

The Role of the Teacher in Improving Students Self Esteem

Bruno U. D. O and Njoku, Joyce

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Education,
University of Port Harcourt

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i1/615>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i1/615

Published Online: 14 March 2014

Abstract

Self esteem is a costly personality factor that is crucial in our lives and relationship. It is based on this fact that the authors decided to study this with a view to bringing out the importance of the concept in our school system. The authors examined the concept as well as its causes and manifestations. The paper ended with proffering relevant counselling issues that will aid one to develop one's self esteem with a view to improving one's academic performance.

Keywords: Teacher, Students Self Esteem, Counselling

Introduction

Self-esteem can be best described as the degree to which our "worthiness" as a person is evaluated. It is the evaluative aspect of self concept (Gazzinga & Heatherton, 2005). Self-esteem is the summary of a set of evaluative judgements of the self as component, successful, virtuous and worthiness (Obidigbo, 2006). Self esteem appears to be both a trait and a state (Davey, 2005). As a trait, self esteem differs in its typical levels. As a state, it fluctuates in response to circumstances (Davey, 2005). Self-esteem is simply defined as the opinion you have about yourself, the job you do, your achievements, how you think others see you and your purpose in life (Obidigbo, 2006). Emler (2001) added that self-esteem involves your strengths and weakness, your social status and how you relate to others as well as your ability or independence to stand on your own feet. In the words of Coleman (2006), self -esteem refers to one's attitude towards oneself or one's opinion or evaluation of oneself which may be positive (favourable or high) neutral or negative (unfavourable or low). According to Obidigbo & Obidigbo (2010) self-esteem borders on how you think and feel about yourself, your work and your relatives. This according to the authors can be negative or positive or more between the two ends (points). Self-esteem usually dictates how one lives one's life and it affects one's decision making strategy as well as how you view others. Generally, the more positive feelings you have about yourself the higher yourself esteem and vice versa (Obidigbo & Obidigbo, 2010). Put differently self-esteem is used to portray one's worth (self- worth) and one's own view about oneself. It is not the same thing with self-conceited or self-centeredness. Self-esteem is compatible with humility and self acceptance (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). Self-esteem simply allows you to be yourself and to appreciate the qualities you have as well as enable you to respond to others in a positive and productive way

(Obidigbo, 2007; Obidigbo & Obidigbo, 2010). Through thinking more positively and realistically about yourself, you can develop your talents and abilities, praise yourself, trust yourself and relations, you can improve yourself as you become more realistic about others too (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). Note that each person has a concept of his/her self-worth (which may either be accurate or inaccurate). Self-esteem simply means how that person feels about or evaluates this concept.

Self-esteem fluctuates with achievement. Coopersmith (1967) observed that self-esteem influences the way we think and feel about ourselves. Lefton (2007) had suggested that people who have an unstable, fluctuating self-esteem react more strongly to positive and negative life events than people whose sense of self-worth is stable and secure. Self-esteem is also linked to important way on how people approach their daily lives (Obidigbo, 2006). Hence, people who feel good about themselves tend to be happy, healthy, successful and productive. They also tend to persist longer at difficult task, sleep better at night and have lesser disease like ulcer (Obidigbo, 2006; Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). They are also more accepting of others and less likely to conform to peer pressure. Healthy self-esteem allows people to be realistic about goals, to accept criticisms, learn from their mistakes and be adventurous (Obidigbo, 2011). Low self-esteem makes people fearful and unrealistic about goals and risks. This further dents their self-image and leads to low performance in school and work (Emler, 2001). The foundation of our self-image is first developed during childhood and continues throughout life. If you have low self-worth, these earlier experiences have simply overshadowed you and have come to represent the sum total of who you believe you are (Emler, 2001).

