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Abstract
In reviewing the literature of guidance and counseling studies over the past fifteen years, several key ideas emerge. Among these is the popular trend toward "planned sequential, developmentally-based guidance curriculum". A major focus of this developmental concept is the building of "self" as a keystone. The terms "self-esteem", "self-awareness", "self-concept" or "self-acceptance", are at the heart of most elementary guidance programs. Self-perceptions held by the child have been of mixed concern in education for a long time. In the not-so-distant past it was felt that a child's sense of self needed to be broken down before truly effective learning could take place! Today, however, the positive correlation between healthy self-concept and academic achievement can not be ignored.

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DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAMS: COUNSELOR AS LEADER

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In reviewing the literature of guidance and counseling studies over the past fifteen years, several key ideas emerge. Among these is the popular trend toward "planned sequential, developmentally-based guidance curriculum". A major focus of this developmental concept is the building of "self" as a keystone. The terms "self-esteem", "self-awareness", "self-concept" or "self-acceptance", are at the heart of most elementary guidance programs.

Self-perceptions held by the child have been of mixed concern in education for a long time. In the not-so-distant past it was felt that a child's sense of self needed to be broken down before truly effective learning could take place! Today, however, the positive correlation between healthy self-concept and academic achievement can not be ignored.

Obviously then, one large task for effective elementary school counseling programs is the appropriate development of healthy self-concepts in all pupils. The viewpoint that the counselor is the counseling program lays an impossible responsibility on the shoulders of the counselor. The school counselor simply can not be the sole developer of self-acceptance or esteem. Self-concept is not something that can be taught in lessons and then class is over. Everything—absolutely
everything—that contacts an individual in any way effects that individual's sense of self. All the counseling interventions and programs available are of little value without the support and collaboration of the school administration, teachers, and parents of the students.

The objective of this paper is two-fold; the first is to review literature appropriate to the topic of the development of self-concept. The second is to outline ways in which school counselors can effectively implement this research in leading a "team" in the school's approach to the development of healthy student self-concept.

Curriculum Effect

Numerous studies have been conducted attempting to discern the effectiveness of developing "self" in the primary grades (Dobson, Campbell, & Dobson, 1982; Eldridge, Barcikowski, & Witmer, 1973; Hadley, 1988; Morse, Bockoven, & Bettesworth, 1988) to name several. Three of these studies dealt with some aspect of a planned program of systematic instruction. Research has been centered on questions such as, 'How do children develop a healthy self-concept', 'Can self-esteem be taught systematically?' and assuming it can be taught,
'What is the appropriate age level at which to teach it?'.

One study designed to ascertain answers in these areas was conducted by Quain (1977) and utilized the DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) materials created by Don Dinkmeyer. The DUSO program is designed to first develop in learners healthy self-concept and then build upon that to learn to accept and respect others. Activities range from art work to music to drama, all designed to meet the needs of learners at a primary stage of personal development. Quain tried to determine what effect self-concept training had on kindergarten (ages 5-6) children. He found no statistically significant changes at that level. He attributed this to the weakness of the self-concept inventory which he himself constructed. Quain felt that the instrument he designed, "...failed to accurately assess...changes in the children's beliefs" (Quain, 1977 p. 144).

The Quain study raises numerous thought provoking questions. One of importance would seem to be, 'Why didn't the learners' develop a better concept of themselves?'. Many explanations are possible. Children at that age certainly don't test well and the presence of a researcher, or simply knowing that they were being
tested, could throw those scores off. Perhaps the instrument used was not sensitive enough or the program used was not comprehensive enough. Were many suffering from test anxiety? Controlling these variables may well be impossible. Most probably, some combination of these, and other factors, influenced this study.

Morse, Bockoven and Bettesworth (1988) sought to measure self-concept six months after exposure to the DUSO program, to compare and contrast gains, losses and to determine how much of the learning had been maintained. They found that the program, which focuses mainly on the affective domain, does seem to have a positive effect on children's self-concept as measured by an instrument devised by the researchers. After six months, these children were reevaluated and their scores remained at post-test levels.

This study was conducted with twenty-four children, aged seven to nine years and, unfortunately, a study conducted with such a small population has little generalizability, and hence, is of little use for general practice. The study does provide information upon which future studies could expand.

Hadley (1988) also studied the effects of DUSO on children aged seven to nine. She used the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to measure
self-concept. She then took reading scores (as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test) and compared the two attempting to find a positive correlation. The study indicated support for the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between the two. Other research has been conducted to correlate self-concept and academic achievement (Coley, 1973; Crawford, 1975; Zeeman, 1982). These findings extend prior knowledge to this educational concern. Based on this study, self-concept is a worthy subject of teaching and learning.

