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Developing Self-esteem: A Search for the Missing Element

Douglas Mack

Eastern Illinois University

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DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM: A SEARCH
FOR THE MISSING ELEMENT

Douglas Mack
Eastern Illinois University
Summer, 1989

Running Head: DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
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Address correspondence to: Douglas Mack
433 East North Ave.
Flora, Illinois 62839

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Abstract

Educators have long known the impact a child's self-esteem, or self-concept, has upon his or her ability to perform in the classroom. This paper explores the variables involved in developing self-concept both in theory and the research. The roles of teacher feedback, student failure and success, and difficulty of task are examined and their impact upon student self-esteem assessed. Learning theories such as constructivism and the use of teams in the classroom are also presented and discussed. Self-esteem does not come about simply as a result of prior success. It develops 1) as a child experiences success at tasks he or she deems important, 2) as that child feels that he or she is comparing positively to others, and 3) as the child consistently sees his or her accomplishments in a positive light as compared to what the child feels he or she can do. The present study examined the effect of student charting and teacher discussion of those charts on student self-concept. The results showed that after the treatment phase, neither of the two experimental groups showed significant differences in self esteem when compared to the control group.

Developing Self-esteem: A Search
for the Missing Element

"I'm enough if I would just be it." Carl Rogers

Self-esteem, or self concept, can be defined in many ways. Perhaps the best way to define it is "the way we feel about ourselves" (Piers, 1969). How does it develop and what can be done in a child's early years to insure a positive self-concept? Researchers and the educational community at large have long acknowledged that a child's estimate of what he or she capable of has strong implications for educational performance and policy. With respect to long-term development and application of abilities, a child's subjective view of achievement potential is just as important as any educational or behavioral technique (Suls, 1979). Roberts (1972) suggested that self-concept is the primary determinant of the behavior of many individuals.

Children were once considered blank slates upon their arrival. But numerous authorities now agree that babies are far from "tabula rasa." A study by Birch, Chess and Thomas (1976) revealed nine behaviors in which

babies differ, including level of activity, responsiveness, distractibility, and moodiness.

Another character trait present at birth is strength of will (Dobson, 1978). This characteristic is the seed of self-esteem that parents and teachers want children and students to have. A child with a strong will may be difficult to handle, but the individuality and expressions of self are what a child needs to succeed in school as well as in life. Teachers and parents do affect the self-esteem of students and children, but many of the attributes found in children are present from birth (Dobson, 1987). The job of teachers and parents is to direct those attributes in ways a child can feel successful.

Developmentalists have observed that children ages 3-5 are in a period of rapid advancement both physically, and cognitively (Suls, 1979). There is no need for comparison with others because it is so easy to watch one's own progress. As a child gets older, it becomes more difficult to better one's achievements at the same pace as before. They begin to compare themselves with others (Suls, 1979) and become increasingly guided by peer expectations as they grow older (Baumrind, 1970).

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Even though children compare themselves more and more to their peers as they grow, adults still have a very important role in developing and stabilizing a child's self-esteem. Prior to the age when children begin to compare themselves and their attainments with others, it has been found that the children who were most reliant, self-controlled, explorative and contented had parents who set definite standards by which the children could gauge their behavior (Baumrind, 1970). Horn (1975) states that adult feedback actually helps children evaluate their performance. Children need feedback from others as they can neither perceive their own attainment accurately nor analyze the cause of success or failure in a rational manner. Even after failure, young children often overestimate their attainment and expectancies (Nichols, 1979). Older children, on the other hand, tend to be more realistic at judging their competence, predicting future performance, evaluating prior performance and judging task difficulty than their younger peers (Newman & Wick, 1987). For adolescents, the key problem may be how to define themselves without severing relationships that are important to their sense of self (Smulyan, 1986).

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From the beginning, children need others to help them define who they are and how well they perform.

As children get older they begin to use this feedback to help them evaluate themselves.