Symptoms of Self-Esteem

Common signs of low self-esteem include feeling tired a lot of the time, having little motivation to get things done, living bored with life and yourself and wishing your life was better, thinking negatively about your abilities and possible opportunities, feeling like a failure or feeling hopeless and depressed (Obidigbo, 2006; Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2010, 2012). Our materialistic world where people continually compare themselves with those around them highlights our insecurities and often leads us to feel negative about ourselves and the way we live. This makes us to lose sight of the value of our own individuality and then feel inadequate and unsatisfied (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2010). This can become one's enduring personality trait. Generally, the common signs of low self-esteem are, consistent anxiety and emotional turmoil, always accentuating the negative, unable to accept compliments, overly concerned about what others think, inability to trust one's own opinions, constantly depressed, socially withdrawn, self-neglect, eating disorders, and unable to take on challenges, always quitting and resigning, arrogant, and extreme self-defensive behaviour (someone who retaliates far worse than what would normally be expected) (Obidigbo & Onyekuru, 2012). The signs of low self-esteem also include: exaggerated perfectionism, feeling worthless, incompetent and unrealistic about our abilities, feeling unloved, being overwhelmed with fear and negative thoughts, being unrealistic about goals, fear of change, distorted view of self and others and constant need for validation and recognition. Someone may throw a lot of "pity parties" as their unyielding thirst for validation, spotlight, and recognition which help them feel better. A person suffering from low self-esteem may feel better if he/she is reassured by his/her friends or care-givers that all is well. Such people often feel defeated to think they can change other people for the better, let alone themselves, hence their personalities are driven inward, rather than outward (Elmer, 2001).

Low self esteem is frequently seen in several different, and often serious conditions such as major depression, anorexia, body dimorphic disorder, anti-social behaviours, domestic violence, hoarding, borderline, and numerous types of addictions, just to name a few (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012, 2010; Obidigbo & Onyekuru, 2012). This means that the presence of extreme low self-worth can be a sign of another serious condition in someone's life and should always be taken seriously and not ignored by the teacher or counsellor. Most people assume self-esteem is the same as self-confident, and although self-confidence is related to self-esteem but it's not the same. Self-confident people may also suffer from low self-esteem, for example, actors, celebrities and public figures in our society today that appear to be totally self-confidence may have poor self-esteem off stage or away from the media attention.

In Latin, esteem actually means 'to estimate'. So self-esteem is often defined as how you estimate yourself. An individual with low self-esteem usually finds it difficult to answer yes to questions such as: Do I feel I deserve to be loved? 'Do I think I'm a good person' and 'Do I deserve to be happy? Low self-esteem is quite common in today's society and those who accept a limited sense of self worth may be more prone to drug or alcohol abuse as they struggle to find their worth in the world. Low self-esteem may also lead to feeling depressed and hopeless, and thinking negatively about yourself and your right to happiness. However, for lots of people there is help available to change negative thinking patterns and there are many strategies and techniques available to build self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; Obidigbo, 2006; Obidigbo & Obidigbo, 2010).

Most people experience low self esteem at some point in their life (e.g. if they lose their job or relationship) but they can also experience high self esteem at other points in their life (e.g. if they are promoted, successfully complete a challenge or fall in love). However, those who can't bounce back after their self-esteem has been bruised, and constantly feel negatively about themselves, may be suffering from chronic low self-esteem and this may lead to depression (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). Poor self-image puts us at risk for eating disorders, teenage pregnancy, depression, suicide, criminal or violent behaviour, bullying, victimization, drug and alcohol abuse, spousal abuse, poor job performance, divorce, and disastrous relationships to name only a few (Lefton, 2007; Feldman, 2009; Obidigbo, 2009; Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). The good news however, is that just as self-esteem is developed during childhood, as an adult, you can learn to counter self-defeating behaviours (Rosenberg, 1965, Elmer, 2001; Obidigbo, 2006). With counselling and support, you can discover how to discard your negative self-image and accept a more positive sense of self.

