



# B A S E

## Building Authentic Self-Esteem Program

### *Preface*

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The Building Self-esteem program is the product of 20 years of development and field testing with its earliest beginnings in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District in Walnut Creek, California. In 1971, a concerted effort was made by the staff of Bancroft School and Dr. Stanley R. Coopersmith, then Chairman of the Psychology Department of the University of California at Davis, to develop a program designed to strengthen students' self-concepts and to build intrinsic motivation without sacrificing academic excellence. Dr. Coopersmith is noted for his research on self-esteem and the development of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (CSEI) and the Behavioural Academic Self-esteem (BASE) Profile, still recognized as standard measures of self-esteem.

The effort by the school was prompted by a study on instructional priorities conducted with more than 250 schools and 5,000 parents and staff who reported that they felt self-esteem to be as significant an instructional goal as reading achievement (Reasoner, 1973). For two years the staff met weekly with Dr. Coopersmith to explore concepts and teaching strategies that would effectively result in greater motivation and positive feelings of self. As the program evolved, it began to attract over 200 visitors a year from throughout California and across the nation because of the high level of student motivation, the increased responsibility demonstrated by the students, the high interest in learning, the comparative absence of significant discipline problems, and the rise in student achievement. The school became a demonstration center for the California Early Childhood Education (ECE) program and the Center for the Study of Evaluation of the University of California at Los Angeles.

In a survey of 350 visitors to the school, 90 percent reported that the students functioned in a manner significantly different from students at other schools with which they were familiar. The most frequent comments were that the children and staff both appeared happier, more relaxed, more confident, more purposeful in their activity, and more open about themselves. Further, they functioned more independently than students from most other schools. Evidence also suggested that the students' level of intellectual functioning, as measured by intelligence tests, increased significantly.

Follow-up studies conducted at the high school six years later demonstrated that students exposed to this program exhibited high academic achievement and increased leadership skills and motivation in the classroom. They were also involved in fewer incidents of deviant behaviour and had set significant life goals for themselves. None of the students were found to have engaged in drug or



alcohol abuse, and teachers reported that they were distinct from students of other schools because of their general level of motivation (Reasoner, 1983).

In 1976, the processes and the classroom activities found to be most effective were compiled and described in a manual prepared with grant funds from the Santa Clara County Drug Abuse Commission. Teachers in the Los Altos School District were then trained and the materials used in all fourth-grade classrooms throughout the district. As a result of the continued success and effectiveness of the program, Consulting Psychologists Press offered to publish the program, which led to the publication of the Building Self-esteem program for the kindergarten through grade eight level.

Since publication in 1982, the program has been used throughout the United States with documented success. A three-year project, conducted from 1983 through 1985, was funded by the Lucile Packard Foundation to assess the program's effectiveness. The study involved three experimental schools and three control schools in three different school districts. Results of the study demonstrated that, in comparison to students in the control schools, those students using the program materials not only felt better about themselves, but also experienced fewer social problems, were more highly motivated in the classroom, engaged in more cooperative activities with other students, and had fewer discipline problems. Over 90 percent of the teachers reported that the program had a significant impact on the general school climate and the attitudes of the students (Reasoner & Gilbert, 1988).

In addition to the validation received from numerous teachers and administrators regarding its effectiveness, the Building Self-esteem program has also been validated by psychiatric agencies and drug rehabilitation programs for its effectiveness in building self-esteem and restoring personal functioning. The conceptual framework upon which the program is based has been recognized and used as a basis for other programs (Borba, 1989; Little, 1988). After nine years of effective use, the decision was made to prepare a comparable program for grades six through twelve, based upon the same concepts. Building Self-esteem in the Secondary Schools is the result of that decision.

This program is the product of the collaborative efforts of the authors to prepare a practical, flexible set of materials for the classroom teacher in middle school or high school. We have great confidence in the process because of the historical evidence that has been gathered. We know that it works! We believe that the ideas and activities prepared especially for this program will make it easy for any classroom teacher to implement. We hope that it will serve as a valuable resource for those interested in activities to build self-esteem in our young people.

By: Robert W. Reasoner



## CHAPTER 1

### *Student Self-Esteem:*

#### *An Overview*

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Educators today are faced not only with making major changes in what students are taught, but they also face changes in how students are taught. The world and its students have changed. Many teachers now find themselves before students who show little interest in learning, who feel that adults neither understand them nor care to, and who envision little hope for themselves and the future.

The home environment of students today differs significantly from that of students ten to fifteen years ago. For example, in 1985 (Students at Risk, 1985) it was reported that 57 percent of those entering kindergarten in California had seen a family change, 23 percent lived under the national poverty level, and more than 50 percent of the mothers had returned to the work force, leaving many children to be cared for by others. They further reported that fewer than 10 percent of high school students come from a family in which the father is the primary wage-earner and the mother is the primary caretaker of the children and the home.

This change in the picture of the American family has been coupled with a decline in both memberships in youth organizations and church attendance, leaving students with fewer resources for social and emotional support. An increased number of students are experiencing the trauma of divorce, the instability of living first with one parent and then another, and the loneliness of having one or both parents away at work for extended periods daily, with little time left for guidance and nurturing. An increased number of young women entering high school are reporting sexual abuse by family member's or relatives.

The result is that many students are in psychological stress and pain when they enter high school, as reflected in the number who are substance abusers or who engage in delinquent, truant, or suicidal behaviour. There are those educators who maintain that such issues are not their concern; rather, their role is to teach academic skills. Their position is that the school would be better off without them; hence they support a high suspension and expulsion rate. Others engage in finger pointing, placing the blame on parents, the church, or the community. But educators sometimes forget that parents send them the very best children they have, having done the best they could under the circumstances. As long as one blames others and feels no responsibility for the problem, it is easier to feel a lack of responsibility for doing something about it.



As a consequence, some schools have made only minimal effort to address these problems. When the students in such schools can no longer withstand what they view as put-downs, lack of consideration, and unrealistic expectations, combined with the confusion and frustration of their personal lives, they withdraw, rebel, or drop out. Indeed, recent studies (Flax, 1989) indicate that drop-out rates have reached as high as 30 percent to 50 percent in some high schools and that 5 to 10 percent of our students actually drop out before entering high school. Thus, dropouts are becoming a serious concern throughout the United States.

American society cannot afford to withhold concern for one-third to one-half of its human resources. The financial burdens associated with programs for welfare, unemployment, and rehabilitation for substance abusers are just too high. More importantly, these students cannot be ignored just because they don't seem to fit the system. The system must be modified to take into account the radical social changes that have taken place in recent history. We have an obligation to adjust our programs to accommodate those who come to us for an education.

Most educators enter the profession out of a genuine desire to help students. But it is unreasonable for us to assume our responsibilities only under ideal conditions. Our task is to do the best we can with what we have to work with. However, to do that we need to try new approaches and techniques so that schools can become places where students are stimulated to make the best of their lives—because others care about them. We need to build the willingness to learn, thereby encouraging students to risk the effort for their continuous growth. But in our efforts to adopt new ways of teaching, we must never forget that academic success remains our primary goal.

The major issue resides in how teachers can apply those techniques that meet students' social and emotional needs within the context of the academic program: Is it possible to address such needs without compromising academic integrity? Mounting evidence suggests it is possible to do both. Many of those schools recently identified as "effective schools" attribute their success to an emphasis on self-esteem and school climate (Purkey Aspey, 1988; Thomas, 1987).



## *Research on Self-esteem*

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The kinship between self-esteem and academic achievement has been well documented (Beane & Lipka, 1984; Brookover, 1965; Keegan, 1987; Wylie, 1974). Coopersmith (1975) found that self-esteem correlates as highly with academic success as does IQ. Gilmore (1974), in his studies of adults, found high self-esteem to be associated with high productivity, whether exemplified in academic achievement, creativity, or leadership, while he found low self-esteem characteristic of low achievers, non-creative persons, and followers.

Conversely, lack of self-esteem has been found to be closely associated with drug or alcohol abuse, truancy, teenage pregnancy, school drop-out rate, and juvenile delinquency. While it is difficult to provide solid evidence that lack of self-esteem is the major cause of such social problems, Skager (1988) found evidence that high self-esteem can be a deterrent for those students who would otherwise engage in such activities for peer acceptance or to compensate for feelings of inadequacy. Steffenhagen and Burns (1987) go so far as to state that low self-esteem is the basic psychodynamic mechanism underlying all deviant behaviour.

One might wonder which comes first—feelings of self-esteem or actual success. Does self-esteem result in success, or is it the other way around? The two are closely related. A strong sense of self-worth is vital to growth into healthy, productive adulthood. Gilmore (1974), in his research on the productive personality, found that self-esteem was the antecedent to success in life and that it was a prerequisite to the acquisition of skills necessary for success. On the other hand, Covington (1984) asserts that "self-esteem does not cause students to do anything at all. What motivates students to achieve is the desire to preserve the self-esteem they already possess and to acquire more". Scheirer and Kraut (1979), after reviewing several studies, reported that self-esteem goes up as achievement goes up, rather than the other way around. The issue here, then, is not which comes first, but rather what are the processes and techniques that result in both high achievement and self-esteem. The way that students feel about themselves determines the core of their personalities—the way they think, the way they relate to people, the manner in which they learn, and the choices and decisions they make. It is no exaggeration to say that building self-esteem is the best possible preparation for life.

