

Self-Esteem in Adolescents: Balance is Key

Amber Whitehead
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Evelyn Blaine Waite
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Developmental Standards Paper

"The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development" ~ InTASC2

The purpose of this essay is to display my comprehension of the factors, both positive and negative, that can affect self-esteem in adolescents and explain how I can take advantage of this information to build or rebuild my students' confidence in themselves. This presentation also connects my understanding to key developmental standards in comparison to self-esteem. These relations allow me to connect the information to my own classroom.

Self-esteem is a perception of one's self that can be accurate or inaccurate (Santrock, 2011). Low self-esteem can cause adolescents to engage in antisocial behaviors that are both aggressive and nonaggressive as well as have problems externalizing (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffit, & Caspi, 2005). These externalizing issues can include difficulty socializing, increased aggression, and behavior problems. On the other hand, threatening the ego of an adolescent with excessively high self-esteem can cause them to become aggressive as well (Thomaes, Bushman, Castro, Cohen, & Denissen, 2009). There is a large variety of important skills that students need to learn to be able to maintain a healthy self esteem which include positive humor, emotions, and the ability to cope (Myers, Willse, & Villalba, 2011, SS 1.3).

I should promote these positive skills to the students in my classroom to help them become more positive about themselves. Since not all self-esteem issues regard low self-esteem, I should also work to prevent children who exude narcissism from lashing out against others. I

will set rules to insure my students know that putting others down will not be accepted in my classroom (SS 5.2). At the beginning of the first class each semester, I will make clear the high expectations I have for my students to show respect to one another (SS 5.5). For example, if one of my students makes hateful comments about another student's weight, there will be serious consequences for them. This type of behavior, commonly seen by those with narcissistic issues, can be dangerous to all other peers and especially hurtful to students suffering from low self-esteem. Observing my students interact and getting an idea of their self-esteem levels will help me to aid them in overcoming the challenges they may face. I can improve my teaching strategies and effectiveness by being aware of the various influences that affect my students' self-esteem (SS 2.8).

Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction, associated with low self-esteem, appears in both male and female adolescents and either remains stable or increases as adolescence progresses (Mäkinen, Puukko-Viertomies, Lindberg, Niimes, & Aalberg, 2013). Low self-esteem in adolescence can lead to destructive body dissatisfaction problems such as anorexia nervosa (Santrock, 2011). Gender plays a major role in body dissatisfaction, as girls tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies than boys (Mäkinen, Puukko-Viertomies, Lindberg, Niimes, & Aalberg, 2013, SS 1.4). Similarly, the correlation between self-esteem and body satisfaction is stronger in girls (Mäkinen, Puukko-Viertomies, Lindberg, Niimes, & Aalberg, 2013). Unfortunately, striving for individuals with body dissatisfaction to achieve satisfaction may be impractical (Trottier, McFarlane, & Olmsted, 2013). This is true because body dissatisfaction is becoming increasingly widespread across girls and women in Western society. One should focus, instead, on rebuilding self-esteem by building a more realistic view of self as well as separate perceptions from assessments (Trottier,

McFarlane, & Olmsted, 2013). Even more importantly, self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction seem to become more severe the longer a person suffers from an eating disorder (Trottier, McFarlane, & Olmsted, 2013).

As an educator, I should help the students to engage in activities which will build their self-esteem (SS 5.1). One activity which could help my students build self-esteem would be to have them set goals for where they want to be as far as body satisfaction, and discuss ways to reach them. This would give them something to work toward and a clear path of how to get there. I can also provide workshops for building self-esteem and help students to learn how to build each other up. Because the parents of students can have a very important influence in the self-esteem of their child, I should build strong relationships with parents. I can get the emails of the teachers and communicate with them when their child may be having an issue or to congratulate them on his or her growth. This relationship will allow me to communicate ways in which the parents can help build their child's view of his or her body while they are not in the classroom. Promoting a safe environment for my students is very important to me, so I can also make my classroom a safe-zone for students to come and discuss body dissatisfaction issues which are affecting them (SS 5.1). To do this, I will educate my students about eating disorders, other body dissatisfaction problems, and their negative effects. I will emphasize to them that their health is very important. I will then make sure all of my students know they can come to me about issues like this.