Self-evaluation is a very useful process and is usually accomplished through a determination of one's standing relative to others (Fastinger, 1954). Waters (1987) states that this discovery of self should be education's main goal. Everything teachers do should be to assist children to not only discover themselves but to feel worth as well.

How do children perceive school? What can teachers do to help them achieve the positive self-concept? To many children, school is place where they learn to be stupid (Holt, 1967). A child who at age 6 was bursting with questions and curiosity has, by age 11, silenced these questions and curiosity, at least within the school walls. What happens to cause this?

Children are not passive recipients of information. They process the information according to their current perceptions and incorporate it into their cognitive framework. The more positive the self-concept, the more the child is able to accept and utilize negative information, while the less secure child tends to color,

deny, and distort negative information (Combs & Snygg, 1949). Therefore, identical information to different students will lead to different results. This self-directed attention leads to a negative effect only when the child perceives that he or she cannot move in the direction of the goal (Carver, 1979). Many students, rather than change their view of themselves, will continue to pursue a previously chosen course of action even if it is ineffective (Brockner, 1986). Is there a level of inertia involved in a child's self-concept that makes it hard to change?

Waters (1987) gives as an example, a poor reader who "works to confirm and to map the limitations of his or her ability to read" (p.3). The child does not move forward with a newly learned skill because that would require a total reconstruction of his or her perception of self. Teachers see a child who is not working. In fact, the child is diligently working to perfect his or her current understanding of who he or she is. A student who has a high self-concept becomes a better student; the student with a poor self-concept becomes a worse student.

If the student's goal appears to be attainable, the student feels good about himself and will move in that

direction. If the goal appears to be unattainable, further effort will be seen as futile and have a negative influence on the child's self-concept (Scheier & Carver, 1982). Students learn things that do not cause them to have to move too far, or cause them too much discomfort (Poplin, 1988). If an idea or skill is too far from their own development or value, they reject it, ignore it, or transform it into something that fits better into their current experience (Poplin, 1988). Students who fail to achieve soon begin to say to themselves and each other that they do not care about learning to read, or even about school itself. For some it is just too difficult. These students feel that to preserve their dignity, they must not care about things with which failure is associated (Masters, 1969; Poplin, 1988).

A student's self-concept appears to be based upon comparison of his or her achievements and abilities with others, or the way he or she feels others perceive his or her skills and achievements (Suls & Sanders, 1979). Rogers, Smith, and Coleman (1978) suggest that the importance of achievement as related to self-concept lies in "the child's perception of how his or her level of achievement compares with the achievement of those in

his or her social comparison group" (p.51). Rogers, Smith, and Coleman (1978) also suggest that failure in the past to find a relationship between achievement and self-concept may be that investigators have tended to ignore the importance of the child's immediate social environment.

If a student does not, or cannot, compare to others in a way that makes him or her feel capable of further success, there is a loss of self-esteem (Suls & Sanders, 1979). But a student who over-estimates his or her abilities does not necessarily have high self-esteem. Both overconfidence and underconfidence can cause a student to misappropriate time and energy and even give up on a task too soon (Bandura, 1977; Newman-Wick, 1987). Watson (1974) stated that it is important to ask students before a test how well they think they will perform on the test. He found that student self-prediction is often more accurate than standardized aptitude and intelligence tests in predicting student scholastic performance. To help students develop realistic predictions, teachers should provide positive experiences for both overestimators and underestimators through group discussion meetings. Students who know

themselves are often more secure because they know what to expect of themselves (Watson, 1974).

When a child begins school, he or she is already making comparisons. Just being a part of the current educational system encourages socially-oriented estimates of one's own abilities. Students are acutely aware of the devices used by teachers to separate them into groups: test scores and classroom performance being chief among them (Suls & Sanders, 1979). These groupings influence a child's self-confidence immensely. A child's perceptions of his or her competence and ability depend on both their performance and the evaluative feedback they receive from peers and significant adults (Horn, 1985).

