Self-esteem: Enhancing Good Practices and Overcoming Barriers

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Abstract: It is believed that several factors contribute to successful learning, and teaching is merely a part of the learning environment. A main restraint on motivation, and thus learning, is the child's level of self-esteem. The development of high self-esteem is significant in order for children to be happy and successful. As such, the term of 'self-esteem' has received a significant portion of attention in both the educational and social fields. This article is focused with discussing children's self-esteem, which is one of the many important issues regarding children. This paper will, firstly, present an understanding of the term 'self-esteem', the models to which it applies, and its measurement. Secondly, the paper also focuses on the development of self-esteem, the barriers regarding its development, and the importance of self-esteem with regards to its relationship to learning, behaviour and emotional difficulties, as well as a consideration to bullying and aggression. Thirdly, the role of schools in enhancing children's self-esteem will be discussed with reference to two perspectives: Self-esteem being built on an individual basis, which will be discussed briefly, and self-esteem on a class level, with particular attention to Circle Time.

Keywords: Self-esteem; Emotional Behavioural Difficulty; Circle Time; Bullying; Aggression.

1. Introduction

In order to satisfy the aim of this article, it is vital to explicate the meaning of the term 'self-esteem'. In any discussions relating to self-esteem which are carried out amongst workers in the field of education — specifically those who work closely with children — the several different definitions used can be quite surprising (Lawrence, 2006). Moreover, the literature includes various other terms, such as 'self-concept', 'ideal self' and 'self-image', which all carry the same or similar definitions. Fortunately, the works of various people — such as Argyle in Britain and Rogers in the USA — have worked towards making the concept much clearer (Lawrence, 2006). Therefore, with the importance of defining these different terms and how this paper regards it being paramount, it should be detailed foremost.

The definitions of these concepts remain as a theme for discussion, even though there is an agreement, to some extent, which determines that 'self-concept refers to an overarching view of the self, whilst self-esteem reflects a person's evaluative assessment of themselves'. (Butler and Gasson, 2005). In other words, 'self-concept has been approached with the question "Who am I?" and self-esteem with the question "Am I worthy?"' (Burnett, 1999).

I see the term of self-concept as being 'the sum total of an individual's mental and physical characteristics and his/her evaluation of them' (Lawrence, 1988). Moreover, self-concept has three phases: The thinking (cognitive), the feeling (affective) and the action (behaviour) (Lawrence, 1996). From teachers' views and in practice, it is helpful to deem self-concept as being concerned with the development of three areas: Self-esteem, the ideal self and self-image. Self-esteem, indeed, is the focus of this paper. However, it is nevertheless essential to define self-image (what one sees) and the ideal-self (what one would like to be) in order to be able to fully recognise the concept of self-esteem (what the individual feels about the discrepancy between what he or she sees, and what he or she would like to be).

Lawrence (1996) describes self-concept as 'an umbrella term under which the other three evolve' (see Figure 1). This is known as the 'phenomenological approach', and owes its origin primarily to Rogers' work (1951).
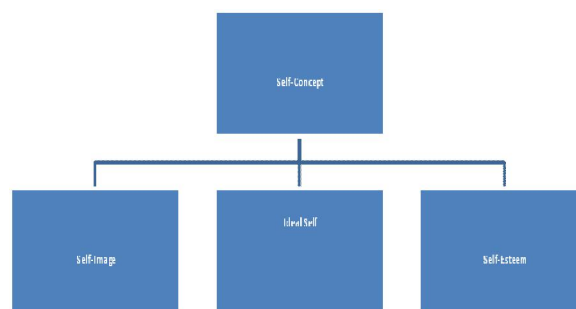

Figure 1: Demonstrating the umbrella of Self-Concept

Self-image is the awareness of the individual, of both his or her mental and physical characteristics (Cooley, 1964). The ideal self occurs side-by-side with the growth of the self-image; the child finds that, when learning, there are some ideal characteristics he or she ought to hold, and there are also some ideal standards of distinct behaviours and skills which are additionally appreciated (Robinson and Maines, 2004). Then, self-esteem is considered as the evaluation of the individual depending on his or her own self-image and standards of an ideal self (Robinson and Maines, 2004).

