteristics of a good teacher. Miller, has put herself in a position of a learner rather than teacher and in the process she has found ten characteristics of a good teacher demonstrating how a good teacher builds his/her students' self-esteem in the classroom.

1. A teacher with contagious enthusiasm for his/her teaching.
2. A teacher who is creative.
3. A teacher who can add pace and humor to the class.
4. A teacher who challenges me.
5. A teacher who is encouraging, patient, one who will not give up on me.
6. A teacher who will take interest in me as a person – one who tries to discover discussions which interest me.

7. A teacher who knows grammar well and who can explain something on the spot if necessary.
8. A teacher who will take a minute or two to answer a question after class.
9. A teacher who will treat me as a person, on an equal basis with all members of the class, regardless of sex, marital status, race, or my future need for the language.
10. A teacher who will leave his/her emotional baggage outside the classroom. (Miller, 2013, p. 36-38)

WHY SELF-ESTEEM MATTERS

Studies have demonstrated that Self-esteem is an integral part of the growth of both teachers and students who interact in varied capacities daily. Teachers' self-esteem would also be linked to self concept because self concept hinges on how we think and how we evaluate ourselves (Brookover, Thomas, & Paterson, 1964; Rosenberg, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995). When as educators we are aware of who we are, then we have a self concept of ourselves. Unfortunately, if teachers have a distorted self image of themselves, it is possible that they become incapacitated in their teaching career.

Second, self-esteem, it is linked with teachers' self image as self image is how we truly see ourselves (Lawrence, 2006; Brookover, Thomas, & Paterson, 1964; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Since self-esteem is how we value our selves, self concept and self image add to the equation because they bring the needed fuel into the educational and teaching arena of how we think about ourselves as educators and how we see ourselves respectively. Hence, it is incumbent upon all teacher preparation programs in the USA, all other first world nations, developing nations, and poverty stricken nations to enhance teacher candidate self-concept (Yeung, Craven, & Kaur, 2014). It is evident that teachers are not only modeling content in arithmetic, reading, science, art, PE, and social studies, but they also model self-esteem to students who are learning everything from them. Hence, the enhancing of self-concept of both teachers and students must be conspicuous and conscientious. The enhancement of teacher and student self-esteem should be embedded in the daily lessons across Pk-12 schools, colleges, and university.

In the future, this study will test teachers' self-esteem to determine (1) their perception on their self-esteem, and, (2) how their self-esteem affects teaching and student learning. Further, the study will focus on elements that determine positive and low self-esteem by the use of surreys and interviews.

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