Ginott (1972) realized the importance of a teacher's feedback when he wrote, "In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized" (p.15-16). Obviously, some teacher responses to students are better than others when applied to development of student self-esteem. A study by Welner, Graham, Taylor and Meyer (1983) pointed out several teacher responses and their consequences. The following actions can have negative effects on

self-esteem: praise for success and lack of criticism for failure at an easy task; too much help, especially when not sought; and expressions of pity for failure. The following actions were found to have positive consequences for self-esteem: lack of praise for success, criticism for failure at an easy task, comparative neglect, and expressions of anger for failure. Positive effort feedback can make a child wonder how good he or she was in the first place if it was necessary to work so hard to succeed. Praise, help-giving, and pity may cause a child to feel that the other person regards his or her ability as low whereas blame, neglect, and anger may convey the information that the student's ability was regarded as high. These inferred opinions may influence the self perception of ability and help determine expectations, affective reactions and performance (Meyer, 1982). A conscientious teacher would be able to determine which type of feedback would work best with individual students (Meyer, 1982; McMahan, 1973).

Praise does work under some conditions (Covington & Omelich, 1979). Results of a study on student and teacher responses to successful effort indicated that both positive self-evaluation and teacher praise were

greatest when success followed much effort. Conversely, both student pride and teacher reward were reduced when the conditions of success detracted from the causal role of effort. It was also found that perceptions of ability enhanced positive affect as well.

The words a teacher uses should tell students what he or she liked and appreciated about that student's efforts, work and accomplishments. The student will draw his or her own conclusions. If the teacher's statements realistically and appreciatively describe the events and feelings involved, the student's conclusions about himself or herself will be positive and productive (Ginott, 1972). It is not only the success or failure at a task which affects a student's self-esteem. It is also the child's comparison of himself or herself with the person he or she feels he or she could be. "Praise consists of two parts: What we say to the child and what he in turn says to himself" (Ginott, 1972, p.126). Student self-focused attention, or self-comparisons, depend to a large degree upon what happened to the student prior to the feedback, be it praise or negative criticism. It is commonly understood that most children develop positive self-esteem as a result of successful completion of tasks and the positive feedback that

followed (Lewis-Beck, 1978). But, there are no data to support the idea that self-concept and academic performance have a cause-effect relationship (Chandler, 1985).

Welner (1974) suggests that early task successes are used to formulate ability attributions. When children succeed at a task they are apt to believe that they are becoming competent and develop a sense of efficacy for continued success. There are several studies in which students did poorer after initial failure than after initial success (Feather, 1966; Dweck & Repucci, 1973; Fretz & Engle, 1973).

But simply succeeding at a task is not the only criteria for these early task successes. Students attribute success to four causal factors: ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (Frieze & Welner, 1971). Each student tries to explain the outcome of a particular action by assessing his or her level of ability, the degree of effort expended, the difficulty of the task, and the magnitude and direction of luck involved. Frieze and Welner (1971) also found that increased expectancy of success results from attributions to what might be labeled stable elements: high ability or ease of task. Blumenfeld, Pintrich,

Meece and Wessells (1982) state that students traditionally do better on future tasks when they feel successful completion of the task is due to ability rather than luck or ease of assignment. Does it make a difference if all succeed or all fail? Only when a child's performance is perceived to be different from that of his or her peers does he or she make inferences about ability and thus, self-esteem.

Dweck (1975) did a study on self-concept involving success, failure and taking responsibility. In it he showed that the group given success did improve their outlook and consequently their scores on self-concept scales. But they experienced severe deterioration of self-concept after failure on future tasks. The positive changes in self-concept were not permanent. The other group was taught to take responsibility for failure and attribute it to a lack of effort. This group maintained or improved their performance on future tasks. There was no great deterioration of self-concept after failure. Failure, in this case, was a signal to try harder, not give up. The success experienced by the first group made them feel good but did not help them deal with failure.