Recent studies by the National Institute of Mental Health and the University of California at Berkeley suggest that the attitudes developed early in life tend to affect one's general attitude toward life even 50 years later. Teenagers who were considered cheerful, warm, and un-resenting of demands were found to have been happy in their work life and satisfied with life in general when they were tested again in their postretirement years ("Adolescent Attitudes," 1987). The significance of such research highlights the importance of developing healthy, productive attitudes towards self and the world early in life.



## *What is Self-Esteem?*

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The term *self-esteem* refers to the evaluation of self a person makes and maintains. It includes attitudes of approval or disapproval and the degree to which one feels worthy, capable, significant, and effective. It differs from self-concept, or self-image, which refers to the picture one holds about oneself, often based on what one believes are the perceptions of others. Self-esteem is the sum total of the feelings one has about one's multiple self-concepts or self-images.

While general agreement is held regarding the concept of self-esteem, numerous experts define it in slightly different fashions. Brandon (1969) defines it as the integration of self-confidence and self-respect, the conviction that one is competent to live and is worthy of living. Briggs (1970) reports that self-esteem is the sum of one's feelings about oneself, including the sense of self-respect and self-worth. These feelings, she states, are based on the convictions that the person is (a) lovable and (b) worthwhile—meaning that individuals are competent to handle themselves and their environment and have something to offer others. Carothers and Gasten (1979) state that self-esteem is what one thinks and feels about the self-image.

Clemes and Bean (1981) equate self-esteem with the feeling of satisfaction that arises when individual needs are met. This occurs by the way people handle the world or are able to influence events through their own abilities and by how they are influenced by the world or by the environment provided for success. Coopersmith (1967) and others report that the concept of self is particular, resists change, and remains stable over time.

William James (1890), perhaps the founder of self-esteem psychology, identified four aspects of the self: the physical self, the social self, the cognitive self, and the spiritual self, while Adler (1969) based his concept on what he saw as the individual's natural striving for superiority. through achievement of goals. He maintained that individuals enter the world in an inferior state and strive toward superiority. The basic motivation for behaviour is goal-directed or purposeful, though not always conscious, in striving to achieve a position of superiority or at least protecting the level of esteem currently held. Self-esteem, therefore, is continually evolving and constitutes the totality of our perceptions of ourselves at any given moment.

Steffenhagen and Burns (1987) propose that self-esteem functions on three levels: (a) physical, (b) mental, and (c) metaphysical. When self-esteem is high, they report that eighteen factors are present and integrated at all levels. These factors include courage, flexibility, encouragement, creativity, adaptation, social interest, status, and success.



For our purposes, we shall define self-esteem as the degree of *satisfaction one feels about oneself, the appreciation of personal worth or the value of one's endeavours and confidence in one's potential*. This implies neither conceit nor self-gratification at the expense of others: Self-esteem is not typically arrived at in competition with others, nor is it a tally of one's successes and failures. It is based more on a feeling of competence or efficacy in dealing with the future than it is on satisfaction with past accomplishments.

Agreement exists in the literature that self-esteem enhances all aspects of life by enabling increased personal productivity and satisfying interpersonal relationships. Those with positive feelings about themselves are better able to define directions and goals, clarify strengths, and cope with setbacks. The matrix from which strong self-esteem rises is a balanced blend of acceptance, limits, and self-respect (Coopersmith, 1967; Glasser, 1965). Young children strive to achieve in areas of particular importance to their parents. When parents value academic achievement, their children's level of self-esteem is affected by their grades and level of academic achievement. When they fail to meet parental expectations, they develop feelings of inadequacy. As they reach adolescence, peer values gain in importance while parental values lessen. This may become a source of conflict if parental values are rigid and conflict with adolescent values. Being popular, physically attractive, or skilled athletically may become more important to a student than grades at the same time that smoking, drinking, or cutting school may earn favour with peers, while alienating the parents.

The base for self-esteem thus changes from parental values to peer values and settles finally on personal, internal values adopted by the individual. Often the adolescent is caught between the conflicting values of peers and parents, unless those values can be reconciled. This accounts for the inconsistent behaviour often associated with this age group, who can be seen acting responsibly in one instance and irresponsibly the next. Instability in the level of adolescent self-esteem is well documented. Compounding matters is the fact that student success or recognition in the classroom has little impact on the self-esteem of a student whose primary concern is peer acceptance and recognition. The level of self-esteem is therefore continually evolving and changing, based on the decisions or choices made, actions taken, and the status attached to different self-images. Self-esteem is further complicated by the multiplicity of one's self-concepts. The feelings adolescents have about themselves depend on the feedback they receive from others and on which self-images are most important to them at the time.

In sum, self-esteem is a major force in every decision a student makes. If a student is confident in a given learning situation, there will be an openness, a willingness to accept challenge, and a stimulus for entering into learning wholeheartedly. But if a student lacks self-esteem, feels threatened, or sees little chance of succeeding, he or she will most likely try to avoid the challenge, find a way out by skipping class, rely on someone else to do the assignments, or give only minimal effort.



## *Characteristics of Self-esteem*

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Students who feel good about themselves are apt to behave differently from those who lack self-esteem. First, students with self-esteem view themselves realistically and are able to identify their strengths and acknowledge their limitations. Their assessment of their abilities is based on accurate feedback rather than on a distortion of what they'd like to believe. Introspective and perceptive regarding their own thoughts and feelings, they also exhibit a sensitivity to their environment and how they relate to it. They possess the ability to think clearly without the distortions of wishful thinking or self-degradation. Further, they have a personal philosophy and a clear sense of values that direct their actions. This also provides a backdrop against which to weigh successes or failures. Generally, their values are congruent with those of the family, the church, or their peers. If the values of these groups are in conflict, they find ways to prioritize them or to rationalize their congruence. When individuals are unclear about their personal philosophy or values, they become confused about their values and level of self-esteem. Since most adolescents question and explore the validity of parental values, it is not uncommon for their self-esteem to fluctuate from day to day.

Individuals with a high level of self-esteem feel secure in their environment and know how to function in that situation, aware of what is required of them. They seem to understand their place in the world and how best to relate to it. Because of this security, they are not easily threatened by change or new situations. They also exhibit a high degree of acceptance of others and generally have a broad circle of friends. Their sensitivity to feelings of others is often fostered by genuine interest or curiosity in knowing more about them. They feel comfortable in cooperative settings or when working with others and typically feel a sense of belonging and connection with others. They may identify strongly with the groups in which they participate and feel accepted and supported by them, whether the group be a team, class, school, club, church, or social group.

Individuals with self-esteem are not afraid of risk and generally face challenges with confidence that stems from a certain amount of intellectual self-trust and self-reliance. They take a healthy attitude toward failure when they don't succeed and tend to find ways to profit and learn from their mistakes. They often take pleasure in tackling the unknown and stretching their limits. Because they feel in control of their lives, they accept responsibility for their behaviour, taking pride in their accomplishments and successes because they recognize their part in making them so. They generally keep their expressions and behaviour within socially acceptable standards. However, they can be aggravating to teachers because they express themselves confidently and with conviction, believing in their own points of view. They are apt to challenge authority by requesting further evidence or justification for a stated position. Although they are not defiant, they are not satisfied to passively accept someone else's conclusions.





They are not afraid to initiate action and are often motivated by what they want to become or accomplish. They typically set specific goals for themselves. In most classes, they have some idea of what they expect to achieve with respect to knowledge, skills, or grades. They often hold high expectations and strive to be the best or to perform with perfection. Because of their desire to succeed and their belief in their own capabilities of achieving it, they are willing to persevere, even in the face of hardship and frustration.

### *Characteristics of Lack of Self-esteem*

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Those who lack self-esteem seem more concerned with preserving their sense of self-respect or "failing with honour" than with putting forth the extra effort needed to succeed. They typically assume a false front to keep others from knowing who they really are.

Students who lack self-esteem are apt to feel controlled or manipulated by others, consequently demonstrating a distrusting, resentful attitude. Such students typically play the role of the victim or pawn, believing that the world and the odds are stacked against them. Success is attributed to luck. If luck has been bad, they feel powerless to change it. These students react defensively to avoid coping with the demands placed upon them. These defensive mechanisms might include any of the following:

- Rebelling, resisting, defying, or retaliating
- Discounting and undermining teachers' authority
- Lying, cheating, or copying
- Blaming others
- Failing to take responsibility for their actions
- Bullying or threatening others
- Withdrawing, daydreaming, or giving up
- Denying there is a problem and refusing any help offered
- Engaging in means of escape, including truancy or drug or alcohol dependency

Such behaviour makes these students among the most difficult to work with. They are apt to procrastinate, fabricate excuses, or blame others for their failures. Unable to cope with the demands placed upon them, they hide their feelings by appearing bored or uncaring. Students with low self-esteem often fail to profit from instruction. Though fearful of failure, they rarely put forth the sustained effort needed to achieve. This may stem from their underlying belief that it won't be worth the effort anyway. Even when suggestions are made or errors pointed out, a defensive posture prevents them from gaining anything from the instruction.