Despite the massive interest in self-esteem, a clear, unanimous definition is still yet to be unwritten, causing an unresolved issue (Branden, 2001). With the apparent lack of clarity in this area, Mruk (1999) highlighted the fact that some researchers appear to avoid the disagreement by defining self-esteem in a very brief sense. And, after researching this issue myself, I believe that an exact definition for self-esteem does not exist, and that there are various theories regarding this concept. Furthermore, I believe that the theory in which the author ultimately believes has influence on his or her definition, and, therefore, it is necessary to briefly present the models of theory here before proposing the adopted theory of this article.

2. The Models of Self-Esteem

Five theories have been used in order to help deepen the understanding of the term 'self-esteem'. The oldest theory, as initiated in 1965, considers self-esteem as a one-dimensional concept; this view — which was made by Rosenberg — has been accepted by many researchers (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). In contrast, however, Rosenberg sees self-esteem as a general or global construct, and defines self-esteem as the 'totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings, having reference to him/herself as an object' (p. 7). The second view regards self-esteem as a model of a self-concept hierarchy, which contains various aspects of self-esteem which are more or less important, but which all nevertheless contribute to a stable, global self-esteem (Burns, 1982). The third point of view — as detailed by Ross and Parker, (1980) — states that the notion of self-esteem acts as a compensation model, which indicates that high self-esteem in some facets compensates for lower self-esteem which could appear in other facets. The fourth point of view looks to the concept of self-esteem as categorically stating that the aspects of self-esteem operate independently of each other; therefore, specific self-esteem refers to a feeling of self-worth and confidence with regards to a specific activity or behaviour. In other words, the person may have feelings of worth or unworthiness in specific situations (Marsh, 1986).

Tafarodi and Swann (1995) proposed a model of two-dimensions, which highlights that feelings of worth and competence have been deemed the two bases of self-esteem, and maintain that "it is becoming increasingly accepted that self-esteem . . . actually consists of two distinct dimensions . . . one being the sense of social worth and the other the sense of personal efficacy and power. (a) 'self-liking', the evaluation of the self as being social; and (b) 'self-competence', the internal conceptions of achievement and failure in conducting tasks" (p. 324).

This paper is written with the view that there is the need to include all of these theories, since each can be considered as being useful in some way, depending on the situation; however, this paper is inclined to steer more towards the fourth definition as, in my experience as a teacher and after working closely with children, self-esteem appears to vary in accordance with different tasks, and a child may have high self-esteem when tackling some tasks, but, regardless, have low self-esteem in others. In addition, children do, of course, differ in what they value and desire, and high self-esteem does not always compensate for low self-esteem.

3. Self-Esteem Measurement

It is believed that, without measuring self-esteem, it is impossible to solidly determine either its causes or effects. There is a need for the measurement of self-esteem and the ability to detect variation or alterations in self-esteem, even if they are quite small. Moreover, I believe that the measurement method adopted will also depend on the theory in which the designer believes.

According to Blaskovich and Tomaka's (1991) review, there are at least 200 different measures of self-esteem which have so far been produced, with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967) being the most accepted and well-used measurements. However, while the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was initially designed for use with adolescents and adults' global feelings (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991), the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was developed for implementation with children in order to assess self-esteem in general and by distinct components, which are personal interests, parents, peers and school (Pervin, 1993).

Lawrence suggests that using a Behavioural checklist is the simplest and most useful method, although its limitation should be kept in mind. The second method is The Lawrence Self-Esteem Questionnaire (The LAWSEQ), which teachers have found to be useful, owing to its brevity, high reliability and validity. The LAWSEQ is a particularly well standardized questionnaire, and was

selected for use in the 1979 National Child Development Study (Lawrence, 1982; 1983).

This paper inclines to agree with Lawrence (2006) when he states that, 'no measure of self-esteem is perfect, and there are many limitations to all of them. There are often the statistical limitations of the measuring instrument itself as well as the limitations of the child being assessed' (Lawrence, 2006, p56). One of the limitations is the validity and reliability, since the majority of the measures are self-report of children's feelings or opinions of themselves, which means that it is such a personal and subjective construct. In fact, only two options have been deemed as being more reliable (Emler, 2001). The first one is used to observe and measure a child's self-esteem; however, it is believed that this is like estimating how children ought to feel about themselves, and works from making suppositional judgements, The second option, on the other hand, is to use indirect measures, which have already been used with obvious success with measuring other kinds of attitudes. However, Farnham et al. (1999) states that it is not a good measure of self-esteem.

