



How Can Primary Teachers Help To Assist The Development Of Positive Self-Esteem In Students Through Their Ordinary Teaching Practice?

* Jigar L. Dave

* Research Scholar, Singhania University, Rajasthan

In order to discuss this question fully I feel I should briefly look at the role of the teacher. The teacher is the first person a child meets when they begin their educational years. As the role of a teacher is not "simple or straightforward" and as according to Rowan 1994 it ranks in the "top quartile on complexity for all occupations". (Snowman, Biehler, ninth edition 2000, pg 5). It has also been recognised by the National Board for Teaching Standards 1994 that teaching is a "complex activity that requires an in-depth knowledge in a number of areas." (Snowman, Biehler, ninth edition 2000, pg 5). To achieve the highest level of teaching standards the board have suggested 5 propositions.

1. Teachers are committed to students and their teaching.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1994)

- Taking into account all these aspects, it shows that the primary teacher plays a pivotal role in the educational cycle of a child. With all of these in mind we will now look in-depth at how a teacher can develop self-esteem in a child. Firstly we will look at the word self-esteem and what it means. The term self-esteem comes from a Greek word meaning "reverence for self." The "self" part relates to the values, beliefs and attitudes that we hold about ourselves. The "esteem" part describes the value and worth that one gives oneself, basically self-esteem is the acceptance of what and who we are at any one stage in our lives. (Website: www.ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education, viewed 13/07/07) In relation to young children, self-esteem relates to the extent to which they expect to be accepted and valued by the adults and peers who are important to them. Self-esteem features prominently in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, (Fontana, David, 1995) (See Appendix no.1) it is an integral part in everyone's lives.

So now we will look at where self-esteem comes from, who helps develop it and especially the role that teachers play in the development of a child.

In the majority of classrooms there is a wide variety of children. They vary in size, shape, origin, religion and also in self-esteem. Stanley Coopersmith (1967) did a lot of investigation into the different levels of self-esteem; he based his work on a group of ten-year-old boys. He discovered that all of his findings could be divided into three clear categories, "High", and "Medium" and "Low" self-esteem children. The boys with high self-esteem were positive and had a realistic view of themselves and their own ability. They were confident, took part in activities and weren't overly concerned about criticism. They

were generally successful academically and socially, and were active and expressive in all the activities they took part in. The "Medium group" showed quite a few of these qualities also but tended to more conformist, less sure of their worth and anxious for social acceptance. Coopersmith described the "low self-esteem group" as a "sad little group, isolated, fearful, reluctant to join in, self-conscious and over-sensitive to criticism" (Fontana, 1995 pg263.) They spent a lot of time worried about their own problems, they did not perform as well in class and under-rated themselves consistently. It may be perceived that the children with high self-esteem are more intelligent or might come from a higher class but all of the children were chosen from the same social status; middle class homes.

However there was one variable in which each of the children varied greatly and this was in the relationship they had with their parents. Children with high self-esteem predominantly came from homes where they felt respected and their views were listened to. Discipline was controlled, and these children viewed their parents as being "fair." They were shown affection and their parents knew a lot about their child i.e. their interests, names of their friends etc...in complete contrast children with low self-esteem viewed their parents as "un-fair". Discipline ranged from over-strictness to over-permissiveness. It left the children unsure as to where they stood, they had mixed, and un-clear guidance and it seemed that these children were not as significant or important as people in the home. All this information seems to lend to the idea that the levels of self-esteem were linked significantly to parental behaviour. However important the role of the parent in their child's development, the teacher plays an equally important role in the child's educational development.

It is obvious that the parent has more influence over the child as they spend the majority of their time with them but children tend to take over and internalize the teacher's picture of them just as they do with their parents. Therefore as a teacher it is our job to provide children with an environment that is conducive to learning by providing each and every child with a sense of security and comfort that allows them to learn. We must foster positive self-esteem and help to develop the "whole child". A lot of teachers signal to their students, "Consciously and unconsciously" that they see them as people, they believe that they are able to develop the skills needed to do their work and that each and every one of their views are important and worth listening to. They set them realistic goals; encourage them to work independently and responsibly when needed. Other teachers send signals of the other kind which leave children with a negative view of themselves and their ability. These teachers must remember not to make comparisons but to clearly show that each individual student matters just as much as the next and that their qualities and abilities can be further developed to help them deal with situations as they arise.

