Student Self-Esteem and the School System: Perceptions and Implications

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ABSTRACT **K–12 school personnel appear to have an impact on student self-esteem. In addition, most self-esteem programs used in the schools have historically consisted of superficial activities; thus, self-esteem is seldom addressed at a conceptual level. In order to do so, school personnel need to understand their own attitudes about self-esteem. The purpose of this study was to examine similarities and differences in perceptions of school administrators, counselors, and teachers about student self-esteem and explore further how each group perceives their own and the other two groups' impact on student self-esteem. Participants were selected from a stratified random sample of K–12 school administrators, counselors, and teachers. Each of these groups completed a survey that addressed perceptions of student self-esteem and impact of school personnel on student self-esteem. Data yielded noteworthy similarities and differences in school personnel's perceptions of student self-esteem as well as statistical significance regarding perceptions of the impact of school personnel on student self-esteem.**

Although many definitions of self-esteem have been advanced, they are often contradictory in nature. Frequently, self-esteem is viewed as a component of a more inclusive construct, typically labeled self-concept or self-perception (Beane & Lipka, 1980; Calhoun & Morse, 1977; Dickstein, 1977; Rosenberg, 1979). Self-concept is viewed as the aspects of one's self-image that are basically descriptive and nonjudgmental, whereas self-esteem is construed as those aspects or attitudes that are classified as self-evaluative. Some researchers (e.g., Beane & Lipka, 1980; Calhoun & Morse, 1977) believe that in viewing the distinction between how one describes oneself (self-concept) and how one evaluates oneself (self-esteem), the evaluative aspect is more vulnerable to situational and value influences. For purposes of this study, self-esteem was defined as "appreciating one's own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for oneself and to act responsibly toward others" (California State Department of Education, 1990, p. 1).

The Genesis of Self-Esteem

When children enter school, their self-concept is already substantially formed, primarily through the influence of family (California State Department of Education, 1990; Purkey, 1970). Although nothing impacts the development of a child's self-esteem as significantly as the family (Brookover, 1965; Coopersmith, 1967; Thomas, 1966), the impact of the school environment cannot be overlooked. According to Hoge, Smit, and Hanson (1990), it is a combination of school factors, family, and innate intelligence that appears to be an essential ingredient to increasing students' self-esteem during the academic years. Additionally, Amundson (1991) reported, in an analysis of data from the National Center for Self-esteem, that as students get older, their self-esteem diminishes. Eighty-nine percent of kindergarten students were reported to have high self-esteem, whereas only 20% of fifth graders, 5% of high school graduates, and 2% of college graduates reported high self-esteem. Additionally, Stipek (1984) posited that children enter school expecting to be successful and feeling good about themselves and are not particularly concerned about achievement outcomes. Over time, however, they learn to care about grades and come to have negative beliefs about the likelihood of their experiencing success. These changes are attributed, in part, to the manner in which children process feedback about their performance as their cognitive development continues. More important, however, they come to accept the emphasis on external evaluation for achievement that is common in school systems (Stipek, 1988). Thus, both academically and interpersonally, students' self-esteem is affected daily by evaluations not only from school personnel but also from peers and family members. Because of the multitude of academic and social roles that students assume, they must constantly evaluate and

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reevaluate their knowledge and skills and compare them to those of others.

The School Climate and Self-Esteem

Discussions of school climates generally distinguish between two types: custodial and humanistic (Beane, Lipka, & Ludewig, 1980). The custodial climate is characterized by concern for maintenance of order, preference for autocratic procedures, student stereotyping, punitive sanctions, and impersonalness. The humanistic climate is characterized by democratic procedures, student participation in decision making, personalness, respect, fairness, self-discipline, interaction, and flexibility. Deibert and Hoy (in Beane, Lipka, & Ludewig, 1980) found that students in schools with a humanistic climate demonstrated higher degrees of self-actualization than those in schools with a custodial orientation. Further, according to Coleman (1961), school climates in which student choices and creative expression are encouraged are associated with higher student self-esteem. Ryan and Grolnick (1986) noted that the more a student perceives school climate as allowing student autonomy and initiative, the higher his or her self-esteem will be. Thus, it appears that the custodial climate may have a debilitating impact on student self-esteem, whereas the humanistic climate may be a vehicle to facilitate more positive self-esteem (Estep, Willower, & Licata, 1980; Licata & Wildes, 1980).