Dweck and Repucci (1973) conducted research on learned helplessness in children and its relationship to success and failure. A group of students was given only soluble problems by the "success" experimenter. This same group was then given only insoluble problems by the "failure" experimenter, after which they were given soluble problems by the same experimenter. Several students were unable to complete soluble problems when presented by the "failure" experimenter even though they had solved nearly identical problems when given by the "success" experimenter. Scores on a locus of control instrument revealed that children whose test performance was least impaired made internal attributions for success and failure more frequently than those who did more poorly on the test problems. These students, not unlike the students in Dweck's (1975) experiment, had at least partially, taken responsibility for their actions.

In another study students performed tasks in which they encountered success followed by failure (Diener & Dweck, 1980). Half were asked a series of questions about their performance after success and half after failure. The students were defined as either mastery-

oriented or helpless. Compared to mastery-oriented students, helpless children underestimated the number of successes and overestimated the number of failures. In addition, helpless children did not expect the successes to continue and did not view the successes as indicative of ability. Subsequent failures led them to devalue their previous success. For helpless children, successes are less predictive, less enduring and less successful.

The previous study suggests that failure can cause a child to devalue his or her success. Is there any value to giving a non-achieving child only success? LaBenne and Greene (1969) state that providing "non-achievers with superficial experiences at which they cannot fail reinforces negative self-images by conveying that the teacher believes the students lack ability"(p.29). Assuming one could improve self-esteem in an area without specific skills to go with it could cause a student to attempt a task that was too difficult. Imagine trying to ski down an advanced ski-run armed with only a high self-concept. An added danger might be that a student with too much self-esteem could feel that there is no room for growth (Chandler, 1985).

Success alone will not improve self-image and failure can sometimes undo what gains have been made. But is failure always bad? One study found, contrary to predictions, that failure feedback increased the performance of all fifth graders regardless of their scores on a locus of control instrument (Lewis-Beck, 1978). Somehow, these students had persisted in spite of failure. This study of the relationship of persistence and the perception of failure suggests that students may be motivated to achieve by systematic reinforcement, and thus lead toward increased independence. Failure must be accepted as part of the system.

A study made of college freshmen (Fretz & Engle, 1973) found that students who made top grades in their course work had self-reports which were relatively more stable than the self-reports of students who met with academic failure. The authors suggested that beginning college students' self-concepts are more affected by negative evaluative feedback than those in advanced levels. Carlson (1965) hypothesized that, in the period from late childhood through adolescence, self-esteem is a stable trait. Perhaps college freshmen, like children in early and middle childhood, have yet to come to

conclusions regarding their skills and ability in this new phase of their lives. They have no data from past situations to give them any idea of how they might do in the future and have no stable perception of themselves (Feather, 1966).

One of the criteria mentioned previously in connection with student self-concept is a student's perceived ability. Could students be given feedback to cause them to value their own ability and skills, and thus have more success and improved self-concept? One problem with using ability, albeit perceived, is that although students view ability as the main variable for success across all grade levels, not all teachers share that view (Harari & Covington, 1981). Teachers generally view effort and outcome as the main criteria for deciding the degree of teacher reward and punishment. This is further complicated by the student belief that success after low effort implies higher ability than success after high effort.

Among elementary school students, the reputation for being a hard worker is valued very highly. In high school and college though, effort is not valued so highly (Harari & Covington, 1981; Schunk, 1984). If a student tries too hard, then he or she is not perceived

as smart, because smart people do not have to study. Students change as they grow older from valuing effort to valuing ability.

Kukla (1972) suggests effort may be affected by the attractiveness of the consequences. It may or may not appear desirable to do well on a math test depending on the student's perception of the consequences. A student who valued a good grade might work toward that goal. But if the result of a good score meant a move into a higher and more difficult math group, there could be fewer students who would work toward that goal. From a self-esteem perspective, the threat of success is that others will come to expect further success. If the student feels further success is impossible, success is indeed threatening (Covington & Omelich, 1979).