From my previous experience, I believe that it is sometimes hard to use the methods mentioned above when teachers are needed to assess children quickly or when they do not want to involve a complete measurement. Therefore, in order to assess the child's self-esteem levels, teachers need to know the child well for a period of time, although this is not an accurate method, as some children are new or difficult when being dealt with on an individual basis. Secondly, the child should then be non-formally interviewed, whereupon a discussion is encouraged regarding self-esteem; there should be good interaction during the interview, which is reliant on the teacher's skills and the previous relationship, and the particular child, should be encouraged to talk or write something down regarding themselves and how they view themselves, as a way of measuring self-esteem.

4. The Development of Self-Esteem

When looking to the development of self-esteem, there is little agreement concerning the way in which self-esteem develops. However, more generally it is believed that before the age of five or six, self-esteem is not measurable, which is primarily due to competence and worthiness operating separately of each other (Mruk, 1999). After this age, however, children then start to make judgements about themselves in all of five different areas: Social acceptance; physical appearance; scholastic ability; behaviour; and artistic and athletic skills (Harter, 1983). Generally speaking, young children tend to have fairly high self-esteem, coupled with confidence and vibrancy, but this tends to change as they grow older (Robins and Trzesniewski, 2004), which is true for both boys and girls equally (Marsh, 1984): High levels of self-esteem in early childhood could be simply due to their views being unrealistically optimistic. After this stage, however, their cognitive thinking develops more significantly, and children subsequently begin to be influenced by external feedback and social comparisons within their learning, living and playing environments (Robins and Trzesniewski, 2004).

5. What Effects Children's Self-Esteem?

Many studies have discussed the factors which may affect children's self-esteem (e.g., Cottle, 2004; Owens, 2003), although some have weaker impacts on self-esteem than others. For example, ethnicity or race, social class, and gender all have either a weak or non-existent effect on self-esteem (Gray-Little and Hafdahl, 2000); however, on the other hand, factors such as successes and failures tend to have significant effects, with successes raising levels of self-esteem, while failures behave to the contrary. However, children vary in what kind of success they desire, and what they personally consider to be failures. As James (1890) argued 'our self feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be or to do' (p. 64).

Different aspects have substantial impacts on children and their levels of self-esteem, such as parental influences. I personally believe that there are different factors which can influence self-esteem but, debatably, nobody is more important to a child than his or her family (Maclellan, 2001), However, there are also different considerations to be given to this area, such as socioeconomic, single-parent homes, attention received at home, parental attachments, level of educational attainment of parents, parental unemployment, stress, violence, abuse and neglect, ways of communication (Wolf, 2004). Of course, the behaviour of the parents (Peterson, Southworth and Peters, 1983), as well as that the family members and siblings (Feinberg et al., 2000) also has effects on the child.

From my own experience, I believe that is because children have already some previously determined levels of self-esteem before entering school (Mead, 1934). In addition, Coopersmith (1967) concluded that four factors of parents' behaviour toward their children would be vital, and these were the amount of acceptance, the degree of the standards of the behaviour encouraged and anticipated, the degree of their control whether based on explanation or force, and the comfort with and extent to which their children could express views regarding family decisions. However, it is also important to take into consideration that parents' effects do not conclude with childhood — they also

continue into adolescence and adulthood (e.g. Kashubeck and Christensen, 1995).

Additionally, it is also fascinating to learn that most studies show how a mother's effect is a further major influencing factor in the early development of a child's self-esteem, and is noticeably more so than the father's effect (Lawrence, 2006). Other researchers (e.g. Richards, 1991) have also indicated that mothers are of further significance to sons while fathers are further significance to daughters.

With a keen interest in this area, and in order to strengthen my views further, I asked some of my very young students about the ways in which their parents influence their levels of self-esteem. Their responses generally consisted of labelling themselves as 'stupid', 'thoughtless', 'lazy', etc., and the parents seem to have been anticipating too little or too much from their children and criticizing them beyond what was required, especially in front of others. Sadly, there was little evidence of the children being admired for their own abilities, but were, instead, being neglected or being told that they were failures when making mistakes etc.