The Impact of School Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers on Student Self-Esteem

Research indicates a persistent relationship between various aspects of self perception and a variety of school-related variables including perceived social status among peers, pro-social behavior, and overall school achievement (Wylie, 1979). As a school-related variable, the impact of school personnel and the behaviors and values they model cannot be ignored. A brief discussion of the various ways these three groups affect student self-esteem follows:

Administrators. A review of the literature reveals very little directly related to the impact that school administrators have on student self-esteem. Although this appears to be an unresearched area at present, the literature clearly speaks to the role of the superintendent as that of visionary (Johnson, 1993). It seems feasible then, that the vision upon which a school administrator decides in turn sparks the development of the "identity" or climate that a school develops. And it is under the umbrella of this school climate that not only its goals and objectives but also its written and unwritten rules are likely subsumed. Thus, the impact that most school administrators have on student self-esteem is, in all likelihood, indirect and attitudinal, emanating from their visionary values. This kind of impact can be especially powerful because of its potent trickle-down effect throughout the entire system. It is our view that when the vision of the superintendent translates into a custodial school climate, its impact on student self-esteem, and on the system in general, can be negative. And if the vision is antithetical to or incongruous with the belief systems of other school personnel, the result can be great confusion in the system, which is detrimental to the continuity of message delivery.

School counselors. When middle school children were asked to identify significant others in their decisions about self-esteem, they rarely mentioned school counselors (Beane, 1986). Although school counselors may have a direct impact on the students with whom they interact, their impact is generally more indirect, channeled through consultation with teachers and administrators. Beane (1986) cited four major areas in which school counselors can be most effective: a) engaging in continuous efforts to raise the consciousness of other educators in the area of self-esteem; b) helping teachers develop skills related to enhancing student' self-esteem; c) using their expertise in the area of self-esteem in curriculum planning; and d) developing and coordinating student support networks in the school to enhance academic achievement (e.g., peer tutoring) and provide support in the areas of self-esteem.

Teachers. The research on the impact of teachers on student self-esteem has been extensive. Results indicate that teacher support and encouragement of student autonomy are associated with higher student self-esteem. In a study of seventh and eighth graders, Nelson (1984) found that several teacher variables—amount of teacher involvement and support, the degree to which teachers stressed order and organization, and innovation—were positively associated with overall student self-esteem. Conversely, the amount of teacher control over students was inversely associated with students' academic self-esteem. Further, in a study of students in Grades 4–6 in New York State, Ryan and Grolnick (1986) found a significant relationship between students' self-worth and their perceptions of whether their teachers allowed them autonomy. In a study that examines the educationally dysfunctional role of teacher–pupil personality conflicts, Bhasin (1987) notes that both aggressive misbehavior and shy withdrawal are viewed as symptoms of teacher-reinforced low self-esteem.

According to Covington's (1984) theory of self-worth, the pervasive tendency in our society is to equate accomplishment with human value, which creates a perception that individuals are only as worthy as their achievements. Is this notion more reinforced, both implicitly and explicitly, in the schools? If so, students may often confuse ability and worth, and there may not be sufficient guidance personnel to help them modify this perception. The net result, all too often, is that children struggle, not to achieve, but simply to avoid failure.

The school experience, then, appears to be a significant determinant of a student's sense of self. It affects self-concept, values, and subsequent self-esteem. Therefore, it is essential that school personnel have a sound understanding of both self-concept and self-esteem, and how these func-

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tion in school-aged youth. Further, an understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and values as well as the potential positive and negative impact that school personnel might have on each student's sense of self is necessary. Self-esteem must be a major concern to those responsible for planning and implementing curriculum, not only within the confines of the classroom but also within the total school environment (Beane, Lipka, & Ludewig, 1980). However, little is known about either the conceptual knowledge that school personnel have about self-esteem or the attitudes and beliefs they espouse regarding student self-esteem.