One may wonder why some students continually play the part of the loser, getting themselves into trouble time after time. But they may be trapped in a self-image of failure, unable to meet their own expectations or those set by others. Often their expectations may be entirely unrealistic. Thus they feel unworthy, inadequate, and unlovable. Putting forth extra effort or trying hard is risky for them, because it may result in confirmation of their own inability or unworthiness. Such lack of effort subsequently becomes a source of teacher and parent criticism, resulting in threats and pressure to change. Thus their feelings of unworthiness are confirmed and the motivation to achieve declines even further.

Yet these students may really wish for nothing less than love, acceptance, recognition, and respect from others, although their outlook and actions are alienating and lead inevitably to more failure. Again, this confirms their feelings of inadequacy. Over time, school becomes personally threatening and the pattern of defensiveness deepens. This is why many students drop out of school, escape through drugs and alcohol, or choose associates whose attitude and behaviour is similar to their own.

### *The Value of Self-esteem Activities and the Building Self-esteem Program*

Teachers have a tremendous impact on students and influence the attitudes they develop about themselves. Most of us can remember particular teachers who either boosted our self-esteem or made us feel inadequate, embarrassed, or inferior, either intentionally or inadvertently. An adult may still feel inadequate or incompetent in art, music, math, or reading because of comments made years earlier by a particular teacher. On the other hand, outstanding teachers are able to motivate students to achieve dreams and levels of attainment never believed possible.

The Building Self-esteem program is designed to facilitate the process of building self-esteem by making it a conscious, purposeful process. Even teachers with the best of intentions may fail to build self-esteem in a student because of the lack of materials available that will enable them to work with students in a systematic manner. When teachers even at the high school level have such materials available to them, it can make a significant difference in how their students function.

The program described in this manual is intended to provide teachers with techniques and materials that can help students develop positive feelings about themselves. It has been demonstrated that the activities in this program can have a significant impact on students as well as on the climate of the school. Schools that have made special efforts in this area have been rewarded with a reduction in the number of suspensions, discipline problems, and dropouts, and have seen increased attendance as well as increased levels of student motivation.



Silver Creek High School in San Jose, California, for example, established Project Esteem with approximately 100 ninth-grade students to determine the impact of a self-esteem focus in the school. Participants were randomly selected from among those students who neither qualified for the gifted program nor the Title I program for disadvantaged students. The students selected were then assigned to a team of three teachers and given a variety of self-esteem activities once a week.

At the end of the four-year study, the students participating in Project Esteem were compared to those students from the rest of the student body, and significant differences were found between the two groups as reported below.

	<i>Project Esteem</i>	<i>General</i>
	<i>Students</i>	<i>Student Population</i>
Students completing 90% of the homework assigned	75%	26%
Average number of absences per semester	1	16
Percentage of students participating in at least 20 school activities	26%	6%
Percentage of student body officers	75%	25%
Percentage of students graduating	82%	50%

*Note: Data presented by Dusa (1984).*

A three-year control study was conducted from 1984 to 1987 in three different school districts to evaluate the impact of the Building Self-esteem program on student and staff self-esteem and general behaviour. The study involved approximately 3,000 students from six schools—three experimental schools and three control schools. The experimental schools used the Building Self-esteem materials in the classrooms. At the end of the study, the results were measured using the Behavioural Academic Self-esteem (BASE), the Self-esteem Inventory (SEI), the Assessment of Staff Self-esteem (ASSE), and a questionnaire of staff reactions.

Significant gains in academic self-esteem were found in all three of the target schools. Students increased their alertness to the learning environment and assumed more initiative in involving themselves in the classroom environment. Gains were noted even after the first year. At the conclusion of the study, it was evident that those students in the experimental program using the Building Self-esteem materials felt better about themselves than did the students in the control schools. In addition, we found that they engaged in more cooperative activities with other students, experienced fewer social problems, were more highly motivated in the classroom, and had fewer discipline problems.



Another outgrowth of the study was the significant change in teacher behaviour in the experimental schools. The staff began to make more positive evaluations of their schools and of their relationships to their colleagues and other staff members. They displayed more trust in their administrators, indicated more mutual support for each other, engaged in more cooperative sharing, reported feeling more competent as teachers, and gained more satisfaction from their careers (Reasoner, 1988).

In 1987, the Chapter I elementary and middle schools ranked as the most outstanding and nominated for national recognition attributed much of their success to the Building Self-esteem program materials. Because of the significance of self-esteem and the ample evidence that programs such as these make a difference in enhancing self-esteem and how students function, schools are wise to adopt programs that focus on this critical aspect of development.

### *The Process of Building Self-esteem*

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1. A sense of security
2. A sense of identity or self-concept
3. A sense of belonging
4. A sense of purpose
5. A sense of personal competence



These five factors have been identified through research and field studies as key elements in those individuals who demonstrate the characteristics of high self-esteem, including the ability to relate well with others, approach problems with confidence, work toward the accomplishment of specific goals, think and act on the basis of independent judgment, and achieve high levels of success in most of what they do.

The Building Self-esteem program is designed as a sequential, step-by-step process that addresses the personal needs of students in a systematic fashion. This approach has proven effective in that students are more easily motivated to achieve when their basic needs for security, identity, and social acceptance have been addressed.

At the secondary level, teachers and parents may mistakenly assume that these basic needs have been met at home or through the social structure of the school. However, when one remembers that twelve- through seventeen-year-old students are experiencing the transition of shifting from parental and/or adult values to peer group and individual internal values for their sense of security, identity, and belonging, it is understandable why so many students feel unsure of themselves. This is true for students from stable, supportive families and even more so for those from dysfunctional families.

In a typical suburban or urban high school of 1,500 to 2,000 students, there are rarely enough opportunities for all students to gain recognition or a sense of belonging by being active in extracurricular activities such as student government or sports. Opportunities are likewise limited in smaller high schools. Thus, many students feel invisible and isolated and bring these feelings to the classroom. By making these emotional concerns a part of the instructional process, teachers can effectively teach to their content areas while at the same time acknowledge the special needs of the students by enhancing the development of healthy levels of self-esteem.

On the other hand, if teachers fail to address these basic needs and concerns and resort to various forms of pressure, coercion, or threats in an effort to increase motivation, student security is only threatened, while their initiative is stifled and their motivation reduced. Student focus shifts from learning to surviving, gaining social recognition, or creating the image or impression they want their friends to have of them.

The roles and tasks performed by the teacher who facilitates the process of building self-esteem can be summarized as follows:



<b><i>Desired Attitude</i></b>	<b><i>Teacher Responsibilities</i></b>
<i>A sense of security</i>	
	Set clear rules and provide a structure for the operation of the school or class
	Enforce the rules fairly and consistently
	Preserve self-respect and build personal responsibility
	Act in ways that foster trust
<i>A sense of identity</i>	
	Help students to clarify their values
	Provide positive feedback
	Demonstrate caring and acceptance
	Help students to identify and accept personal strengths and shortcomings
<i>A sense of belonging</i>	
	Create an accepting environment
	Provide opportunities for interaction
	Develop supportive behaviours
<i>A sense of purpose</i>	
	Convey expectations
	Build confidence and faith in ability to succeed
	Explore visions and dreams
	Develop plans for achieving goals
<i>A sense of competence</i>	
	Point out options and alternatives
	Develop problem-solving and coping skills and provide support
	Assist in self-evaluation
	Provide recognition and rewards

When teachers make clear the classroom procedures, policies, and practices, they reduce student anxiety and enable them to perform comfortably. Teachers should work to establish a personal rapport and sense of caring in the classroom, allowing students to feel personally significant, respected, and accepted. Students' needs for defensive postures are reduced, and they are more open to correction, knowing that the teacher cares for them and believes in them. When efforts are also made to reduce social isolation and to create a climate where students feel supported and acknowledged by their peers, the stage is set for increased expectations and motivation.



The role of the teacher at this point is to help students see the relevance of the subject matter to be learned and relate it to their personal goals or dreams. The question *Why?* becomes central as students formulate their own sense of intention and understand the relevance of the material being taught. As a consequence, they become active, successful learners who achieve a sense of accomplishment and are open to challenges, accept higher expectations, and exhibit greater initiative and responsibility. A spiral, cyclic process is set in motion as students learn new skills, become more proficient at using resources to achieve their goals, gain in feelings of security, grow in their sense of identity, work more cooperatively and effectively to gain feelings of belonging, and set higher goals to achieve. They begin to feel more in control of their lives and feel the sense of competence, thus making the teaching process easier and more productive as students take greater responsibility for their own learning.

The teacher's role is to establish the conditions that support and encourage students to assume an increasing amount of responsibility. The long-range objective is to enable them to be self-initiating and self-determining, rather than being passive or misled by someone else. This can be done within the context of normal teaching and does not require a separate curriculum. The object is to build the level of self-confidence, respect, and motivation to the point where students become active learners who have positive direction to their lives.