Of course, this cannot be generalised to stating that all parents behave in this way and all children feel this way, but this is what I found to be true when conducting my own in-class analysis.

6. The Importance of Self-Esteem

'Self-esteem may well be the single most important determinant of personality and social adaptation. It has a major influence on how the individual meets and responds to the social environment and its varied challenges. A favourable attitude towards self is associated with greater personal satisfaction and effective functioning' (Hunter, 1998).

Abraham Maslow (1970) has incorporated self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs; self-esteem was established to be in a high position, which reflects the importance of self-esteem in a person's quality of life. Equally, another great psychologist, Carl Rogers (1961), views self-esteem as being a fundamental human need; therefore, it is seen as a basic human need, and is something which affects the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions (Branden, 2001). There are those who believe that it is the 'single most important variable in an individual's life' (Keat, 1974, p. 47), and is in correlation with several behavioural outcomes (Baumeister, 1997), and is the bridge between the identity and what is important in the individual's life (Reisman, 1985).

Children with high self-esteem are less likely to face pressure in their social lives, and are very likely to be leaders, since it assists children in developing their own abilities in order to contribute to their society, and to the level which they deem

satisfactory. Studies have also shown that high self-esteem is associated with other positive and influential life-factors, such as physical health (Antonucci and Jackson, 1983], positive lifestyle behaviour (Muhlenkamp and Sayles, 1986) and the care of protection of these. On the contrary, however, those who have a low self-worth often suffer with psychological problems and feelings of inadequacy, which inhibit relationships with others due to the fear that their inadequacies are going to be exposed (Coopersmith, 1967). In addition, it is common for individuals with low self-esteem to experience eating disorders (Shisslak et al, 1995).

It is apparent that high self-esteem does indicate high quality in important areas such as academic achievements, positive relationships with family and friends, an absence of psychological problems (e.g., anxiety, depression), and less behavioural difficulties (Baumeister et al., 2003; Harter, 1998). However, Several studies have suggested that it is essential to distinguish between secure high self-esteem and insecure high self-esteem, as some children with insecure self-esteem are at risk of problematic development (e.g., Elliott, 2002); therefore, with this in mind, I believe that there is the need to refer to 'healthy self-esteem' as opposed to 'high self-esteem', as the two can be very different.

It is also believed that the importance of healthy self-esteem appears when considering and analysing the elements to which it is related. With these factors as important considerations, the article will discuss these in order.

7. Self-Esteem and Learning

There has been some questioning as to whether teachers should be concerned with a child's levels of self-esteem, or whether their focus should be primarily — and solely — concentrated on education and furthering knowledge.

In 1967, Coopersmith discovered that self-esteem among children was positively connected to academic success and creativity-factors, which both contribute to successful schooling. Cole (1974) also discovered a positive association between attainment motivation and self-esteem, while Yellott, et al. (1969) and Larsen, Jorjorian, and Parker (1973) all found positive relations between self-esteem and accomplishment motivation. On the other hand, a number of researchers (Andrews, 1966; Thomas, 1973; Wylie, 1974) stated that these findings were not constantly replicated, and some data invalidated that universal tendency and, therefore, this area still needs further study and research (Smith and Nagle, 1995). What is more, Kristja´nsson (2007) argues that teachers need not be concerned with a child's self-esteem, and Smith (2002) also agrees when stating that they need not worry or not much.

As a learning difficulties teacher, I have found that low self-esteem is connected to low studying achievements. I personally believe that efficient learning depends on a number of factors, and teaching is just one part of the learning process. A major factor is the level of healthy self-esteem which a child has.

Throughout my teaching career, I opted to teach students individually, and began my lessons by enhancing the student's self-esteem, which I have always seen to work positively, and in such a way that improves their approaches to learning and success in learning, which is not dissimilar to Lawrence's research on reading difficulties (Lawrence, 2006). It is then my opinion that children should be concerned with a child's levels of healthy self-esteem, as I believe that it has great effect on the ability to learn, and academic success.