Ability feedback generally promotes ability attributions. But children who are given ability feedback may doubt its credibility because of being told previously that effort was responsible for success (Schunk, 1984). One reason for this unwillingness to believe the new feedback is that estimates of ability and task difficulty are relatively fixed in student minds. An outcome that does not confirm a student's

prior expectations tends to be attributed to a variable factor such as chance (McMahan, 1973).

A study was done in which students recorded the number of problems solved and the degree they felt performance was due to ability or luck and the degree of satisfaction with their performance (Feather, 1969). The unexpected success was more often attributed to good luck than the expected success and was associated with a higher degree of satisfaction. Unexpected failure was attributed to bad luck and associated with greater dissatisfaction than expected failure. Students who barely passed or failed were more likely to attribute it to chance than students who scored extremely high or low.

In a related study, Ames and Felker (1979) hypothesized that children with high self-concepts would focus on skill to help interpret their performance on various tasks, while children with low self-concepts would use luck to explain their performances. It was hoped that the children in both groups would maintain their prior self-evaluation by "taking responsibility for outcomes consistent with prior self-evaluations and denying responsibility for outcomes inconsistent with the prior self-evaluation" (Ames & Felker, 1979, p.613).

The study found that children tested as being high self-concept attribute success to skill more than children with low self-concept. Both high and low groups used lack of skill to account for failure. Luck was used as an explanation to explain success by the children with low self-concept (Ames & Felker, 1979). The authors suggested that children be trained to interpret and deal with success as well as failure feedback.

Teachers often ask psychologists how to motivate children. One answer is, "Make it safe for them to risk failure" (Ginott, 1972, p.242). The major obstacle to learning is fear: fear of failure, fear of criticism, fear of appearing stupid. An effective teacher makes it possible for each child to make a mistake without worrying about punishment (Ginott, 1972; Holt, 1967).

Holt (1967) discusses the way fear destroys not only self-esteem, but intelligence as well. He states, "The scared fighter may be the best fighter, but the scared learner is always a poor learner"(p.49). He suggests that the keys to high self-esteem and success in school are freedom and power--freedom to be in control of one's life and power to choose.

Controllability in one's life has a major effect on the way we see ourselves. One study found that, when uncontrollability is attributed to internal factors of personality rather than external factors, a lowered self-esteem is the result (Orbach & Hadas, 1982). That same study reported that children who attributed lack of control to their ability showed more deficits in self-concept than children who attributed lack of control to their performance. They further reported that failure in unimportant tasks did not lead to feelings of helplessness as did failure in important tasks.

Teachers and administrators give students the power and freedom they need by helping them feel important (Gough, 1987). Except for those students who live in deepest poverty, the psychological needs --love, power, freedom and fun--take precedence over the survival needs (Gough, 1987). All our lives we search for ways to satisfy those needs. If a student feels no sense of belonging in school, that child will pay little attention to academic subjects. Instead, he or she will search desperately for attention, possibly by becoming a behavioral problem (Gough, 1987).

What can be done to help students feel a sense of belonging? In most classrooms students are told, "Keep your eyes on your own work; don't share; don't compare; don't help" (Gough, 1987, p.660). This is contrary to the basic human need to belong. How can a person feel important if he or she is always working alone? We all need recognition and a feeling of importance, in order to feel good about ourselves. Glasser, as cited by Gough (1987), contends that teachers will find youngsters work harder on teams. Glasser states, "Teachers won't always be able to tell which team member was formerly the poor student and which team member was formerly the good student" (Gough, 1987, p.660).

Non-competitive learning arrangements appear to foster self-esteem in children in ways that lead to effort in low as well as high achievers (Nicholls, 1978). Group learning, for example, would cause a child to look at different reasons for success and failure. Nicholls (1978) suggested that these changes in the perception of attainment would lead to changes in causal explanations for success and failure.