The Building Self-esteem program affords great latitude in teaching style, materials, and methods. It can be used in any classroom with any subject, allowing adults to set expectations and perform their leadership role while building rather than destroying motivation and initiative. Teachers can thus help students come closer to achieving their full potential by supporting them in their growth.

The following chapters explain in more detail the activities and processes that develop each of the five essential elements of self-esteem.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Sense of Security*

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A sense of security is a prerequisite to self-esteem. Security is a basic need of all humans, especially students. Students are anxious to know what they have to do to survive the school environment. Some typically test the limits to determine how much power they have, what kind of behaviour they can get away with, or what they need to do to avoid the wrath of the teacher. Others want to know how to earn a particular grade or how the teacher is apt to treat them: Can the teacher be counted on to provide support in times of need and defend them from the abuse of others, or will the teacher be uncaring, turning a deaf ear to their problems or making fun of them and perhaps embarrassing them?

When students feel secure, they are comfortable enough to ask questions and try new experiences. They are willing to express their opinions and expend the extra effort needed to distinguish success from failure. However, many high school students may have decided long ago to maintain their security by not even attempting new experiences. This poses an extra challenge for the high school teacher.

Research indicates that school culture—the atmosphere and tone for all that happens in the school—has a significant influence on student behaviour. Students learn best in an orderly environment where they are treated with respect and are required to meet high expectations. The objective is to establish a culture conducive to responsible behaviour on the part of students. Such a culture stems from clear rules that are consistently enforced through punishment of misconduct and rewarding of good behaviour (Finn, 1987).

In most schools, the majority of students are conscientious and responsible. Yet many schools establish punitive environments by focusing on those students who engage in misconduct. They assume students will misbehave if they let their guard down for a minute. However, schools must take steps to give at least equal attention to the conscientious students and the rewarding of good behaviour. Positive incentives such as attractive rewards, special privileges, and recognition to those who try to follow the rules are more effective than punishment in motivating good behaviour.

Some schools maintain a custodial climate rather than a humanistic one. According to Beane and Lipka (1984), a custodial climate is one in which order is maintained through autocratic procedures, grouping, punitive sanctions, class punishment, labelling, and moralizing. There is also an emphasis on obedience and maintaining an impersonal atmosphere. Studies by Deibert and Hoy (1977) show that the more custodial the high school, the less self-actualized are the students. Climates exercising external controls tend to foster compliance, whereby students become more dependent on adults rather than more independent.





To effectively build feelings of security, schools must develop humanistic climates characterized by personal interaction, democratic procedures, respect for the dignity of individuals, emphasis on self-discipline, flexibility, and participatory decision making. This is in contrast to those schools that deal with antisocial behaviour through procedures that humiliate or degrade students. The result is generalized negative self-concepts throughout the school, even if such procedures are used in only some of the classrooms: When a few teachers humiliate or degrade students, it has a pervasive impact. It is therefore essential that steps be taken to encourage such teachers to use more positive forms of behaviour modification.

Because the school plays such a dominant role in the life of the student, it is important that the school climate be conducive to the development of positive, responsible behaviour on the part of young people. This is especially true at a time when schools are implementing various programs to address such issues as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and dropout rate. We need to encourage positive behaviour and positive models, rather than remaining preoccupied with those who misbehave. Experience has shown that no matter how hard a school staff tries, it is not possible to establish rules and punishments effective enough to prevent students from misbehaving. There will always be those who choose not to follow the rules, no matter what they might be.

If a lack of self-esteem is a strong correlate with the social issues of drug and alcohol abuse, dropout rate, teenage pregnancy, truancy, and delinquency, school activities need to seize every opportunity to build and reinforce students' sense of self-esteem within the context of a humane climate. Failure to do this results in the following sequence as described by Yale child psychiatrist James Corner (1984):

*When a school staff fails to permit positive attachment and identification, attachment and identification take place in a negative way, with the counter-culture. The school becomes a target of a student's angry feelings, with resultant rebellion, ambivalence, and apathy. The school is then unable to interrupt troublesome development or compensate for underdevelopment.*

Effective schools work toward the development of a climate that reduces stress, builds a sense of security, and fosters responsible behaviour—all stemming from internal controls and values. Efforts must be made to build respect and responsibility by helping students to understand who they are, what makes them react the way they do, and how they can best manage their lives. The following steps can be taken in the classroom and by the school to foster student security:

- Set clear rules and provide a structure for the operation of the school or class
- Enforce the rules fairly and consistently
- Preserve self-respect and build personal responsibility
- Act in ways that foster trust



**self-esteem  
institute**

## *Summary*

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Feelings of security can be fostered when the rules and procedures are clearly defined and consistent, when students know how to be heard and how to enact change, when rules are enforced in positive ways that build respect and responsibility, when students feel they can trust the adults in the system, and when they feel protected and safe from personal harm. To build this sense of security in students, it is important for adults to be as consistent as possible, to treat students with respect, and to encourage them to take personal responsibility for their behaviour. Unless students assume some of the responsibility for their own behaviour, the responsibility is apt to fall upon the teacher. Under these circumstances, students begin to test out the situation. They challenge the teacher, fail to follow prescribed procedures, criticize and put down other classmates, and become difficult to handle. So the challenge becomes one of not merely controlling student behaviour, but having students internalize those standards as their own. The task for the teacher is to adopt behaviours that allow this to happen, based on trust and mutual respect, rather than fear.

The objective is to reduce or eliminate any feelings of anxiety or tension, encourage feelings of being in charge of oneself, and feeling protected by a responsible adult. Such an environment contributes to maximum involvement, participation, and willingness to risk maximum effort. Thus, a climate that fosters this sense of security becomes so very important at the outset. Without such a climate, the other elements of self-esteem are extremely difficult to achieve.

## CHAPTER 3

### *A Sense of Identity*

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Self-knowledge has long been recognized as essential to personal effectiveness. "Know thyself" was inscribed over two thousand years ago on the Grecian temple of Apollo, and it has been a cornerstone in modern psychology since the early part of this century when William James first referred to it in his early writings (James, 1890). Today, knowledge of self, or identity, is viewed as the foundation of self-esteem and motivation. Identity denotes the sum of the perceptions or views individuals hold of themselves, sometimes referred to as self-perceptions, self-concepts, or self-images. For practical considerations, these terms are used here interchangeably, though some authors make technical distinctions between them. In general, there is recognition that what people say about themselves to themselves has a profound impact on their behaviour and their level of self-esteem.

A strong sense of identity implies that one has a realistic idea of oneself, including knowledge of one's strengths, shortcomings, and how one appears to others. Thus, it is important that students achieve a realistic picture of themselves as well as feelings of self-worth.

The sense of identity results from the complex process of perceiving and interpreting one's own personal existence. It might best be thought of as a set of perceptions rather than as a single force. Thus, it cannot be viewed as a direct force or cause of behaviour. Individuals behave the way they do because they have learned to perceive themselves in ways consistent with those behaviours. Thus, one student may perform poorly in math because he perceives himself as poor in math, while a student of similar ability may perform more successfully because she perceives herself as strong and consequently tries harder or sticks with it longer out of confidence in ability to succeed. The self-concept or identity doesn't determine behaviour, but rather guides the individual in choosing behaviours consistent with that identity (Purkey, 1978).

Capabilities can generally be viewed in three ways:

- The level individuals show in their actions
- The level individuals think they have
- The level that actually represents an individual's capabilities



The ability level individuals think they have, significantly influences how they function, regardless of what their actual capabilities might be. Students who in fact may be bright may hesitate to go to college because they don't think they have the capability to succeed. Harris (1971), in his study of seventh- and eleventh-grade students, found that academic self-concept involved three factors:

- How certain individuals are of their abilities
- How accurate the self-ability is perceived to be
- How optimistic or pessimistic individuals are toward their abilities

Some students are inconsistent in their behaviour, exhibiting great interest and effort on one occasion and little effort on the next, or they may be shy and sensitive in some situations and aggressive and assertive in others. Such inconsistency results from discrepancies in the individual's self-perceptions in different situations and is characteristic of the student who is confused about or unsure of what kind of image to project. In either case, it is clear that such an individual lacks a strong sense of identity.

When individuals are realistic about what they can accomplish, they are more apt to be successful than when they have unrealistic perceptions about themselves. When they feel confident and know that with a little extra effort they can master certain material, they will try—and probably succeed. On the other hand, if from their perspective they lack the skill or talent for particular tasks or are afraid of failure, they will probably not even try.

Students who see themselves as poor students or as problems to others expect teachers to relate to them in that manner. They may even sabotage their own efforts unconsciously upon unexpected success. This is because they find it easier to live with failure than to accept their capabilities and the responsibility for their success or failure. This helps to explain why some students persist in misbehaving and accept whatever consequences come their way without even having attempted the task at hand, rationalizing their failure by telling themselves it was because they didn't really try: If they had tried and failed, it would be a great blow to their self-concept. Hence, fear of failure, not laziness, keeps them from trying. For such students to change their behaviour, they must first change the beliefs they hold about themselves.