8. Self-Esteem and Bullying

There is an argument as to whether self-esteem can also be related to bullying. By considering literature on bullying, it seems that it is accepted that children who have been bullied tend to have poorer levels of self-esteem (e.g. Rigby and Slee, 1992; Mynard and Joseph, 1997); there is also evidence to suggest that children with healthy levels of self-esteem refuse to accept bullies' threats, and are more inclined to defend themselves and remain confident (Egan and Perry, 1998). However, when looking to those children who initiate the bullying, it is found that there is serious debate in this area, while Olweus (1993) maintains that children who bully have not experienced low self-esteem. Additionally, Slee and Rigby (1993) agree that the tendency to bully others is not linked with low self-esteem, and Pearce and Thompson (1998) actually regard such individuals as having high self-esteem. Moreover, Rigby and Slee (1992) agree that bullying others indicates one of the negative consequences of raising levels of self-esteem.

9. Self-Esteem and Aggression

The relationship between aggression and self-esteem in children has received renewed attention during the past decade, and is currently debated. One view suggests that aggression and antisocial behaviour in children is an expression of a child's low self-esteem (Donnellan et al. 2005; Fergusson and Horwood, 2002). On the other hand, researchers argue that aggression in children stems from a high — or unhealthy — self-esteem, which is threatened or disputed by others (Baumeister, Bushman and Campbell, 2000; Baumeister, Smart and Boden, 1996).

My interpretation as to how both low and high self-esteem could be associated to bullying and aggression in children is that the definition of 'high' and 'low' self-esteem is diverse in various studies (Diamantopoulou, Rydell and Henricsson, 2008), and so conclusions can be somewhat difficult to reach. Moreover, from my own personal experience, I tend to agree with the theory that the children who are most likely to demonstrate such behaviours are those with high but unstable self-esteem, while those children with high and stable — or healthy — self-esteem, tend not portray these attributes (Kernis et al., 1989).

10. Self-Esteem and Emotional Behavioural Difficulty (EBD)

It is from my own experience and in my own opinion that I state that self-esteem is relative to children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Lund (1986) conducted research using the LAWSEQ method (Lawrence's Self-Esteem Questionnaire, Lawrence, 1981), and stated that 'the self-esteem of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties . . . is significantly lower than the self-esteem of children in ordinary schools. . . . This is the first time a direct link has been demonstrated between emotional and behavioural difficulties and low self-esteem' (Lund 1986, p. 30). This has also been in agreement with some recent studies (e.g. Howarth and Fisher, 2005) which have demonstrated that low self-esteem is related to behavioural difficulties (Emler, 2001) and emotional problems (Branden, 1994).

11. The Importance of the School's Role

I see schools as being establishments which are able to provide significant influence on children's mental health and their overall life's quality. It is believed that an overarching aspiration of the schooling system is to 'promote pupils' self-esteem and emotional well-being, and help them to form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships, based on respect for themselves and for others, at home, school, work and in the community' (Great Britain, & Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1999, p. 11). Moreover, the DfEE (1999) outlines aims, purposes and values; thus, it is necessary that schools have — amongst their other targets — an aim to endorse children's self-esteem.

Researchers have proven that when a group's morale is high, an individual's self-esteem tends to also be high (Argyle, 1994). Therefore, any activities which aim to build morale at school are likely to improve self-esteem (Lawrence, 2006). Thus, in order to enhance self-esteem, the feeling of belonging to a valuable group ought to be the aspiration for the whole-school approach.

The achievement and ways in which this can be achieved will obviously depend on many factors, such as the size and the type of the school, which is a key consideration (Lawrence, 2006).

I believe that when choosing an activity it should not chosen simply because it works, but also by how well it works, along with considerations as to whether the children are of an appropriate age to contribute to the activity and reap rewards, and also bearing in mind the extent to which the activity is related to self-esteem. Moreover, in order to increase levels of healthy self-esteem the activity should hold some significant characteristics, such as offering a sense of security, belonging purpose, personal competence and pride, trust, and a sense of responsibility (Schor, 1999).

As from my own experience, I know and understand that teachers are required to be aware of a child's levels of self-esteem and what each child is practically capable of; being aware of such elements are necessary in order to provide the child with an increased insight into themselves. I personally believe that schools can make a significant difference in raising levels of healthy self-esteem, and in overcoming any barriers to its development, especially, in two diverse ways — individually and by the carrying out of class activities.