Even so, the concept of building self-esteem has become popular and important in the education system. Although school personnel have some understanding that the genesis of self-esteem is internal, generated from a genuine sense of achievement and unconditional worth, the actual outcome of the self-esteem movement has largely been an explosion of awards, gold stars, happy face stickers, and canned curriculum on self-esteem (Newsweek, 1992), the value of which is questionable. For instance, Eldridge, Witmer, Barcikowski, and Bauer (1977) reported a study on the use of a group guidance program titled Developing of Self and Others (DUSO) that included 211 educable developmentally disabled 8-to-12-year old children in 20 randomly selected intermediate-level special education classes. Two treatment groups were used, one of which experienced 85 sessions of DUSO, and the other encouraged individual teachers to use a personal approach to self-esteem improvement. Although an improvement in self-esteem scores was found, no significant differences were found between the two treatment groups. It therefore appeared that the curriculum package DUSO was no more effective than the individual approaches selected by the teachers.

Self-esteem is seldom examined at a conceptual level in the schools, and very few school personnel have an accurate understanding of their impact on student self-esteem. This is unfortunate, because in order for school personnel to make an enduring difference in students' self-esteem they must construct a consistent and ongoing series of specific situations in which students can receive both positive and constructive feedback. It is from this process that they will be able to better clarify their concepts of self and the values upon which judgments about self-esteem are made (Raths, 1972). It is difficult for this to occur in any focused way if school personnel do not understand the necessity of doing so or if their attempts to do so work at cross purposes.

Purpose of the Study

To more effectively address the self-esteem of students at a conceptual level, one must gain a better understanding of the views and attitudes that school administrators, school counselors, and schoolteachers hold regarding student self-esteem. Toward this end, the purpose of this study was twofold: a) to determine the behavioral cues that school personnel view as indicative of both high and low self-esteem as well as ways they might help students increase self-esteem and b) to determine each group's perceptions regarding their own and the remaining two groups' positive or negative impact on student self-esteem.

Method

Participants

Participants selected for this study were drawn from a stratified, commercially prepared education mailing list of more than 2.8 million K–12 teachers, counselors, and administrators from the public school systems across the country (Market Data Retrieval, Inc, 1992). From this sample (N = 2,799), names were further systematically drawn from each strata (every 10th name) to comprise the sample of respondents, such that one hundred participants from each of these groups were finally selected. The survey response rate from this sample was 58%, distributed as follows: 52 administrators, 73 counselors and 48 teachers (n = 173). Of this combined group, 61% were female and 86% were Caucasian. More than half of the respondents (59%) worked in a nonrural school setting, and most (76%) had earned a master's degree. Of all respondents, 63% were identified as career personnel (20+ semester hours of post-graduate credit), and those holding master's degrees outnumbered those holding BA/BS degrees, regardless of post-graduate credit, by a 5 to 1 margin. Respondents holding either a PhD or EdS degree constituted only 8% of this sample. Most respondents worked in either an elementary or senior-grade-level setting (73%). Slightly over two thirds (68%) of the respondents were in the 31–50 age bracket.

Procedure

Following random selection of participants, information packets containing a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study; consent to participate agreements, related survey instruments; and a stamped, self-addressed return envelope were mailed to respondents, requesting that all materials be returned within 3 weeks Three weeks subsequent to that initial mailing, all the participants were mailed a follow-up post card as a reminder to return materials if they had not already done so. Only one reminder notice was sent. Information on nonrespondents is unavailable.

Instrumentation

Participants were asked to complete the School Personnel Perceptions of Student Self-Esteem (SPPSS) questionnaire, a nonstandardized instrument that we developed and piloted on selected school administrators, counselors and teachers who served to support construct validity. The SPPSS has not been tested for reliability.

The SPPSS is an 18-item questionnaire that addresses

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five domains: (a) demographic information, including professional experience, education, age, gender, ethnic affiliation, and both size and geographic location of the respondent's school; (b) perceptions about characteristics of student self-esteem; (c) perception of effect of school personnel on student self-esteem; (d) personal self-efficacy regarding perceived ability to affect student self-esteem; and (e) perceptions of whether students' self-esteem can be increased. Response categories include Likert scale rating, forced-choice responses, and rank ordering of multiple response items. The SPPSS takes approximately 10 min to complete.