Our view of success and how it is attained changes with maturity. Covington (1988) found that young children typically view successful performance as the product of effort, good behaviour, and ability. Adolescents worry that if they try hard and don't succeed, it may reflect on their lack of ability; hence, it may be safer not to risk the effort. High school students tend to view effort and ability as separate and independent, a perspective considered to be a more mature outlook. Thus, lack of effort in adolescents is a common characteristic for those who lack self-esteem or are unsure of their identity.



While it is possible to modify or strengthen the sense of identity or self-concept, it is not an easy task. Whether the self-concept is psychologically healthy or unhealthy, effective or ineffective, a person maintains those perceptions and behaves accordingly. Because one's sense of identity develops over time, it may take an extended period together with multiple experiences of a different nature to modify that identity.

### *How Identity Is Formed*

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The general sense of identity is composed of multiple self-concepts, including those of the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional selves. Students may have self-concepts with respect to abilities in math, English, or athletics, or as a dancer, social being, friend, son or daughter, or bright or mediocre student. One's identity is dependent upon the sum total of these self-concepts, and the relative significance attached to each affects the level of self-esteem. For example, unless a student attaches some importance to history, achievement in history may be of little concern. On the other hand, rejection by a boyfriend or girlfriend, if considered to be of more significance, could be devastating to the level of self-esteem.

These various self-images develop over time as a result of personal experiences and the nature of the feedback received from others. If feedback is generally critical or negative, students are likely to develop negative self-images with respect to those aspects of themselves. If the first efforts to make social contacts are ridiculed or rejected, for example, a student's initial self-image as a social being may be one of inadequacy, even if he or she possesses all the proper attributes. Although most adolescents experience feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, and social unattractiveness, they may feel alone in these feelings, believing something is wrong with them, if they have few opportunities to discuss these feelings with others.

Self-concepts are formed as individuals observe the reactions of those considered significant to them. In the developmental years, these people could include parents, relatives, teachers, or siblings. As individuals try out different behaviours, they note the reactions they produce and have positive or negative feelings about themselves, accordingly. When significant others make positive comments, positive feelings are generated; when they make negative comments or don't respond, an individual is likely to have doubts or to feel confused or inadequate.

This is of particular importance to teachers who wish to modify student behaviour. It implies that unless one is viewed as a person of significance to the student, there is little chance that one can have an impact on that student's behaviour. A primary issue becomes, how can one become a person of significance to students? Teachers can gain respect in a number of ways. Typically, those who make students feel special, treat them with respect, think well of them, and hold high expectations for them are likely to have most success with students.



Many adolescents rely on models for their self-concepts. Such role models may include a hero or heroine, a rock star, a famous athlete, a celebrity, or a family member. They may copy their mannerisms, speech patterns, or manner of dress in an attempt to emulate them, often adopting their values. However, television and advertising creates images that are largely unrealistic. As a result, teenagers whose models derive from these sources are likely to experience great dissatisfaction when they try to attain those ideals.

Unfortunately, although students of this age rely on models, many have lacked models or individuals of great significance to them. As a result, many feel confused or inadequate. There is evidence, for example, that up to 75 percent of young people who have experienced a divorce in the home take on guilt feelings for their inadequacies, convinced that their parents would never have separated if they had been different. Lack of feedback from parents can be just as damaging to the sense of identity as negative feedback. When so many parents lack the time to spend with their children, it is not surprising that students enter adolescence feeling confused and unsure of themselves.

Young people in our society also tend to confuse who they are with what they have, basing their sense of identity on external factors. They are apt to determine their individual worth by whether they wear designer clothes, associate with a particular social clique, or achieve certain grades or fame. They become concerned with having the right things, being seen in the right places, or achieving the proper look or mannerism. Some feel the image they create for others is more important than who they are inside. Parents may add to this confusion by pressuring them to behave or dress in particular ways because of their own needs. However, students who grow up feeling they have to live their life to please someone else pay a horrendous price. They fail to develop a sound sense of identity, become detached from their own impulses, surrender spontaneity, and sacrifice the ability to create and enjoy—all to please someone else!

An identity based on external factors brings stress and anxiety because positive feelings are dependent upon the impression one makes on others. This leads to false impressions, facades, and role playing, with an underlying fear that one might be found out. Adolescents especially need to understand who they really are and to learn to attach more significance to internal rather than external factors.

Psychologists generally agree that changes in identity are possible: As new experiences are presented to the individual and as positive feedback is received from significant others, accepted, and acted upon, changes do occur. Gradually, new ideas filter into the perceptual world of that person, and the old ideas begin to fade away. This continuous process creates flexibility in human personality and allows for psychological development (Purkey, 1978).

The classroom teacher can significantly strengthen the sense of identity through several means. First, the teacher can model those attitudes that display self-acceptance, a positive outlook on life, and a general appreciation for the unique qualities of each individual. Such attitudes create an environment where students can feel accepted and relate in a more relaxed manner. Second, the sense of identity can be strengthened when efforts are made to work with students as individuals as much as possible. The teacher should be sure to do the following:



- Help students to clarify their values
- Provide positive feedback
- Demonstrate caring and acceptance
- Help students to identify and accept personal strengths and shortcomings

## *Summary*

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In summary, our objective is to help students know who they are and to help them believe so strongly in their identity and worthiness that they have no choice but to respect the dignity and worthiness in others. This sense of identity and worthiness is enhanced by modelling only those attitudes that convey a sense of openness, honesty, and self-acceptance. By helping students use their personal values as a basis for their actions and by providing positive feedback, demonstrating caring and acceptance, and helping students to recognize their strengths and shortcomings, we will come much closer to achieving our objectives.

## CHAPTER 4

### *A Sense of Belonging*

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The significance of the sense of belonging increases with the onset of adolescence, when the need to be accepted by peers and to feel a part of a group is of prime importance. This need is reflected in the desire of teenagers to dress alike as well as in the expressions they use, the places they go, and the things they do. Those who lack a sense of belonging or connectedness seek ways to compensate, often by showing off or withdrawing into a world of computers, science fiction, or fantasy. Others use drugs or alcohol or engage in extreme behaviour to gain social recognition from peers.

Teenagers face a dichotomy—as individuals, they need to feel a sense of their own uniqueness, but they also need to feel the connectedness that comes with an association or group that conveys social acceptance. They want to feel significant and special, but to some degree they want to feel as if they are no different from others. Teenagers fight for their independence and want to make their own decisions, yet it's important that they be a member of some peer group. The difficulty comes in when they allow the peer group to determine their values and behaviour.

A major issue for teachers who wish to develop a sense of belonging in their students is how to help them retain their individuality and their personal values in the face of behaviours or situations that run counter to what is best for them. They need to learn when it is appropriate to act as individuals rather than as members of a group and vice versa. As a member of a class or a group, for example, a teenager may not receive as much individual attention as when acting on individual terms. Membership also implies certain responsibilities toward the group. Opportunities to deal with everyday situations relevant to this issue can help adolescents sort out where they stand and help them determine in what circumstances they need to act on their conscience as an individual.

A primary appeal of juvenile gangs lies in the need for belonging, social acceptance, and identification. This need may become so strong that it subsumes individual expression and values. The gang provides the social structure, determines the mores and values, and dictates the behaviour of its members. Allegiance to the gang becomes paramount, and many end up risking their lives or even losing them to uphold the gang's reputation or its code. Here is an example where the group fully satisfies the personal need to belong, but denies the rights of individuals to think or act for themselves—there is no such thing as balance in this setting between individualism and belonging.

For most adolescents, the need for belonging, social acceptance, or identification is met through participation in various youth groups or organizations. Being a cheerleader, Boy Scout or Girl Scout, or member of a social clique, church youth group, athletic team, drama group, club, or interest group are all ways of meeting this need. Frequently, these groups exercise great influence over social mores, including dress, speech, interests, and attitudes. However, they typically do not exercise the tremendous power over individuals that gangs wield.

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The basic issue is how to satisfy the need to belong while retaining a sense of individual uniqueness and personal responsibility. This often becomes a source of conflict for parents as they see their adolescents sacrificing their sense of personal responsibility and judgment to a group in order to belong. Schools can help by providing opportunities for extracurricular activities within the school setting for students to meet their need to identify with others and gain the acceptance of their peers. The likelihood of individuals sacrificing their sense of integrity and moral judgment is reduced when individuals have a high level of self-esteem.

Strong social bonding is understood to be a central goal of any intervention program, whether it be geared toward prevention of drug or alcohol abuse, school dropouts, or teenage pregnancy. An increasing number of districts are incorporating this element into their intervention programs. In the research report for the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools on model programs for "at-risk" students, it was found that a strong feeling of collegiality and social bonding was a common characteristic of effective models, while an absence of collegiality characterized those programs demonstrating little or no impact on student behaviour (Wahlege & Rutter, 1986).