There has been different research studies carried out on what factors influence a child's self-esteem development. One example of a research study carried out was done by Susan

Harter (1987; 1990) which included her telling us that each child's level of self-esteem is a product of two internal assessments or judgements. The first being "every child experiences some degree of discrepancy between what he would like to be (or thinks he ought to be) and what he thinks he is- between his ideal self and what he perceives to be his real self." (Harter 1998) according to Harter 1998 when a child has high self-esteem their discrepancies are generally low and vice-versa. Each child is different; their values lie in different places, i.e. academic, sports, and social skills. Harter suggests that the key to self-esteem lies in the "amount of discrepancy between what the child desires and what the child thinks he has achieved." (Bee, 2000, pg.300). a child's self-esteem will only be high if they value that particular skill.

Having explored self-esteem and where it comes from I will now look into how the teachers can help in the development of positive self-esteem.

"Two very important aspects of the teacher's role are (1) the attitude he conveys; and (2) the atmosphere he develops" (Purkey, <http://Chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/files/self-conc.html>, viewed 13/07/07) Teachers can present their attitudes through their facial expressions, how and when they speak, their tone, posture, and gestures and all of these things have a big impact on the way children see themselves and their teachers.

- Teachers need to assess their students and have realistic expectations for them. In doing this it will allow each child to reach a certain level of achievement which will help them to maintain positive self-esteem.

- Teachers need to model positive responses in relation to children's successes and mistakes. They need to show strategies for dealing with certain experiences. A teacher's effectiveness in developing self-esteem in the classroom depends a great deal on his/her own attitudes, beliefs and understanding. "Teachers cannot evaluate or begin to build positive self-esteem in their students until they have built and understood their own." (www.davidenglishhouse.com, viewed 15/07/07)

- Children need to know that they are important, as a teacher you need to re-assure children so they feel safe and secure in their environment. When children feel safe in this environment they can freely communicate, which helps them to build a better relationship with both you (the teacher) and their peers.

- Teachers must make children aware that they will respond to their behaviour rather than the child. If a child misbehaves, the teacher must make it clear that s/he has a problem with

the action the child did and not the child itself. i.e. if a child throws a crayon in the classroom, the teacher should make it clear that she isn't annoyed with the child but doesn't like the act that she did. The teacher should focus more on accepting behaviour rather than always correcting a child for example: "I really like the picture you drew with that crayon but I would prefer if you did not throw it across the classroom."

- Teachers must provide opportunities for children to make their own choices and decisions. In doing this it allows them to develop trust in their own judgement. As a teacher you must encourage them to face challenges, teach them to make decisions and set themselves goals. Most importantly teachers must express their faith and confidence in them and their capabilities and give them plenty of opportunities to succeed.

- As a teacher you must listen to what each child has to say. Each child is an individual and it important to listen to and respect their views. They should all be treated equally regardless of what academic ability they hold, favouritism should never play a part in the amount of time a teacher spends with each child.

- It also important that the teacher creates a warm environment within the classroom by being calm, accepting, encouraging and supportive while at the same time maintaining classroom control. (Blefigen-Togashi, Laura, 2004) In doing this the children will feel safe and will be less likely be afraid of failure and more likely to try again if they do fail.

In conclusion it is evident that the role of the primary school teacher is a very complex and skilled activity. A child's self-esteem depends largely on their home environment, they have the greatest influence in shaping their children's sense of self-esteem, and they are their first and most important teacher. However they are also equally influenced by their relationship with their teachers, throughout their educational lives, which lasts from the age of 3/4 to 23 years old. With this in mind primary teachers have to have many qualities, which they use to develop positive self-esteem in children, i.e. creating a warm, safe environment, respect and listen to the children and setting realistic goals according to their individual abilities.

Having explored and researched self-esteem in children I now have a better understanding in this area and realise the pivotal role that a teacher plays in the development of a child's self-esteem.

"Although the complexity inherent in teachers makes it a difficult profession to master, making progress towards that goal is also one of teachings greatest rewards"