Skinner (1953) suggests that one of the ways in which a student could institute self-control is through the self-administration of reinforcement without

environmental restrictions. Students need freedom in order to learn. They do not always need a teacher or adult telling them how they have done. At the very least, the educational system should strive to foster independent, non-social bases for self-evaluation, so that the student's estimate of and interest in developing his or her abilities are not the exclusive products of relative standing, but based instead upon the pleasure and challenge of fully realizing their potential (Nicholls, 1978; Suls & Sanders, 1979).

The competitive schooling so prevalent today seems bound to produce increases of learned helplessness in low achievers. Normative evaluations seem more likely to produce attributions of failure to lack of ability and lead to learned helplessness (Nicholls, 1979). If the schools want students to cease comparing themselves with other students and do what they can do, there must be a change in the way teachers teach as well as motivate students.

Bandura and Schunk (1981) suggest that one way to help children develop self-esteem is by the use of proximal goal setting. They found that self-motivation through proximal goal setting was an effective way to cultivate competencies, self-efficacy and intrinsic

Interest. In the study, students who did not like arithmetic developed an interest by the end of the study. The idea behind proximal goals is to set subgoals that let the student see how he or she is doing. In this way, a student can measure performance much better than if he or she uses long-range, or distal, goals.

In a study by Curtis and Shaver (1981), it was found that when students in the experimental group used an inquiry method rather than the standard text for studying social studies there was a statistically significant difference in self-esteem gain scores when compared with students in the control group. They did state that it was not enough to mandate a change in curriculum and that part of the gain in scores may have been due to the students' interaction with adults. The acceptance and approval of the adults on the various field trips gave the students higher feelings of self-esteem.

Poplin (1988) stresses the fact that positive effects on the self-esteem of children will occur only if the learning has some relevancy to their lives. She calls her educational theory "holistic constructivism." This concept puts forth the idea that learning occurs

only as the student is able to relate it to something he or she already knows or understands. Learning is a process of integrating "what is new with what is old" (p.405). Holistic constructivism would have classrooms set up in a way that acknowledges student differences and allows the students to make mistakes without penalty. Poplin (1988) states, "People who consistently hand us failure and promote negative feelings cannot lead us to construct new meanings"(p.409). The relationship of teacher and student is very important. Trust is critical. Waters (1987), who has experimented with the concepts mentioned, writes, "Rather than to staunch the natural flow of interests, abilities and developmental tasks of both teacher and learner, constructivism capitalizes upon these"(pp.17-18). If students (and teachers) are to feel good about themselves, there must be someone, somewhere, who says, "You are important, and so is what you think." If teachers hope to develop self-esteem in their students, they must relate to their students as well as themselves. Self-esteem will not exist unless students feel important as well as feel that they can learn in a way that does not threaten their sense of self.

The research has shown that some accepted educational practices do not raise self-esteem. Some, such as praise or pity, can be detrimental to a child's self-esteem. What appears to work in elevating self-esteem is developing the personal aspects of a student's life-- relationships with teachers and understanding of self and others.

When the self-esteem equation is simplified, it appears to be the human factor that makes the difference. Techniques, such as working in teams or writing in journals are important, because they foster a recognition of the humanity in all of us. In the end, self-esteem is the belief a person has that allows him or her to keep going. The challenge of the educational system is to value success even as it values failure as one of the steps toward success.

Teachers are among the most important outside forces on a child's self-concept (Ginott, 1972). Just as important are the student's own perceptions of success and failure (Suls and Sanders, 1979). For a healthy self-concept to emerge, there must be communication between the teachers and students regarding expectations as well as perceived successes and failures. The purpose of this research project was

to examine the effects of student charting and teacher discussion of those charts on student self-concept.

METHOD

Subjects and Settings

Sixty-one students in three third grade classes were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (CSCS) (Piers & Harris, 1969) for the purpose of determining whether or not student self-esteem can be altered through student charting and discussion of those charts. The three groups were made up of 26 boys and 35 girls with ages ranging from 7 to 10.

