

CAN YOU REALLY RAISE SELF ESTEEM?



by Carlynn McCormick

The term *self-esteem* is batted around in every educational arena in the nation. Teachers are taught a child's happiness depends on it and lack of it causes bullying, disrespect and even violence. If self-esteem is of such great consequence, what *is* this sought after quality anyway?

The word *self-esteem* was coined in 1890 by psychologist William James who defined it as "a ratio between someone's successes and failures in a particular area." The problem with James's definition is that someone could have the quality today but lose it tomorrow. A man marries the girl of his dreams and is on top of the world. *Hello, self-esteem.* Then one evening he comes home and finds she's run off with his best friend. *Bye-bye, self-esteem.*

In the mid 1960s, the idea of self-esteem moved to the field of education; the definition changed to include the stability missing in the earlier definition. Self-esteem became "a stable sense of personal worth." Students should feel good about themselves *at all times*, not just during happy moments. If you know at

least two children, you might see the quandary teachers had when school administrators insisted self-esteem be instilled in *every* child.

Teachers were expected to praise *all* students including those who scribbled on assignments, ripped pages, or were uncooperative in learning information needed for life skills. With this new definition, students were praised for *any* work done, be it stellar or inferior. And like James' definition, this one had its downside: an incompetent student, bully or gang member could suffer from too much *unearned* high self-esteem just as easily as not enough.

How does the definition fare today? An on-line dictionary defines self-esteem firstly as “a feeling of pride in yourself,” and secondly as “the quality of being worthy of respect.”

If teachers today use definition one and put attention on making students feel good but fail to demand competence, again a grave injustice befalls students. They conclude, as happened in the mid-60s, that just the act of completing assignments is enough to warrant pride and overlook the truism: competence plays a giant role when it comes to success.

Being Worthy of Respect

Therefore, it is the second definition, *the quality of being worthy of respect* that gives a workable way to factually raise a child's feeling of self-worth. Using it, I can personally raise any child's self esteem *and so can you!*

All we need do is encourage the child to do something valuable for another. Think of the last time you made someone's eyes sparkle with gratitude for something you had done for him. A child is no different. The more we do for others, the more respect we have for ourselves.

Go out and try it. Do something nice for every member in your family, for your friends and neighbors. Take care to note how wonderful it makes *you* feel. Get your child into the habit of doing the same. If he learns to have fun by helping others, *you* have brought about the “self-esteem” educators *actually* intended, a child *worthy* of respect!

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