Causes of Low Esteem

Our self-esteem develops from our experiences and relations from birth. Negative experiences and troubled relationships lower it while good experiences and strong bonds raise it. Hence the foundation of self esteem is laid in the family at infancy. As a child, parents are the biggest influence on self-esteem. Children who are consistently criticized, berated, yelled at or beaten by a parent quickly learn they are worthless. If children are continually ignored, teased or ridiculed at home or in school or if they are expected to be perfect all the time in order to be accepted at home or in school, they will eventually develop a poor self-image (Obidigbo, 2006).

Hence, being harshly criticized, being yelled at or beaten, being ignored or teased, being expected to be perfect all the time, or having experiences of several failures such as in the school or sports will result in low self-esteem or self-image. If a child constantly fails at school

or does poorly in sports, they will experience identity issues, especially when they reach their teens. Hence, no single event or person determines your level of self esteem. It develops over time and can change with time and events. Therefore the feelings that we are valued and understood, and that our worries can be soothed, gives us an internal picture of our worth and the feeling that the world is a safe enough place to live and work. It is note worthy to understand that early experiences teache us to nurture ourselves and develop a resilience to deal with life's knocks and blows and protect ourselves from encountering too many dangers. Some people may be less resilient to recover from set backs and may need to find an external source of strength and help. Counselling provides this opportunity by establishing a secure base from which to explore and expand (Obidigbo, 2006; Onyekuru, 2009). How a teacher or a parent (and at times both of them) deals with the situation is what directly impacts whether or not a child will develop healthy self-image. Low self-esteem can often occur as a result of a harsh or neglectful parenting or teaching behaviour (Obidigbo, 2006). It is therefore the duty of the teacher/parent to note the following:

1. That early years are considered particularly important in establishing our self-esteem and our family is a strong force in the development of our individual self-esteem. High self-esteem in parents can be used to nurture children's self-esteem.
2. That how an individual develops their self-esteem during their time at school can also be an important factor in their sense of worth. Those who develop high self-esteem during this time are generally less likely to engage in destructive behaviour such as alcohol (drug) abuse and crime.
3. That our own natural personality and the messages and influences we receive from everyone around us about how we should act and feel can affect our self-esteem.

Manifestations of Low Self Esteem

If you have feelings of worthlessness, it has probably manifested in one of the person who is always waiting for the other shoe to drop and is helpless to do anything about it. Self-pity provides an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for your life. You lack assertiveness and feel you must be in a relation to be worthy. You are the typical underachiever. According to Feldman (2009), those with high self esteem are healthier and happier individual. They also have better intelligence.

You could also try to mask your low self-esteem by over compensating. You are the person who always appears happy. You are the highly competitive perfectionist who continually reminds others of your successes. Underneath however, you live in terror, worrying your true identity will be unmasked. You suffer from intense identity issues and tend to be "burnt out". Possibly, you go to the other extreme and act as though you simply "don't care". You tend to be angry and nothing anyone does for you is ever enough. You feel you are "unworthy" so you blame everyone else for your problems (Obidigbo, 2009). A healthy self-esteem is developed during childhood, underscoring the great need in our society to ensure children are raised in loving, yet study environment guided by strong moral values. By your tens, you will have already decided whether or not you are a "worthy" person. Identity issues are hard enough during this tumultuous time without the added burden of low self-image. So, it's no wonder so many adults grow up to feel they simply aren't good enough. Sometimes all it takes is one incident, in which you adapt an exaggerated and incorrect belief about yourself, to set off a lifetime of problems. Our choice is the biggest factor in how we lead our lives and to change our choice, we must first change the way we think about ourselves (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2010). This is not easy task, but with support and guidance from a

counsellor knowledgeable in self-esteem, you can learn how to create a new self-image. You don't have to become your negative self or be ruled by your negative belief (Obidigbo, 2009; Obidigbo & Onyekuru, 2012).