Results

The survey response rate was 58% (n = 173, Administrator = 52, Counselor = 73, Teacher = 48). Information on nonrespondents was unavailable. To illustrate the differences between school administrators, counselors, and teachers in their perceptions about student self-esteem, we compiled percentage differences on responses to multiple foils from six questions, highlighting the top three responses to each question. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted in order to examine differences within groups and across groups regarding perceptions of each group's positive and negative impact on student self-esteem (α = .05.). Significant differences were found between these groups.

Perceptions of Student Self-Esteem

Participants were asked six questions that addressed their perceptions of student self-esteem. Each question included 9 to 10 foils, from which subjects were to "choose three foils" or "make three selections" (see Table 1).

There are noteworthy disparities between groups on responses to certain questions, which may indicate a lack of conceptual uniformity regarding self-esteem and its determinants. For example, in response to the questions regarding characteristics of students with low self-esteem, 42% of the teachers chose "peer dependence" as an indicator, whereas only 25% of the administrators selected this option. Forty percent of the administrators cited "aggression/rebellion" as an indicator of low self-esteem, whereas only 18% of the counselors chose this response.

In response to a question that asked for the three most effective ways for students to increase self-esteem (not included in table form), 65% of the administrators said that "developing better social skills" was essential, but only 50–51% of teachers and counselors respectively selected this variable. Forty-four percent of the administrators and 52% of the teachers listed "strengthening academic performance" as an effective way to increase self-esteem. However, only 30% of counselors made this choice.

Further, respondents were asked to list the three most important things school personnel can do to help students increase self esteem (Table 2). Sixty-nine percent of school

Table 1.—Perceptions of School Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers About Student High and Low Self-Esteem (in Percentages)

Variable	All	Administrators	Counselors	Teachers
Characteristics of students with high self-esteem				
Being responsible and dependable	**71**	**73**	**71**	**67**
Sense of direction and autonomy	**63**	**56**	**69**	**63**
Self-assuredness	**57**	**54**	**58**	**58**
High performance	35	35	32	40
Kindness/altruism	20	21	21	17
Sense of humor	15	23	14	8
Strong religious/spiritual affiliation	14	14	11	19
Drive to compete	12	12	11	15
Popularity	8	10	8	6
Regularly putting one's needs/wants before those of others	2	4	1	2
Characteristics of students with low self-esteem				
Underdeveloped social skills	**61**	**58**	**59**	**69**
Low performance	**58**	**60**	**63**	**59**
Using high-risk behaviors	**43**	37	56	29
Peer dependence	32	25	32	**42**
Aggression/rebelliousness	28	**40**	18	29
Irresponsibility/underdependability	27	31	23	29
Lack of popularity	21	21	23	17
Anxiety/hyperness	11	12	8	15
Arrogance/conceit	7	4	8	8
Highly competitive	1	4	0	0

Note. Numbers in boldface type indicate a "top three" choice.

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Table 2.—Perceptions of School Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers About Ways to Help Students Having Problems and Students With Low Self-Esteem (in Percentages)

Variable	All	Administrators	Counselors	Teachers
Ways school personnel can help students experiencing problems				
Focus on strengths but hold accountable for misconduct	**80**	**85**	**82**	**71**
Much family involvement	**74**	**73**	**73**	**77**
Help students focus on the natural consequences of of their behavior	**56**	**64**	**51**	**56**
In-school counseling	32	39	36	21
Students decide on intervention for their behavioral problems	16	14	21	13
"In-school" community service	10	2	8	21
Grades contingent, in part, on behavior, as form of behavior mod	8	4	6	17
Counseling (outside school)	8	10	10	2
Enforce penalizing programs, such as detention	3	2	1	6
Corporal punishment	1	2	0	0
Things school personnel can do to help students increase self-esteem				
More unconditional validation	**56**	***35**	**69**	**60**
Help students gain a conceptual understanding of self-esteem	**47**	**50**	**48**	42
Educate all school personnel about self-esteem, and ways to identify and increase their own self-esteem	**45**	**56**	**45**	44
Provide students with a variety of competitive activities	39	***35**	37	**46**
Model high self-esteem behaviors	37	*35	27	**54**
Increase academic and behavioral expectations of students	20	27	12	25
Allow students to experience natural consequences of actions	19	14	26	13
Classes on social skill building	17	25	16	10
Firm boundaries about discipline	9	14	7	8
Corporal punishment	0	0	0	0