12. The Individual Programme

From my previous teaching experience, I believe that some children with low self-esteem experience difficulties in performing in class activities. Evidence in support of this is clear in the child's apparent anxiety when completing these activities, since they find the activities to be stressful. Thus, the importance of the individual approach to enhancing self-esteem has emerged as being essential.

There are diverse methods which can be adopted in order to accomplish this task. However, this paper has a tendency to completely agree with many researchers — for example, Fontana, 1981 — who emphasise the significance of the quality of the teacher-child interaction. The evidence from this research stands in the fact that when the teacher-child relationship is positive, the child attains more and shows more positive behaviour. From this, it seems reasonable to presume that teachers are able to improve the child's self-esteem while teaching (Lawrence, 1972, 1973), and, subsequently, affect the children's self-esteem as well as their learning capacity.

From my experience, I firmly believe that if teachers respect the child's opinion, reminds him or her of the things he or she excels in, and reinforces the truth that everyone is different, levels of self-esteem can grow. However, there is clear evidence which demonstrates that without teachers themselves being confident and having healthy levels of self-esteem, they will not be able to easily enhance the self-esteem of the children in their care (Lawrence,

2006); this may be due to the fact that if a person has a positive attitudes toward himself or herself, there will likely be a positive attitude toward others, and vice versa (Burns, 1975). Ornstein (1993) states that the higher the teacher's self-esteem, the further the children learn and maintain that 'good teachers know . . . that good teaching has a great deal to do with caring and sharing. Effective teachers have the capacity to accept, understand, and appreciate students on their terms and through their world. They can make students feel good about themselves' (Ornstein, 1993, p186).

13. Class Levels

There are several aims of school activities with regards to enhancing self-esteem. Firstly, the children ought to be encouraged to express their feelings, even though they might initially feel incapable because of the fear of punishment or the feeling of guilt of certain other negative feelings. Secondly, through this kind of activity, the child will also learn that it is perfectly acceptable to have ideas, thoughts or feelings which are different to other children, and by adopting this approach, the child will learn to have confidence even though they are different. Thirdly, children will also find that some other children share the same ideas and feelings, which gives some reassurance to the child (Lawrence, 1996). Additionally, it assists children in building up an acceptance of the self without being too concerned with the limitations they might have.

14. Circle Time

I tend to have agreed with many educational researchers who have put forward a method for assisting in the protection and enhancement of self-esteem within schools. This method is known as Circle Time, which was created by Jenny Mosley and others (e.g. Mosley, 1996; Bliss and Tetley, 1993; Curry and Bromfield, 1994) who all suggest different models of circle time (Hayes, 2004).

14.1 Definition: Circle Time

I regard circle time as being a technique which encourages the boosting of children's self-esteem. 'The circle symbolises equality, inclusion and sharing of ideas. There are no barriers' (Draper, 2000, p.29). Any number of people could partake in circle time as a group activity (although a number of up to twenty children are largely practical). The children are then required to sit together with the rationale of increasing their understanding of themselves and others (Mosley, 1998).

14.2 The Benefits of Circle Time

Researchers have emphasized several benefits to circle time within primary classrooms, and how teachers can work to accomplish it. It seems that circle time is not usually utilised to its maximum potential, and so it needs to be carried out with

careful planning, implementation, and cautious consideration to promoting several principles which are focused on reinforcing the National Curriculum.

Circle time results in higher, healthier levels of self-esteem, enhanced listening and speaking skills and co-operation, as well as an awareness of the worth of contributions of all other members. In order to reap such results, circle time should be used to the best effects; therefore, it is not enough to simply play games, although these do have a role to play in circle time. Thus, teachers ought to be conscious of what is essential when trying to make this method work effectively.

Circle time is an influential and pleasant progression which assists both the growth of the individual him or herself, and also morale and friendship within the group (Bliss, Robinson and Maines, 1995). It should also be seen as means of communication whereupon children are all at the same level; in other words, a 'non-hierarchical' environment (Wetton and Cansell, 1993) is necessary. This approach gives every child an equal position (Kidd, 2003). In addition, this technique also helps children to support each other's development (Gilmore and Dymond, 1996). With all of this in mind, I believe that in order to achieve the most positive results, circle time ought to be a daily activity where children feel that they are able to freely express themselves in a comfortable atmosphere where all participation is accepted and welcomed.