The classrooms involved were well-lit, each having one entire wall comprised of windows. The rooms were cheery, well-decorated and reflective of each individual instructor's teaching style. The teacher for the control group was a 54-year-old female with a Bachelor's degree in elementary education. The teachers for the two experimental groups were ages 53 and 36 with a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in elementary education respectively.

Procedures

Children in each of the three classrooms were pretested using the CSCS. It was read to each class by a 50 year-old female who was not involved in the educational system or with the study in any other capacity to insure adequate comprehension on the part of the students. The CSCS is two pages long and takes 15-20 minutes to administer. It consists of 80 first-person statements such as, "I am a happy person," "I have many friends," and "I do many bad things." The student responds "yes" or "no" to each statement. Half the statements are worded to indicate a positive self-concept and half to indicate a negative self-concept. Internal consistency ranges from .78 to .93 and retest reliability from .71 to .77 (Piers & Harris, 1969).

The independent variables were student charting and teacher discussion of the charts with the students. Charting was defined as the student recording his or her own math scores. The teachers in the experimental groups gave the students not less than two scores to be charted each week. Each student was given his or her own folder and graphs for charting the scores for the four month treatment phase. Teacher discussion was

defined in two different ways: (1) teacher devotes five minutes weekly to each individual student to discuss and interpret the student's charts or (2) teacher devotes 15-20 minutes weekly discussing student charts with students as a group. Teachers in both experimental groups focused on positive gains as evidenced in the charts or ways to remedy negative scores. Students were expected to make their own chart entries.

The three non-randomized groups were organized as follows: (1) student-charting with teacher discussion as a group; (2) student-charting with teacher discussion of charts with individual students; and (3) control group, with no charting or teacher discussion. Each of the 3 groups then entered a treatment phase that lasted 12 weeks. During this time the 2 experimental groups recorded their math scores on charts that had been prepared by the researcher. There was no contact with the students by the researcher until the end of the 12 week treatment phase at which time all 3 groups were posttested using the CSCS.

RESULTS

The data from the three groups were compared through an analysis of variance of the gain scores for

each group. Piers-Harris (1969) state that a gain score of at least 10 is necessary before an individual is considered to have appreciable gains in self-concept.

Insert table #1 about here

Table 1 shows nine individual students had gains of 10 or more: 4 in group 1; 3 in group 2; and 2 in group 3. The 2 experimental groups had the greater number of high gain scores but these scores were not sufficient to change the results. The analysis of variance showed no statistical differences between groups, yielding an f-ratio of .18 with $p = .85$.

Insert table #2 about here

It is interesting to note the range of negative gain scores. Group 1 ranged from -1 to -16; group 2 from -2 to -35; group 3 ranged from -2 to -24. Group 3 had the highest number of negative gains; group 2 had the least. One wonders what might have caused the 2 negative scores of -35 and -24 in groups 2 and 3, respectively. The highest and lowest gain scores were found in group 2. Even though there were many

Individual differences, the treatment did not result in any statistical differences among the groups.

DISCUSSION

This study has several flaws which could have contributed to the lack of significant differences in the group gain scores. First, the treatment phase was too short. Perhaps a treatment phase that covered an entire school year would be long enough to provide measurable differences. Second, since Piers (1984) states that the CSCS is designed for children no younger than third grade, any replication of this study should use older children. Dangers in using younger children are: (1) their self-concepts are not as stable as those of older children; (2) younger children tend to try to please those in authority and could invalidate the data by answering in ways they perceive to be socially acceptable (Piers, 1984).

Third, perhaps the addition of "raters", people who had been trained to observe children and self-concept related behaviors, would solve the problem of self-rating by the students. The raters could measure the frequency of the target behaviors indicative of both

high and low self-concept and thus allow more objectivity in rating.

All persons, student or adult, are affected by significant others-- teachers, peers, coaches, parents or supervisors (Morse & Gergen, 1970). The present study did not, indeed, could not control for the effects of activities outside the treatment setting. Besides activities at home, children are affected by other children and teachers. An incident in a classroom just prior to testing could be a deciding factor in a child's perception of himself or herself on that particular day. A person's self-concept scale rating could conceivably change from high to low within a day's time.