Note. Numbers in boldface type indicate a "top three" choice.
*Indicates a tie in the "top three" choice.

counselors and 60% of teachers said that "providing more unconditional validation to students based on who they are rather than how they perform or behave" was important, whereas only 35% of the administrators selected this variable. Only 35% of the administrators and 27% of the counselors thought "modeling high self esteem behaviors" was important. However, 54% of the teachers chose this option.

In response to a question that asked what three best ways can school personnel help students who are experiencing problems (Table 2), only 4% of school administrators and 6% of school counselors said that "making grades partially contingent on behavior as a form of behavior modification" was important, whereas 17% of the teachers selected this choice.

Finally, respondents were asked to list "the single most important factor that influences self esteem" (not listed in table form). Although each group collectively listed "family" as their first choice, there were discrepancies between groups related to the percentage of each group selecting this option. Thus, 65% of counselors, 48% of teachers, and 25% of school administrators selected family as the most important factor. As their second choice, 21% of school administrators said that "a single significant individual (e.g., mentor, teacher, counselor, friend, parent, or neighbor)" was the single most important factor in influencing self-esteem. Fifteen percent of teachers chose "a single significant individual" but only 6% of counselors selected this option. Both counselors (14%) and teachers (17%) chose "peers" as a second choice, whereas only 8% of administrators chose "peers." Thus, responses to items across groups are different as a function of those groups.

There was also agreement across groups in response to many of the questions. For instance, in response to the question that asks for the three most typical characteristics of students with high self-esteem (Table 1), all three groups selected the same top three variables in the same order: (a) being responsible and dependable, (b) having a sense of direction and autonomy, and (c) self-assuredness. All three groups listed "popularity" equally low. Not one respondent listed "corporal punishment" as a way to help students increase self-esteem (Table 2), although 2% of administrators listed it as an effective way to help students who are experiencing problems.

Even though there were notable differences in the percentage of administrators, counselors, and teachers who chose "family" as the single most important factor that influences self-esteem, this was each group's first choice, by a wide margin, especially for counselors and teachers. Virtually no one listed "messages from the media" as the single greatest influence on self-esteem, and surprisingly, few listed "individual performance" as a significant factor (4% of administrators, 1% of counselors, and 2% of teachers).

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Perceptions of Positive and Negative Self and Other-Group Impact on Student Self-Esteem

To examine differences in perceptions regarding the impact of administrators, counselors, and teachers on student self-esteem, we asked participants three questions about their own impact as well as the impact of the other two groups on student self-esteem. Scores ranged from 0, reflecting negative impact, to 5, reflecting positive impact (Table 3).

Administrators. Administrators rated their own impact on student self-esteem as significantly more positive than did school counselors and teachers. Mean administrator ratings of administrators' impact was 4.22. Mean counselor and teacher ratings of administrators' impact were 3.45 and 3.66, respectively. A one-way analysis of variance showed statistical significance (p = .0001), (Table 3). A post hoc analysis (Tukey, 1977) for all pair-wise comparisons confirmed statistically significant differences between administrator–teacher and administrator–counselor pairs. Thus, while administrators viewed their own impact on student self-esteem as very positive, counselors and teachers viewed administrators' impact as less so, although it was still viewed as positive.

Counselors. Counselors and administrators rated counselors' impact in a similarly positive fashion. Mean counselor ratings of counselors' impact was 4.59. Mean administrators ratings of counselors' impact was 4.54. Teachers, however, rated counselors' impact on student self-esteem somewhat less positively (4.27). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed statistical significance (p = .0062) (Table 3). A post hoc analysis (Tukey, 1977) for all pair-wise comparisons confirms statistically significant differences between teacher–counselor and teacher–administrator pairs. Thus, while counselor impact on student self-esteem was viewed as very positive by all three groups, teachers tended to view that impact as somewhat less positive than the other two groups. As a practical matter, ratings of this magnitude present a strong perception of positive counselor impact on student self-esteem.