14.3 Circle Time and Self-Esteem

There are various reasons as to why circle time has been broadly implemented as a vehicle to developing self-esteem, primarily because it creates a positive influence on behaviour and other ethos in schools (Lang and Mosley, 1993). This technique supports children while they raise and build up their levels of self-esteem (White, 1999), and there is a diversity of helpful strategies which can be utilised in order to help children recognise their individual strengths compared with their peers (Lang and Mosley, 1993). Circle time an ideal forum for improving self-esteem, as it provides the chance to support individuals, as well as the opportunity to learn how to work in groups in order to develop children's relationships and social skills, which have a significant and influential positive effects on self-esteem (Curry and Bromfield, 1994, p.29). Moreover, it also allows children to discover their emotions, and to be acquainted with their self-worth, and to improve levels of self-esteem (Curry and Bromfield, 1998).

On the other hand, Lown (2002) believes that numerous researchers connect un-researched advantages to circle time, and her example was the use of circle time in enhancing self-esteem. It is a fact

that not every research shows a positive image of utilising circle time in classrooms; she and Taylor (2003) believe that because of the lack of research in this field, there is only slight evidence of the positive impacts of circle time, despite the fact that it is acknowledged that circle time is a beneficial activity for both the child and teacher. She believes that it is difficult to regard circle time as a direct cause of enhancing self-esteem, and therefore states that further study is required before conclusions can be drawn.

In addition, Kelly (1999) agrees that there are several unanswered enquiries with regards to circle time, although the literature indicates some degree of proof of the value of circle time. However, it furthermore lifts the diversity of views concerning circle time, such as how it should be implemented to its full potential, since there is no widespread vision of what the process should be; as a result, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the definition of what is positive and rewarding circle time practice (Lang, 1998).

This paper agrees with the opinion which shows that there is a relationship between circle time and self-esteem. As this paper demonstrates, self-esteem is associated with emotional needs, for example, the Department for Education and Employment (1997) and the Educational Psychology Services documents regards self-esteem as an efficient way of assisting the emotional and behavioural needs of children (Department for Education and Employment, 2000), and circle time is associated with children's emotional and behavioural (Howarth and Fisher, 2005); therefore, I am of the opinion that circle time is associated with self-esteem and has a positive consequence on a child's self-image and how they see themselves, which assists the development of self-esteem.

Moreover, for a variety of reasons, there has also been an obvious increase in the use of circle time throughout the United Kingdom — especially in primary schools.

14.4 Making it Work

I believe that successful circle time with regards to enhancing self-esteem should not be the only technique implemented in order to improve self-esteem, nor should it be used alone. Additionally, it should not be used in an authoritarian atmosphere, as children may then be afraid of failure (Housego and Burns, 1994) and, subsequently, not reap the benefits which it can provide. In addition, the development of self-esteem should be seen as a product, and not the aspiration of circle time (Lawrence, 1988).

I personally believe that teachers must be conscious of the necessity to giving rules, which should be kept to a minimum (Bliss, Robinson and

Maines, 1995). In addition, children should be permitted to both speak and listen, and have the freedom to voice ideas in relation to what is being said, which allows a child to think that they have been heard in a non-judgemental way (Gilmore and Dymond, 2001).

When implementing circle time, there should also be a 'pass' rule, which allows the child to opt out of speaking within the circle situation until they feel more comfortable about talking to others in the group. The passing rule is vital because contributors ought to be permitted to believe that they have an option in contributing without being forced (White, 1999). Forceful activities will only decrease confidence and levels of self-esteem.

Conclusion

This paper has examined, firstly, the understanding of the term 'self-esteem' by demonstrating the gap between self-image and ideals (Rogers, 1961). It has also stated that self-esteem is an opinion and is currently under debate, and that it has different domains which can be measured by different techniques, though each demonstrates some limitations. The paper has also considered how self-esteem can develop in childhood, as children are not born with self-esteem. I have considered how self-esteem starts to change with reference to its barriers, where parents are considered as being the most influential factor. Thirdly, this paper has also demonstrated a belief that schools can make a key difference with regards to self-esteem by overcoming any barriers — both individually and at a class level with reference to circle time as one of the preferred methods available for enhancing self-esteem within the classroom.

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