Gender

Gender is a major factor of self-esteem, as female adolescents in the United States (with the exception of African-American females) are less likely to have good self-esteem (Bachman, O'Malley, Freedman-Doan, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2011, SS 1.4). Gender conformity,

trying to live up to society's "ideal" boy or girl, has both positive and negative outcomes (Good & Sanchez, 2010). For girls, the transition from childhood to adolescence can be especially detrimental due to a number of vulnerabilities (Moksnes & Espnes, 2012). These vulnerabilities can include genetics, cognitive styles, and stress exposure. One vulnerability can be dangerous, as it can lead to a snowball effect of issues (Moksnes & Espnes, 2012). Gender development throughout adolescence can be highly shaped by observations of others and the influence of society's view of a male/female (Santrock, 2011). Peers, family, and teachers can have an influence as well, providing "rewards" or "punishments" for an adolescent. (Santrock, 2011). The rewards are actions such as telling a girl she looks pretty in a dress, where a punishment would be making fun of a boy who wears a pink shirt.

In my classroom, I will establish a no-tolerance policy based on gender discrimination. I want my students to keep an open mind toward their peers, regardless of their sex. Because gender conformity can have both positive and negative effects, I want to keep my feedback as positive as possible (SS 2.3). For example, I will have to be very careful with making gender-related jokes with students, because it could be a sensitive subject for one or more of them. I will say things that will help build my students up, such as the compliment of the girl wearing the dress. Although I will only teach one or a few different classes, I want to be helpful to my students as they transition into adolescence and young adulthood. I can further this by asking the other teachers to be supportive as well. Self-esteem can be a fragile aspect for my students, especially my female students, so I will provide a support system for my students. If need be, I will create a support group that will focus on building up self-esteem for all of my students (SS 5.1, 5.3). Doing so will help provide a learning environment that will support the learning of my students and be relevant to each of their needs.

Narcissism

Not all self-esteem issues are due to low self-esteem. Narcissism, having excessively high but fragile self-esteem, can be related to increased aggression in adolescents (Papps & O'Carroll, 1998). High self-esteem is far more related to outright aggression than low self-esteem is, especially when the ego is threatened (Lau, Marsee, Kunitatsu, & Fassnacht, 2011). Contrary to instinctual belief, boosting the self-esteem of a narcissistic individual can actually reduce aggressive behavior (Thomaes, Bushman, Castro, Cohen, & Denissen, 2009). This is thought to be because in boosting the individual, it temporarily reduces the protective behaviors which are often aggressive (Thomaes, Bushman, Castro, Cohen, & Denissen, 2009). To reduce aggressive behavior in my classroom, I will need to get to the root of why the individual is acting that way. Aggressive behavior can be caused by a number of issues, but narcissism can be one of them. With the exception of a few studies, none have found low self-esteem to be a cause for outright aggression (Thomaes & Bushman, 2008).

Narcissistic adolescents tend to be aggressive after their ego has been challenged (Thomaes & Bushman, 2008). If narcissism is the root of one of my students' aggressive behavior, there are two things I can do to prevent him/her from lashing out. First, I should make it clear to all of my students that putting others down will not be accepted in my classroom (SS 5.1, 5.2). Second, I should also express to my students that aggressive behavior, no matter what the reason, is not tolerable (SS 5.5). No aggression will aid anyone in my classroom in learning, so it is not needed. Once the basic rules are established, I will focus on building my students up. Even some jokes can easily be taken the wrong way, which could cause a student to have their feelings hurt. I should be careful not to make an accidentally offensive joke and try to keep the student calm if someone else makes a joke.

Positivity

Although self-esteem issues can be an uphill battle, there is always hope for winning it. Displays of compassion can help to improve the self-esteem of adolescents as well as decrease depression. This is assumed to be true because compassionate acts are considered valued qualities, and can improve one's chances of achieving a higher social appeal (Mongrain, Chin, & Shapira, 2010). Positive factors influencing self-esteem can be divided into 5 topics: physical, creative (emotions, positive humor), coping, social, and essential (gender/cultural identity, self-care) which can make or break the self-esteem of an adolescent (SS 1.1). The lack of these factors or presence of negative elements are predictive of self-esteem issues. The presence of the positive elements which include positive humor, stress management, and love can all help to build or rebuild the self-esteem of an adolescent (Myers, Willse & Villalba, 2009). There is a significant correlation between thinking styles and self-esteem in adolescence, particularly more complex thinking styles such as legislative and hierarchal (Zhang, 2001, SS 1.2). The extracurricular activities that adolescents are involved in are also related to self-esteem and thinking styles (Zhang, 2001).