Teachers. All three groups rated teachers' positive impact in a similarly positive fashion. Mean administrator ratings of teachers' impact was 4.41. Mean counselor ratings of teachers' impact was 4.08. Mean teacher ratings of teachers' impact was 4.30. A one-way (ANOVA) showed that the differences between these groups were not statistically significant (p = .062), (Table 3). These results preclude the application of a post hoc analysis. That is, whereas all three groups viewed teacher impact on student self-esteem as somewhat positive or higher, these groups did not differ statistically in that perception of impact.

Discussion

Although there were marked differences in some of the perceptions of school administrators, counselors, and teachers, the results of the study (Table 1) indicate that being responsible and dependable are characteristics that school personnel believe are most typical of students with high self-esteem. In many definitions of self-esteem, "feeling good about oneself" frequently overshadows "being responsible." "Being responsible for oneself" (the foil selected by 71% of respondents as a typical characteristic of students with high self-esteem) is both a precursor to and a result of "a sense of direction and autonomy" (ranked second, selected by 63% of the respondents), and both of these are interactive with "a sense of self-assuredness" (ranked third, selected by 57% of respondents). All three groups ranked the three most important characteristics of students with high self-esteem in the same order. Evidently, school personnel perceive accountability to be a crucial factor in achieving high self-esteem. These findings underscore the importance of responsibility and choice as core components of personal development curricula as well as in enforcement of student behavior policies.

Table 3.—School Personnel's Perceptions of Personal and Collegial Impact on Student Self-Esteem

Group being rated	Rater	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Administrator	Administrator	51	4.22	0.86			
	Counselor	73	3.45	1.84			
	Teacher	47	3.66	0.94			
					8.95	9.68	.0001
Counselor	Administrator	52	4.54	0.54			
	Counselor	73	4.59	0.49			
	Teacher	47	4.27	0.58			
					1.48	5.24	.0062
Teacher	Administrator	51	4.41	0.78			
	Counselor	71	4.08	0.77			
	Teacher	46	4.30	0.79			
					1.70	2.82	.062

Note. 5 = positive impact; 0 = negative impact. α = .05.

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All three groups believed that the development of good social skills is not only indicative of high self-esteem, but also one of the best remedies for low self-esteem. "Developing better social skills" was the top choice of administrators (65%) in response to effective ways for students to increase self-esteem, and was ranked third overall by all three groups (55%). In responding to the question that asked for the characteristics of students with low self-esteem, "underdeveloped social skills" was the top-ranked choice (61%) of the combined groups (Table 1). These opinions reinforce the importance of providing all students with educational experiences that will enhance their ability to communicate, make effective decisions, and function well interpersonally.

Additionally, the data indicate statistically significant differences in how each group perceives their own and the other two groups' impact on student self-esteem. Although all groups were uniform in their choices of indicators of high self-esteem in students, they were not uniform in their choices about indicators of low self-esteem or about what they could do to help students increase self-esteem. This is clearly evidenced, for example, in the differential responses of school counselors (69%), teachers (60%), and school administrators (35%) to the importance of "providing more unconditional validation to students based on who they are rather than how they perform or behave" (Table 2). Understanding and addressing these differences are crucial components in creating an environment that enhances student self-esteem. An open atmosphere of collegial exchange provides a mechanism for changing behaviors that diminish student self-esteem as well as reinforcing behaviors that enhance student self-esteem. The successful development of this type of atmosphere provides the foundation for a humanistic school climate, characterized by Beane, Lipka, and Ludewig (1980) as one that allows freedom of thought and encourages personal responsibility and authentic discourse. When students receive mixed messages and inadvertent and inconsistent reinforcement from school personnel, they may have more difficulty developing a line of reasoning in relation to their own lives, understanding the concept of boundaries, and applying this concept in the construction of their own values and attitudes.