It is not uncommon for adolescents to behave in ways that seem contrary to good sense. Bright students, for example, may devalue their own ability and intentionally do poorly in school to gain peer acceptance because they don't want to appear different. Questions regarding what they should wear, what they should say, and how they should act become the focal point of adolescent discussion. They need to feel accepted as a part of the group, to feel they are participating members entitled to the requisite rights and privileges, and to feel the support of others. Connecting ties become particularly important to adolescents—for the first time, the world most important to them is shared only by others of the same age group. As they strive for independence from their parents and their values, they need to relate to others about their own world of dating, sex, music, friendships, school, and entertainment. When they lack such relationships, they can feel alienated, estranged, or alone and may begin to question their personal worth, feeling that something is wrong with them. They begin to feel unlovable and incapable.

On the other hand, those who've had the privilege of playing on a winning team know the thrill and satisfaction that comes from contributing to a group effort, having experienced a positive connection to others. Some teenagers experience this through membership in youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire, YMCA, or others. However, with the small percentage of students involved in such groups in recent years, it is no surprise that many students feel alienated. Teachers need to work to allow student experiences that will engender a positive sense of belonging and group satisfaction.

Approval from the group can have a significant impact on the student's identity and wellbeing. Feedback from peers begins to carry more weight than feedback from parents or teachers, and the adolescent's value structure changes to one that is more peer related. A father's request that his son get a traditional haircut may meet defiance if the son feels his haircut can gain him the peer recognition and acceptance he wants. On the other hand, this request may not cause a problem if the student already feels strongly accepted by his social group.



It is important that schools address this need for belonging because so many students lack close personal ties, living in a world where they feel isolated, disconnected from their parents and peers, and unattached to school and a future. Family changes have alienated many young people as has the impersonal character of many schools. As a result, they may feel out of touch with society, unable to build and maintain meaningful relationships with others who may exploit or abuse them. They may also demonstrate little motivation to contribute to the well-being of others or society. To facilitate positive peer relationships in school, to foster a sense of social well-being, and to create feelings of belonging, the teacher can take three steps:

- Create an accepting environment
- Provide opportunities for interaction
- Develop supportive behaviours

Teachers need to create an environment where students can share their identities, beliefs, and ideas without being ridiculed, laughed at, or belittled. Only in such an environment can a student feel free to risk a closely held idea or burning question that might make him or her feel different from others. When students feel safe to share such ideas or questions, they begin to realize that they are not so different after all. To achieve this, the teacher and school must encourage mutual understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of others.

In schools with multiracial or ethnic populations, this is particularly important. Teachers must strive, both by policy and example, to eliminate discriminatory acts and rejection of others who appear different. When the school overlooks social or racial discrimination, it is inevitable that some students will feel alienated and excluded. And although it is natural for students to form cliques or social groups, these groups create problems when varying degrees of status are attached to them. Therefore, when different groups or factions take shape, it is important to acknowledge their presence but to make certain all students are treated equally in the school setting.

In many schools, various forms of discrimination are evident that are unrelated to race. These groups are largely social groups that are activity related. Whenever students feel they are better than others because of their social or academic standing, unhealthy social relations develop, followed by feelings of resentment. Schools should also be careful not to favour the college-bound students and give equal recognition to those with vocational skills or artistic, musical, or dramatic talent and not to devalue the industrial or practical arts. There is a responsibility in every school to reduce all discrimination and to avoid creating situations that foster it.



A lack of the sense of belonging and feelings of alienation have been major causes of teenage suicide. In 1986, an estimated six thousand teenagers committed suicide, an estimated 50 percent of high school students seriously consider suicide, and one in ten students makes a serious attempt (Honig, 1986). This may be especially true for those dealing with issues of sexuality. When an environment exists where students feel alienated and different, those who feel they are looked upon as second-class citizens may turn their resentment toward themselves, toward others, or toward the school. Suicide is now a major cause of death among teenagers, and it has become a strong concern of both parents and school personnel.

A sense of group pride contributes to the sense of belonging. This is the significance of school spirit, pep rallies, school colours, and so on. Any time one feels a part of something larger than oneself, it enhances feelings of personal worth. Effective schools identify and address ways to include students who do not participate as well as those who feel alienated from their peers, thus creating a more productive environment with fewer conflicts among its students. Thus, it is important that every teacher provide some opportunity within the context of the classroom for students to engage in activities to foster this sense of pride.

## *Summary*

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In summary, the sense of belonging can be developed when the school and classroom environment encourages the equal recognition and acceptance of students and when it provides opportunities for interaction, mutual understanding, and cooperative learning with groups or other individuals. Under these conditions, students gain feelings of acceptance, belonging, and pride.

## CHAPTER 5

### *A sense of Purpose*

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Reducing anxiety level, helping students to feel good about themselves, and strengthening the sense of belonging with others all contribute to self-esteem, but it is not enough—there are happy, well-adjusted students whose only objective is to have a good time. Self-esteem is more than this. To be sustained, it requires belief in one's potential as well as accomplishment of specific tasks. Self-esteem is nourished by achieving goals, solving problems, and sensing one's own personal growth.

Many schools have attempted to raise the achievement level in students by pressuring them rather than building their level of motivation. But setting higher standards, instituting more difficult courses, or adding graduation requirements do not necessarily result in higher achievement. The most effective way to raise achievement is to increase motivation and effort. To do this, the basic needs of students must be addressed—the sense of security must be in place, providing students with enough trust to risk learning; a strong sense of identity must be accompanied by the feeling that someone cares; and feelings of belonging and support must rule out over feelings of alienation. Only when these basic needs are met will students be open to true intrinsic motivation.

Individuals need to have a sense of direction and feel that they are achieving their purpose in life. For many high school students, their purpose for being in school has never been defined. Some may want only to graduate or to get into college; others may simply want to get out of school, get a job, or be on their own. A student's motivation in class will be related to his or her major direction or goal. The sense of purpose for students must answer the question, 'Why'—Why should I learn this? And is it worth the effort? What will I gain from it? When the answer is, "Because I have to," students have little to stimulate active learning. Such forms of motivation might be considered destructive rather than constructive. When it comes to learning, the objective is to get students to internalize their sense of purpose so they can say to themselves "I want to," "I enjoy school," "I'm interested in this," or "I choose to," rather than having to rely on external pressures and forces to make them do an assignment. Unfortunately, many students never develop the conscious sense of intention or purpose related to schoolwork, seeing no relevance between it and what they regard as their primary goal in life. The sense of purpose may be lacking for one of several reasons.

First, some students may have failed to set long-term goals for themselves, having found little hope in a future promising nuclear holocaust or limited personal opportunity. These students need to see the possibilities that exist, how others have succeeded, and how they can capitalize on their own strengths and talents.



Second, some students may never have had someone who believed in them or who encouraged them to trust in their own potential. All students need someone to believe they can make it - a parent, boyfriend or girlfriend, relative, teacher, or someone they highly respect. Many students, however, have never had anyone relate to them in ways that developed such convictions. Although it is well known that some children overcome the most chaotic, abusive, or impoverished circumstances and become highly successful, why this occurs is not entirely understood. But children who thrive seem to have had at least one person to provide them with consistent emotional support—frequently a teacher who understands and takes a personal interest in them.

Third, other students may never have addressed the issue of career goals. An important step can be for the high school to require students to identify a career goal that is important to them, providing them with an area of focus for their studies and establishing a basis for personal counselling.

Fourth, many students have come to expect instant gratification, with parents having provided for their basic needs, and in many cases, granting wishes for guitars, stereos, and cars. Consequently, such students may never have learned to save money, think about the future, or develop the discipline required to achieve long-range goals. They have learned how to forego long-term happiness for immediate pleasure.

How can students learn to believe in themselves and internalize their sense of purpose? Research by Brophy (1987) indicates that motivation to learn is an acquired competence that can be developed through general experience and stimulation by the teacher. This is done through use of incentives and efforts to make learning thoughtful and enjoyable. When both affective and cognitive elements such as goals and strategies for achieving goals are used in teaching, students are motivated to learn. Intrinsic motivation, however, includes the degree to which students expect that they can perform successfully and the degree to which they value the task or benefits to be derived. When either the expectation or the value is missing, they are likely to make little effort. Teachers must help students relate the task to their personal goals and convince them they can achieve success. To do this, teachers need to create the supportive environment emphasized earlier, provide activities at the appropriate difficulty level, and teach to meaningful learning objectives.

Duveck and Elliott's (1983) research on achievement motivation has shown that effort and persistence are greater in individuals who set goals of moderate difficulty level and who seriously commit themselves to pursuing them. Sears' (1964) conclusions were similar when she found that those who felt best about themselves had learned to set realistic goals. The amount of effort and persistence expended by students is closely related to their sense of identity or their assessment of the chances of achieving success. Those with a strong sense of identity are typically able to set more realistic goals. However, Beery and Covington (1976) report that students of all ages typically hold unrealistically high expectations. Those with more realistic expectations typically receive better grades. The key is not to have students set their own expectations, but to have them set goals related to how they want to achieve the realistic expectations set for them.



Because high school students tend to equate success with ability and failure with lack of ability rather than effort, many students are afraid to risk possible failure, fearing it will reflect poorly on their ability. For this reason, it is important for teachers to emphasize that success is measured by effort. Students need to view success as improvement and progress toward achieving their own potential.