Self-esteem may be too complex, and students too different from each other, to expect a 3 month, or even a year-long, treatment phase to lead to measurable differences in self-concept. Teachers can make a difference, but not with a blanket approach to the whole class. Like any quality instruction, developing self-esteem can best be done through an individual approach that meets the needs of particular students. So, even though Journals (Waters, 1987) and team-learning (Gough, 1987) may be important tools in developing a child's self-esteem, they are not the only

ones and should not be used as a panacea for all. Students, like teachers, have individual styles that must be respected and acknowledged.

Dobson's (1978) idea that children come into the world with definite and decided differences may mean that students have a set level of self-esteem long before teachers have any interaction with them. This is not to say that teachers do not make any difference, but the capacity for lowering a student's self-esteem may be much greater than the capacity for raising it.

Educators and psychologists have long stated that the most important years of a child's life are the first years, as opposed to the school years, when considering self-concept and personality. Indeed, there are many who state that the first 12 months make the deciding difference (Dobson, 1978).

It cannot be denied that teachers and parents are important. Perhaps what makes them important is the climate they provide, not just the individual acts and experiences. For example, a child may not care what activity he or she does with his or her parents. The important thing is that something is taking place and that it is enjoyable. The effect of teachers on self-esteem may stem from the degree of freedom, fun and

control allowed in the classroom (Gough, 1987). When viewed in this way, the teacher is a most important variable because it is the degree of freedom and student interaction allowed by the teacher that makes a major contribution to the climate in a classroom.

Climate also includes teacher expectations. Here, too, is found individualization. A teacher does not expect the same effort and skill from all students. Therefore, the level of self-esteem will be affected differently in each student's case. If a teacher and a student do not "hit it off", this could create adverse effects on that student's self-esteem.

Can self-esteem really be measured? The makers of the many tests available for that purpose would have people think so. But even they recognize that scores can change from day to day. And when the scores do change, it is difficult to say who or what was responsible.

Self-esteem is not easily measured or observed. Its results and effects can be seen, but even this is not a reliable method of determining presence or absence of self-esteem. For example, there are quiet children who have great self-esteem. There are also loud, seemingly self-assured children who are merely putting

on a show to cover their own lack of self-esteem. What is needed to measure self-esteem is not just one test, but possibly a series of tests and observations over a period of weeks.

Is there any value to knowing a child's level of esteem? None, if it is just to put in the student's file. Measuring self-esteem becomes valuable only when it is used to determine what teaching practices are best for enhancing self-esteem. That is perhaps the only reason for delving into self-esteem: to improve a child's chances for success.

Future research into self-esteem and its antecedents should not be avoided because of the many interacting variables and complications. Teachers and researchers alike should constantly be alert for classroom activities that will build and overcome deficits in self-esteem. The results will have important implications for teaching, teachers, and most especially, students.

Table 1

GAIN SCORES

Group #1- Experimental/Group Discussion

Group #2-Experimental/Individual Discussion

Group #3-Control

Group #1 Child	Gain	Group #2 Child	Gain	Group #3 Child	Gain
1	4	18	-9	34	7
2	10	19	-2	35	-2
3	-5	20	9	36	-2
4	10	21	8	37	4
5	-1	22	-2	38	-8
6	10	23	3	39	2
7	8	24	10	40	6
8	4	25	0	41	-3
9	1	26	-4	42	-4
10	8	27	-35	43	-24
11	-1	28	0	44	6
12	2	29	5	45	12
13	-13	30	14	46	-13
14	-1	31	0	47	11
15	-16	32	30	48	6
16	11	33	6	49	3
17	1				

Table 2

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
	SS	df	ms	f-ratio	p
total	4985.1	48	--	--	--
b/g	39.46	2	19.7	.18	.83
w/g	4945.64	46	107.5	--	--

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