Counselling Strategies

There are several things that one must do along the journey to have better self-esteem. The first thing is for the counselee to understand that he/she is having a problem and that he/she needs help. This will help then to accept corrections and change. This will enable them to correct any incorrect beliefs that they may have about their own worth or significance and get over any distortions that they may have regarding their strengths and weaknesses. They should also work on being able to make an honest and accurate assessment of their gifts, potentials, significance, strengths, and weaknesses. Aaron Beck's cognitive skill can be used in this direction. They must heal themselves from deep relationship wounds. Hence, when helping an individual with low self-esteem it is important to help them to develop a realistic assessment of their own unique abilities, skills, and character traits. Counsellors should try to give them hope and encourage them to see that along the journey to having better self-esteem, there may be bumps, but that they should remain patient and not give up. They should be reminded that with little effort, time and patience the bumps and hurdles will be overcome. Counsellors should train them to imbibe these essential values (skills):

1. **Recognize your value:** This does not mean having an inflated ego, but rather a simple understanding of your significance. Client-centred counselling techniques can be used in achieving this. The counsellor using this technique helps the counselee to think positively about their talents, abilities, character traits, physical traits and accomplishments that set you apart from everybody else. They should also think about their negative qualities and how they can make them positive. Help them to identify the positive people in their life who make them feel good about being themselves and spend more time with them. Concentrate on your strengths while deemphasizing your limitations or weakness.
2. Stop harmful thought patterns by using thought stopping. Identifying the thought patterns and any other factors that have stood in the way of you realizing your own true worth. Obidigbo (2007) has already enumerated some of these thought patterns and how they can derail one from achieving greatness. Aaron (1999) had earlier warned us of these. Instead, think back on all of the good things that you have done in your life no matter how small or large they may be. Consider how they may have had a positive influence on the people around you.
3. **Learn (begin) new thought patterns:** This may entail the use of thought stopping technique of behaviour modification or counselling (Obidigbo, 2007). Counsellors should therefore help the counselee to counter all negative thoughts with honest assessments of your value. The A-B-C Counselling format of the cognitive therapist can be employed in achieving this (Obidigbo, 2007; Onyekuru, 2009).
4. **Be patient:** It is gainful to exercise enough patience with both the therapy and therapist. Healing will not come overnight. Remember it took a lot of time (years) for the problem to manifest. It will also require some period for one to get over them. Healing or behaviour change won't happen overnight as it will require replacing all of your bad habits with good ones and may take some time before you automatically begin to respond to negative thinking in a proactive way. Behavioural change and change itself is a process and it has to run its course. Be assured that the required

(desired) change will come one day. Work towards the change process with hope and courage (Obidigbo, 2007, 2009).

Conclusion

The paper posits that the counsellor as a teacher has a strategic role to play in the change process and specifies the skills that should be imbibed for effective behavioural development.

References

- Coleman, D. (2006). Oxford Dictionary of Psychology. Oxford: Oxford Uni
- Coopersmith S. (1967). The antecedents of self esteem. San Francisco: Freeman Press.
- Davey, G. (2005) Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology. Kent: Hodder Arnold.
- Emler, O. N. (2001). Self-esteem: The Costs and Causes of Low Self-Esteem. New York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Feldman, R. (2009). Essentials of understanding psychology. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Gazzaniga, M., & Heatheroton, T. (2005). Psychological science. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lefton, L. (2007). Psychology. Boston: Allyn and Beacon.
- Obidigbo, G. C. E. (2006). Fields of Psychology. Enugu: Sages comm.
- Obidigbo, G. (2011) Healthy self-concept, health personality. Paper presented to Anambra State students Association ESUT chapter. 17th August.
- Obidigbo, G. C. E., & Obidigbo, M. U. (2010). The use of systematic desensitization in managing students low self-esteem.
- Obidigbo, G. C. E., & Onyekuru, B. U. (2012). You and your self concept. Enugu: Sages Communication.
- Onyekuru, B. U. (2009). Principles of guidance and counselling.
- Onyekuru, B. U., & Obidigbo, G. C. E. (2012) Self-esteem and psychology.
- Onyekuru, B. U., & Obidigbo, G.C.E. (2010) Understanding human behaviour. Enugu. Godwin Sages.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965) Society and the adolescent self image. Princeton N.J.: Princeton Uni Press.