Teachers can build motivation in several ways. They can increase the number of meaningful rewards, define success in individual terms, encourage students to exceed their previous performance, and emphasize effort over ability as the preferred means to success. They may also want to establish incentive systems that relate to effort rather than success or failure and promote an incremental view of ability so students will focus on their growth and potential. The objective for teachers is to establish conditions conducive to internal motivation, based on working toward dreams, achieving goals, and living a life consistent with one's values.

The following four strategies can be used to foster motivation and sense of purpose:

- Convey expectations
- Build confidence and faith in ability to succeed
- Clarify visions and dreams
- Develop plans for achieving goals

## *Summary*

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The objective is to create active learners who are intrinsically motivated to learn and willing to take the initiative and primary responsibility for doing so. To achieve such motivation, adolescents need to be encouraged to set goals for themselves and to see the relevance or significance of what they are being asked to learn. Interest and motivation can be enhanced in a number of ways, but unless students see the relevance in that achievement, they will not approach assignments with a sense of internal motivation.

When the content is such that students cannot be given a choice or may not find it personally relevant, it becomes especially important to present it in a stimulating manner, using external forms of reward and appealing to their curiosity or special interest to stimulate motivation. Motivation will be lost if teachers state flatly that this is something they have to do and for which they have no choice.

The sense of purpose can best be developed by conveying expectations, by displaying confidence and faith in ability to succeed, by helping students relate goals to their values, and by helping them develop a plan for achieving their dreams and goals.

## CHAPTER 6

### *A Sense of Personal Competence*

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The sense of personal competence or power comes from the belief that one can overcome problems and achieve the success one dreams about. This quiet confidence, referred to by Bandura (1986) as self-efficacy, is essential to self-esteem and involves the ability to use cognitive, social, and behavioural subskills and to integrate them into courses of action to serve specific purposes.

The distinction must be made between possessing subskills and being able to use them under diverse circumstances to achieve goals. Competence requires both the skills and the belief that one can use them effectively. Such feelings develop only as a result of numerous challenging and successful experiences. Playing on a winning team or in the band, performing in a successful theatrical production or in the school chorus, working on the school newspaper, making the honour roll, or achieving personal goals are all ways to enhance the sense of personal competence.

Personal competence requires the ability to identify options, to make wise choices and decisions, and to apply various problem-solving skills. It also requires familiarity with a variety of human and material resources as well as inner strength to overcome the barriers to success. The issue is how to structure school experiences so as to develop this optimistic outlook and the skills needed for personal competence. Fortunately, many schools now are placing increased emphasis on thinking skills and problem-solving techniques, the effectiveness of which can be enhanced by relating them to student goals or to solving the problems of daily living. Competency skills can best be developed after setting specific goals so that students can better achieve success in the areas of greatest significance to them. Students function more effectively when they learn to apply their skills to solve their own problems and achieve their own goals. This leads to a sense of personal competence that carries over to success in diverse activities. When students believe in their own competence, they are more likely to achieve success in almost any endeavour.

One way to give students practice solving their own problems is to have them analyse various occupations they might want to consider and identify the specific skills required. Follow this by having them do a personal assessment of the skills they already possess and those they need to acquire along with the information they need. Various options for gaining the skills and information can be explored and supported. Another example of supporting students in their problem solving might be in assisting a student select a college. Options and acceptable alternatives can be explored, information gathered, and assistance given to help the student identify primary criteria for decision making.



Throughout this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator and supplier of information and resources—a guardian who holds up the goal or dream so that it is not forgotten. It's also important for the teacher to monitor the process. Once students commit themselves to a direction or goal, the teacher's task is to provide whatever support is needed. Some students may require only minimal assistance; others may need individual tutoring and reassurance.

The assertion is made by some that it may be more difficult to foster self-esteem in females than males. According to Frey and Carlock (1987), this difficulty stems largely from conflicting and changing societal values. They report that traditional femininity is negatively associated today with high self-esteem, while the sense of competence in a career is associated positively. Thus, those who see themselves in the more traditionally defined feminine sex role are apt to be in conflict with commonly held values. Teachers can assist students in building feelings of competence and personal power by helping them to identify their values and to chart a course consistent with those values, rather than relying on the values of others.

To develop the sense of personal competence, the teacher can take the following steps:

- Point out options and alternatives
- Develop problem-solving and coping skills and provide support
- Assist in self-evaluation
- Provide recognition and rewards

## *Summary*

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The key to developing the sense of personal competence is to provide whatever instruction and support is needed to enable individuals to achieve their goals successfully. This might involve the basic skills of reading, math, or writing; it could include study skills or the use of reference materials; or it might require knowledge of government and the legal system.

Significant growth is made when students are able to choose from among various options, pursue a course of action, and successfully achieve their goals. When they have learned to do this repeatedly, they develop feelings of personal competence, convinced they can achieve the goals they set. The teacher can facilitate this process by identifying more options or alternatives from which students might choose, by providing whatever additional support might be required to ensure their success, and by monitoring their progress and providing feedback so that students can evaluate themselves and determine when they have achieved their goal.



## CHAPTER 7

### *Student Self-esteem*

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The significance of the sequential process of developing the five elements of self-esteem now becomes evident. Unless the basic human needs for security, identity, and belonging have been met, the individual is unlikely to set realistic goals or to use resources effectively. The focus of the individual is apt to be on checking the limits of authority or the degree to which he or she is accepted. Those who are unsure of themselves, what their levels of skill really are, and what their values are find it difficult to set realistic goals for achievement. Their motivation is founded on more basic needs, and their feelings of self-esteem will be determined primarily by external sources.

It is only after individuals have their basic needs met that they feel comfortable enough to risk accepting a challenge or setting a significant goal for themselves. Feelings of accomplishment and internalized self-esteem are the result of this process of goal setting and achievement this is the key to feelings of control in life, efficacy, and success. This is the process whereby individuals can become their own source of self-esteem.

The exciting phenomenon one observes is that when individuals set and accomplish significant goals, they tend to repeat the process. Thus, their sense of security is strengthened and their sense of identity improves. They feel closer to others because of the support received, which strengthens their sense of belonging. They are then open to new challenges and willing to set higher goals, especially when encouraged to build on their success. Thus, their sense of purpose becomes more internalized. As they become more proficient in problem solving and using resources, their sense of personal competence grows and the cycle is repeated. Through this process the student learns to capitalize on the success achieved.

This cyclic process has not only proved effective in building self-esteem in average and above-average students; it can also be used as a process to help those with low self-esteem begin to believe in themselves. When an effort is made to develop each of the five elements in sequence, with extra effort being made to establish rapport, build support, and find some area of value or interest where the student can achieve success, the cyclic process can be used to inquire how the student would like to extend that success. That might result in a goal of higher proficiency in the same subject, or the application of that skill to a new area. By reaffirming confidence in the student's ability to succeed



and by providing the support necessary to achieve success, the resistance begins to dissipate, rapport is strengthened, and self-esteem grows.

It is this sense of personal competence that ultimately builds self-esteem. Quiet confidence in one's potential comes from feelings of personal power, being able to effect change, and knowing how to use resources and solve problems without depending on others. When combined with the practice of setting goals, this process leads to a self-actualized individual, one who becomes his or her own source of motivation, less dependent on others for direction, and more internally motivated toward the achievement of personal goals.

There is a higher level of excellence than merely academic achievement—it is the development of complete human beings who can function effectively as individuals and in cooperation with others as citizens of our society. The Building Self-esteem program described here is designed to use the educational process to develop such individuals.



## *Use of the BASE Program Materials*

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The *Building Authentic Self-esteem* program, to be used individually or in small groups, is designed as a flexible program to be used as the basis for a semester course or integrated into the regular program through English, social science, health, or guidance classes. The program's framework enables the teacher or counsellor to integrate it with other materials or programs that may already be in place.

The activity sheets are categorized on the basis of the five components of self-esteem as outlined in the Teacher's Manual: Security, Identity, Belonging, Purpose, and Personal Competence. The classroom teacher may add additional activities to the binder as they are discovered. The arrangement of worksheets in this manner clarifies the intent of each activity. Each section includes a table of contents for easy reference.

The collection of activity sheets is not intended to serve as a workbook, in which teachers work through the activities in sequence. Rather, the worksheets serve as extensions of regular classroom activities and address particular concerns. Although there is no intended sequence to the activities, they have been ordered with the easier activities listed first. The activity sheets have been numbered by section and sequence for easy reference and return after use. The activities presented on each worksheet are self-explanatory so that they might be given as homework assignments rather than limiting their use to the classroom only. Most activities can be easily used to initiate individual conferences or group discussions and can be extended through related assignments.

## *Suggested Sequence of Activities*

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The activity worksheets in the Sense of Security section are particularly valuable early in the school year to establish classroom and school standards. These activities support the formulation of rules and trigger discussions regarding governance in different social settings; most importantly, they support attitudes that lead to personal responsibility.