There are many options for me to bring positivity into my students' lives. Doing so will almost always be beneficial to them and their self-esteem. First, I can exercise the benefits of compassion for my students by requiring a service project for my students to participate in. Although my students might not enjoy the requirement aspect, it will promote volunteerism to students who would not traditionally be involved in service. Second, I can promote higher-level thinking skills to my students (Zhang, 2001). Doing so will allow them to become more creative and will hopefully result in positive academic outcomes which will boost their self-esteem. Finally, I can work on making my students aware of their thinking styles by having them take an

online thinking styles test. This test will allow them to focus on their own strengths and weaknesses which will allow them to create their own plan for self-growth (SS 2.1, 2.2).

Reflection

This project helped me to explore several aspects of self-esteem during adolescence as well as shape my teaching styles and the way I respond to issues. I think it is very important to provide support for my students as they make transitions, as this can be a damaging time for their self-esteem. I will focus on the building up of my students' self-esteem and do everything I can to prevent other students from breaking it down. I want my students to be strong in their faith in themselves, which I know could take some work. To prevent my students from harming another's self-esteem, I will set high standards for everyone and hold strong to the punishment if one of the standards is violated.

To grow as a professional, I will attend Ball State's self-esteem workshop called Discovering Your Excellence: Enhancing Self-Esteem provided by the Counseling and Health Services that will not only help build up my self-esteem but also teach me how to recreate a workshop for my students to improve their self-satisfaction. In regard to students with gender identity issues, I will participate in another workshop for education about the LGBTQ community and ways to help students with gender issues.

There are a few other steps I can take to help myself grow. Because narcissistic students can have aggressive tendencies, I will educate myself on how to handle students who have excessive self-esteem. This can be a very detrimental issue to other students, so I want to keep aggressive actions to a minimum. I can also involve myself in community activities to be a living testimony to my students about how kind acts to other people can improve your own self-confidence. I will work on setting a positive example for my students to follow and look after.

I want to use my position as a teacher to be a good role model that all of my students, regardless of sex, race, or status can look up to. Having low self-esteem can drastically affect my students' ability to learn and progress in school. Because each student deserves the best education possible, I want to optimize their opportunity. Helping my students build self-esteem and stand strong when they face challenges is my biggest goal that I am taking from this project.

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Standard 1: Student Development and Diversity

Teachers at the secondary level have a broad and comprehensive understanding of student development and diversity and demonstrate the ability to provide instruction that is responsive to student differences and that promotes development and learning for all students, including:

1.1 major concepts, theories, and processes related to the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, physical, and moral development of students in grades 5–12, and factors in the home, school, community, and broader environment that influence the development of students at this level

1.2 knowledge of developmental characteristics and developmental variation for students in grades 5–12, and the ability to use this knowledge to inform instructional decision making and promote student success

1.3 typical developmental challenges for students in grades 5–12 (e.g., in relation to peer interactions, identity formation, self-esteem, risk taking, and educational decision making), and the ability to help students address these challenges

1.4 knowledge of types of student diversity (e.g., cultural, economic, and linguistic background; gender; religion; family structure), and the ability to use this knowledge to promote learning and development for students with diverse backgrounds, characteristics, and needs

Standard 2: Learning Processes

Teachers at the secondary level have a broad and comprehensive understanding of learning processes and demonstrate the ability to facilitate student achievement, including:

2.1 knowledge of major theories and concepts related to the learning process, and the ability to apply this knowledge

2.2 processes by which students construct meaning and acquire skills, including critical- and creative-thinking skills, and the ability to facilitate these processes for students with diverse characteristics and needs

2.3 knowledge of how student learning is influenced by different types of instructional practices and teacher behaviors, and the ability to use this knowledge to promote learning for all students

2.8 knowledge of how various individual factors (e.g., prior learning and experiences, interests, talents) and factors in the home, school, and community influence learning processes, and the ability to use this knowledge to improve teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes

Standard 5: Learning Environment

Teachers at the secondary level have a broad and comprehensive understanding of student learning environments and demonstrate the ability to establish positive, productive, well-managed, and safe learning environments for all students, including:

5.1 the ability to apply skills and strategies for creating a safe, healthy, supportive, and inclusive learning environment that encourages all students' engagement, collaboration, and sense of belonging

5.2 the ability to apply skills and strategies for establishing a culture of learning that emphasizes high expectations for all students, promotes self-motivation, and encourages students' sense of responsibility for their own learning

5.3 the ability to apply skills and strategies for planning and adapting learning environments that reflect cultural competency; are responsive to the characteristics, strengths, experiences, and needs of each student; and promote all students' development and learning

5.5 knowledge of various classroom management approaches, including relationships between specific management practices and student learning, attitudes, and behaviors, and the ability to use this knowledge to create an organized and productive learning environment that maximizes students' time on task; facilitates learning; and encourages student self-regulation, responsibility, and accountability