This is a recurring theme throughout much of the research regarding the child’s concept of self. Morgan and Kafer (1985) examined the relationship between children’s acceptance of self and their stage of friendship expectations. One hundred sixteen boys and ninety-two girls completed the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale and a Picture Sequence Task. Results indicated that children who were at the evaluation, admiration, and common activities stages of friendship expectations reported comparatively lower self-acceptance feelings for the global self and for a
number of minor self-concept areas than did those who were at higher developmental levels. They noted that:

...it appears that the child must learn to accept the self before he or she can begin to relate effectively with others and to seek friendships that are truly reciprocal. On the other hand, it could be that if a child is unable to interact with his or her peers at an appropriate developmental level, then negative peer feedback would lead to an increasing dissatisfaction with self. Nevertheless, regardless of the direction, there is a close development of an understanding of self and an understanding of others (Morgan & Kafer, 1985, p. 524)

For counselors and other teachers of affective education this may be a moot point. Teachers, both regular and special education, are charged with developing and maintaining student achievement. If that alone was enough to also build positive self images in their learners, guidance and counseling curricula would simply be an adjunct to academic instruction. However, if achievement in and of itself is not enough to
nurture the learner's healthy image of self, then the job of the counselor as leader of the affective development of students is to develop a curriculum which assists students in forming a self-concept concordant to their achievement.

Neither teachers nor counselors can stand alone. The misconception that teachers teach and counselors counsel is severely limiting, for teachers also counsel and counselors also teach. Regular and affective education are critical to each other and to the positive development of children.

Effect of Families

A study conducted by Esters and Levant (1983) examined the effect of two parenting programs on the self-esteem and achievement of low achieving elementary children. Two groups of parents were trained in either the Systematic Training for Parents (STEP) program designed by Dinkmeyer and McKay or the Self Esteem Method (SEM) created by Gilmore and Gilmore. Their children were tested using the California Achievement Test to determine low achievement status and The Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale for Children to measure changes in self-esteem. Some difference in self-esteem was noted, "The SEM approach resulted in consistently
significant gains in the children’s self esteem....The results indicate that differential effects occurred in the domain of children’s feelings..." (Esters & Levant, 1983, p. 164).

Maskin (1976) compared the effects of two institutional programs on sixty, fifteen to seventeen year-old juvenile delinquents. One group of subjects was treated with a work-oriented program emphasizing individual vocational and personal skills. The second group was involved in parent-child interaction focused on building family communication, cohesion, and solidarity. The group involved in the parent-child interactive model showed significant differences when compared with those in the work-oriented program at post-test.

The results of these studies are of critical importance. They underline the powerful contribution made by parental involvement in self-concept development efforts. It is most probably true that the school can do little—either affectively or academically—without approval and support from the family. Other studies have found a positive relationship between family support and self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas, 1972; Rollins and Thomas, 1979) again highlighting the essential need for nurturance within the family.
Teacher Effect

Phillips (1984) sought a correlation between teacher praise for positive self-referent statements and improved self-esteem. Thirty low income third, fourth and fifth graders were randomly placed into experimental and control groups. All students completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and then took part in a series of seven day treatments. Both groups were studied for the first seven days as a way for teachers to train as observers. This was followed by a baseline measurement phase in which teachers carefully noted the number of positive self-referent statements. During the third seven day period, members of the experimental group were praised by the teacher for any positive self-referent statements. Then a seven day extinction period began for the experimental group wherein teachers did not reinforce positive self-referent statements. This was followed by seven more days of experimental treatment in which teachers praised students for positive self-referent statements. During these two experimental stages and the extinction stage, teachers for the control group simply continued to record the raw numbers of positive self-referent statements without responding with praise. Both groups were then
post-tested. The number of positive self-referent statements increased significantly for the experimental group. Further, the scores on the post test were significantly higher for the experimental group suggesting that teachers play a critical part in the development of learner self-esteem.

O'Connor (1978) studied 123 females and 123 males enrolled in the fourth through sixth grades. The Lipsitt Self-Concept Scale for Children was administered to measure the discrepancy between the self-concept and the ideal self or the degree of self-dissatisfaction expressed. The Davidson-Lang Adjective Checklist was used to measure the subject’s perceptions of his/her teacher’s feelings toward him/her. No correlation between how the students viewed themselves and how they perceived their teacher’s feelings toward them was found.

The inference, however, that teachers’ attitudes and actions have little effect on student self-concept is an erroneous one. Young learners spend about one third of their waking lives in school and it would be absurd to believe that teachers do not effect the self-concept of their students.
Counselor Role

The counselor is the driving force in an effective guidance and counseling program (Podemski and Childers, 1980). As the affective leader of the school, the counselor must take a vigorous role in creating, maintaining and strengthening a guidance and counseling program designed to maximize student development of positive self-concept. Encompassed in that affective leadership role are several sub-roles including: a strong working relationship with the school administration, liaison between community groups and outside agencies, consultant to both teachers and parents, an advocate for the child, the chief source of both personal and small group counseling in the school, program coordinator for the guidance curriculum, and an active participant in "at-risk" or student assistance programming.