The Sense of Identity worksheets are appropriate at any time during the school year. These activities provide teachers with insight regarding individual students and are helpful in getting students to understand one another, engage in cooperative action, and learn of particular interests and viewpoints of other classmates. They are also intended to foster students' understanding and acceptance of themselves. Because these activities may elicit sensitive responses from students, they are best used with caution in group settings—students should be allowed to "pass" if asked to share. The activities in this section are especially valuable to counsellors in establishing rapport with new students.



The Sense of Belonging activity worksheets can be used early in the semester or school year or throughout the year to foster a supportive classroom environment, group acceptance and inclusion, and cooperative activities. Because these activities are generally safe and not as personal as those in the Identity section, they can normally be used in group settings. They are appropriately used after those in the Identity section have been completed, but can be used simultaneously or interspersed with activities from other sections.

The activity worksheets in the Purpose section are most effective after teachers have established rapport with their students and the students feel comfortable in committing themselves to goals. This is most likely to be after feelings of security, identity, and belonging have been established. The activities in this section are especially significant because they lead to inner self-esteem as students set important goals for themselves and work to achieve them. Inner self-esteem, in turn, serves to enhance student self-esteem overall.

The activity worksheets in the Sense of Personal Competence section are designed to help students look at optimal ways of achieving goals and expectations and to help them increase awareness of resources. They are especially useful as a means of helping students monitor their progress. Particular activities might be used before students have completed the other sections, but they have primarily been designed for use after students have set goals for themselves and have clear priorities in mind.

Most of the activities presented on the worksheets can be used on more than one occasion to note changes in perception or attitude and to help students observe their own growth. Hence, some worksheets are appropriately used a second or third time during the year.

### *General Suggestions*

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1. It is important to create a "safe" environment where students may share without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. A climate of acceptance and mutual respect is essential if students are to gain maximum benefit from the activities.
2. Teachers must be careful to guard against the use of sarcasm in the class based on a student comment. They should also refrain from making any serious student response the basis for class humour. The manner in which teachers address and react to student responses determines the level of trust achieved between them.
3. Although no activity is intended to elicit information students do not feel comfortable in sharing, there may be times when responses are most appropriately treated sensitively and confidentially. Students should never be forced to share information unless they feel comfortable in doing so. Ensure that students have the option to pass rather than share their responses if they feel uncomfortable.



4. Different perspectives or points of view should be encouraged and accepted to reinforce the uniqueness of each individual and to help students gain confidence with their views.

### *Use of Activity Worksheets Based on Observations of Student Behaviour*

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Skilled teachers can make judgments of students based on their behaviour in the classroom. For example, it is possible to discern whether a student's behaviour stems from a lack of respect for authority or whether the student is one who prefers to be dominated by a few strong individuals. Other students may seek peer approval by showing off or acting the part of the class clown or resident comedian. The following characteristics serve as possible indicators of a student's personal needs, providing teachers with insight as to which worksheets might be most appropriate.

#### *Sense of Security*

In any classroom, it is easy to spot those students who mistrust adults, ignore instructions, or fear authority figures or ridicule by their classmates. Students who demonstrate the following behaviours may be reflecting their insecurity:

- Excessive shyness
- Nail biting
- Hair twisting
- Constant tapping of hands or feet
- Expressed anxiety over tests and grades
- Apparent resentment of authority
- Ignoring of directions
- Challenges to authority

The activities from the Sense of Security section are particularly valuable as vehicles with which to establish better student-teacher relations based on mutual trust and understanding. In these activities, students examine the reasons for rules and authority and participate in the rule formulation process. Participation in such activities helps to build a sense of personal responsibility in students. It is important that the teacher design and clearly communicate a system of operation in the classroom that facilitates the business of learning. Trust and security are enhanced when the procedures are non-punitive and student suggestions are considered and acted upon when appropriate.



### *Sense of Identity*

Students who have poor self-concepts or lack a sense of identity may exhibit a variety of behaviours. Many adolescents are confused as to who they really are, tending to associate their identity with external factors such as the number of friends they have, the clothes they wear, the car they drive, or the recognition they receive. Depending on their emotional state, their behaviours with others may range from being outwardly critical to behaving inconsistently from day to day. Those who lack a sense of identity typically do not take responsibility for themselves and are apt to demonstrate the following defence mechanisms:

- Emotional outbursts
- Anxiousness to please others
- Use of excuses or placing of blame on others
- Failure to take responsibility for self
- Display of poor sports conduct
- Hypersensitivity to criticism
- Discounting of personal achievements
- Inability to take pride in achievements
- Inability to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Adherence to unrealistic expectations

These behaviours could be a clue that a student could benefit from the activity worksheets from the Identity section. Students exhibiting these symptoms typically feel unaccepted and inadequate; unable to accept themselves, they may try to point out the flaws in others. They may also set unrealistic goals for themselves, share few opinions, avoid taking responsibility for themselves, or escape and deny there is a problem of any kind.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Feelings of belonging and connectedness with others are especially important to adolescents. Without these feelings, students may become preoccupied with what others are thinking about them and direct much of their behaviour toward their peers. Yet because they may lack effective social skills, they risk turning off the individuals they want to impress. The activity sheets in the Belonging section are designed to address this problem.

Frequent behaviours of those who lack a sense of belonging include the following:

- Isolation of self from others
- Demonstration of loneliness
- Avoidance of group activities
- Affiliation with few friends
- Inconsistency in roles played
- Teasing or criticism of others
- Acting silly or showing off
- Bragging or exaggerating to others
- Engaging in behaviour designed to impress others, such as smoking or drug abuse
- Participating in gang activities

Such behaviour typically indicates feelings of inadequacy with peers and unsatisfactory social adjustment. Such students need assistance in understanding others and how to be accepted by others; they also need opportunities to work with others in a controlled situation.

### *Sense of Purpose*

Many students demonstrate a strong sense of security, identity, and belonging, but lack any sense of the future. They may have few occupational goals and spend their days in school as passive students. Such lack of purpose in the school setting stems from a number of causes: Students may lack confidence in their ability to succeed; they may never have had anyone who believed in them enough to sit down with them and talk seriously about the future; they may have given up hope of changing anything connected with their lives. Those who lack a sense of purpose frequently exhibit symptoms such as the following:

- Demonstration of little or no effort
- Easy discouragement with little cause
- Helplessness
- Apparent boredom
- Little motivation for school work
- Failure to stay with one activity
- Frequent questioning, such as "Why do we have to do this?"



- Lack of a goal after high school
- Promiscuity
- Drug, alcohol, or tobacco abuse

Typically, parents and teachers of unmotivated students try to build motivation through greater demands, more adult direction, punishment for failure to complete work, or lectures. But none of this is likely to succeed until the student has a firm sense of security, identity, and belonging. The key to developing the sense of purpose lies in determining what is important to the student. Teachers must discover in what areas the student would like to succeed and encourage the student's willingness to seek improvement.

Because the activities in this section are meant to encourage students to think positively about themselves and the future and to identify what they would really like to achieve, they can be of great value in the counselling process with students.

### *Sense of Personal Competence*

The sense of personal competence is typically the last of the elements to be developed either in students or adults. It requires that the other elements be developed as a base since competence is built upon the realization that one can accomplish what one sets out to do, and it develops only through numerous successful experiences. Those who lack feelings of personal competence exhibit symptoms such as the following:

- Excessive degree of dependence on adults and friends
- Fear of taking personal risks
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Cynicism about school and life
- Discouragement regarding progress
- Attribution of grades to forces outside the self
- Sense of apathy or pointlessness
- A clinging to childish behaviours

These symptoms are related to the sense of overall success and are dependent on an ability to set realistic goals and use resources effectively. The activities in this section are designed for students who have some sense of purpose with goals they want to achieve. The activities can be an effective tool for teachers and counsellors to help them assume a supportive role with the student.





## *Use of the Activities Calendar*

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The Activities Calendar offers a suggested sequence for the use of activities during the course of the school year. The sequence is based on the recommendations made earlier and assumes that teachers will first want to establish classroom rules, procedures, and standards, then seek information on individual students. Next, they will want to build teams or supportive relationships within the classroom, followed by goal-setting activities and use of resources.

However, because teachers may find another sequence more appropriate to the interests of the group or class, they should feel free to select and use those activities endemic to their goals and that correspond to the level of rapport achieved and the level of interaction of the students. If students feel uncomfortable talking about themselves in an open discussion, then more time should be spent on the activities related to Identity and Belonging. If students are well acquainted and comfortable with one another, then teachers may want to focus on the goal-setting activities from the Purpose section.

## *Addressing Specific Needs*

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The Cross-reference section gives teachers a tool for selecting activity worksheets that meet special needs or address specific classroom purposes:

- Activities Designed to Help Teachers Understand Students
- Activities Designed to Set Classroom Standards
- Activities Designed to Build Social Skills
- Activities Designed to Enhance Student Interaction
- Activities Designed for Cooperative Learning Teams
- Activities Designed to Enhance Writing Skills
- Activities Related to Social Science
- Activities Designed to Enhance Classroom Climate
- Activities Designed to Encourage Service to Others
- Activities Designed to Increase Purpose and Motivation
- Activities Designed to Help Students Understand Themselves



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