As stated earlier, in order for school personnel to make an enduring difference in students' self-esteem, they must construct a consistent and ongoing series of specific situations in which students can receive both positive and constructive feedback. It is from this process that they will be able to better clarify their concepts of self and the values upon which judgments about self-esteem are made (Raths, 1972).

Implications for Practice

One of the most significant findings of this study was the overall agreement of school personnel regarding the importance of being responsible and dependable as characteristic of students with high self-esteem. Although this notion has yet to be empirically supported, these results offer a theoretical starting point that may serve to determine the efficacy of appropriate interventions for raising self-esteem. Assuming, for example, that "being responsible and dependable" can be empirically substantiated as a characteristic of students with high self-esteem, school personnel may be better able to design curricula grounded in theory that help to create environments that foster responsibility and thus raise self-esteem.

In addition, respondents indicate clear linkages between family and school in helping students build self-esteem. Again, although not empirically substantiated, these results suggest that research addressing the importance of collaborative efforts between school and home to raise self-esteem may be a first step in the refinement of esteem-building programs and practices.

From an interpersonal perspective, increased clarity among professional groups about each others' values and perceptions of student self-esteem is needed. Focus groups for school professionals on self-esteem might help professionals increase their understanding of the perceptual similarities and differences that exist regarding self-esteem, and the impact of these perceptions on students.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked methods of fostering self-esteem in children is the impact of modeling high self-esteem. Children who exhibit high self-esteem often have parents who exhibit high self-esteem (California State Department of Education, 1990). It is possible, then, that school personnel who exhibit high self-esteem may also serve as important role models. To this end, then, perhaps one important way for school personnel to build self-esteem in their students is to more clearly and deliberately model their own high self-esteem. Although there are many other variables that impact a child's self-esteem, the importance of modeling cannot be overstated.

In tandem with and in addition to our recommendations for practice, the following are recommendations (in brief form) on education and self-esteem put forth from the California Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility:

1. Self-esteem and responsibility must be woven into the total educational program.
2. Educate every educator—through preservice and inservice training—in self-esteem and responsibility.
3. Give students opportunities to do community service.
4. Formulate a real-life skills curriculum.
5. Promote more parent involvement.
6. Be sensitive to the needs of students at risk of failure.
7. Use the arts to help develop self-esteem and responsibility.
8. Expand counseling and peer counseling services for students.
9. Provide cooperative learning opportunities.
10. Reduce class size or student: adult ratios.
11. Implement programs to counteract bigotry and prejudice.

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Recommendations for Future Research

The notion of responsibility is thought to be an important determinant of high self-esteem in this study; further research, though, is necessary to gain a more empirically valid understanding of how different people construe responsibility in relation to their own value system and the kinds of responsible behaviors that may have the greatest positive impact on self-esteem. For instance, a significant body of research indicates a very low correlation between achievement, which is frequently construed as responsible behavior, and self-esteem (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; West, Fish, & Stevens, 1980). In this study, we addressed the differences between groups of people; further study relative to individual differences would strengthen the knowledge base in this area.

The importance of school personnel as potential role models for increasing or maintaining student self-esteem may also be an important area of future exploration. Daily interaction with students seems to be a potentially strong means of addressing the issue of student self-esteem. Further, this variable could be explored within both the custodial and humanistic school climates that were previously discussed.

The interactive effect of family and school on a child's self-esteem appears to be very important. Additional research into the impact of this interactive effect would help school professionals better understand the parameters of what they can do to impact student self-esteem as well as the communication that is necessary with a child's family to maximize the child's potential to increase self-esteem.

In addition, because the concept of self-esteem is such an amorphous one, studies of self-esteem lend themselves well to qualitative research. Field interviews with school personnel and students would be helpful to reveal more in-depth conceptual information about attitudes, values, and perceptions and how these relate to self-esteem.

Evaluative research into interventive methodologies to empower children with low self-esteem would complete the "theory into practice" loop that is so essential in achieving lasting change. Only by evaluating the effectiveness of self-esteem activities can school personnel be assured their interventions are on target.

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