Critical to a program intended to develop healthy self-concept is both the support and assistance of the school administration (Wrenn, 1979; Podemski and Childers, 1987). The counselor and principal must have a strong working relationship in order to form a team aimed at the healthy development of all students. The principal is the overall school leader, ultimately
deciding what programs the school will emphasize, how resources will be utilized and an important influence in the counselor's relationship with the staff. Guidance and counseling programs are mandated in most states, yet some counselors have evolved into quasi-administrators, spending inordinate amounts of time coordinating standardized testing, maintaining pupil records or scheduling students into classes. Still others have become guidance instructors who simply go from class to class teaching group guidance lessons. Both of these imbalanced models are inadequate (Schmidt, 1986).

Financial resources, although not critical to an effective program, are certainly necessary. Educational funds allocated by state and federal governments fluctuate from year to year. Administrators who don't believe affective development is important look to guidance programming as an area for cuts when funds are in short supply. Cutting clerical help and material budgets are two additional ways programs can be downgraded by an administration. With the loss of clerical help, counselors can be forced to do routine paperwork, taking away time spent serving in the professional capacities for which they have been trained.

A counselor sometimes needs to take children out of a classroom to work with them. Teachers resistant to
releasing learners can be either supported by the principal or told that the counselor's work is important enough to merit time out of class. The school principal is often the determining factor in what a counselor is allowed to do or become (Wrenn, 1979).

Service to others is an important part of a healthy self-concept and the counselor can lead in this area by example. Links between school and community are of paramount importance and the leadership of the counselor in this area is also critical. The counselor needs to be well connected in the school district in order to effectively facilitate guidance programming (Podemski and Childers, 1987). Opportunities to serve outside the school are numerous and demonstrate to community leaders the desire of the counselor to impact not only the school, but the community as well. Service clubs, church groups, and non-profit organizations are valuable sources of support, assistance and money. Outside mental health agencies are resources for information, support and referral.

Membership in professional counseling associations is another way that a counselor creates a network of assistance and identity. As a member of a professional association, the counselor keeps apprised of advancements in the field, establishes contacts with
other counselors and maintains the professional identity of all counselors. It follows that the closer the counselor's ties with any group, the more effective will be the working relationship.

The counselor can bolster a child's self-concept by working as a consultant for teachers and parents (Tindall, 1974). The counselor's blend of classroom teaching experience and specialized training in development and counseling is an asset to both these groups. With high student to counselor ratios, a model of direct services is inadequate. Consultation can expand counseling services by working through a teacher or parent. Further, the counselor can be an important bridge between parent and teacher, assisting in home and school communications, especially in coordinating intervention efforts. Families have a tremendous impact on the self-concept of children (Coopersmith, 1967; Esters & Levant, 1983; Gecas, 1972; Maskin, 1976; Rollins & Thomas, 1979) and the counselor must cultivate those ties to have a truly strong program.

Offering assistance to families in the form of parenting workshops is another way to make connections and provide appropriate counseling services and thus impact the self-concept of the child (Wilgus and Shelley, 1988). By working with teachers or families
open to counseling strategies or interventions and having a modicum of success, requests for consultation will undoubtedly increase. The counselor is a valuable consultant to both teachers and parents (Huhn and Zimpfer, 1984).

The counselor must be an advocate for the child (Schmidt, 1986). Children are at a real disadvantage when operating in an adult world and can sometimes be compromised. The developing child’s self-concept is often in a very delicate state. Counselor involvement in situations not in the best interest of the child’s healthy self-concept is required. Counselors are mandatory reporters and need to take action when abuse or neglect is suspected. This may not be difficult with a victim of obvious physical abuse, but action for a child who a counselor suspects is being emotionally abused is of equal importance. Connections with the families and outside agencies are, once again, vital to this process. Results sometimes indicate that the teacher or parent is the source of a problem and not the child. An effective counselor must work with both child and teacher or parent to try to resolve the issue. The school counselor is in a position to serve the needs of the child while maintaining the primacy of the roles of teacher and parent (Willgus and Shelly, 1988).
Counseling is a powerful tool to assist learners in developing positive self-concepts and the primary source of counseling in a school is the counselor. An important distinction is made between guidance and counseling in that guidance is what all staff members and persons who care about children are responsible for, while counseling is a formal process of professional assistance for which a high degree of training is needed (Schmidt, 1986). Counselors have the training to counsel students, both individually and in small groups. An effective program is led by a counselor who uses both teachers and outside resources appropriately to facilitate individual and group counseling. As an example, a group of adolescent girls struggling with body image might best be led by a woman. A male counselor could look to other resources for assistance in offering such a group.

At the heart of a planned program focused on the development of healthy student self-concept is the guidance curriculum. An effective curriculum is not static but develops to meet the changing needs of society (Wilgus and Shelley, 1988). What we hope to instill in our students must be constantly evaluated and refined. Community, teacher, student and parent input must be sought in the form of a needs assessment. These
needs then are matched with objectives and outcomes commensurate to those perceived needs. Counselors are responsible for finding or creating activities designed to achieve those outcomes. Evaluating the success of the program is an on-going task essential to the effectiveness of the program. The counselor serves as the leader of the guidance committee, facilitating a process aimed at affective development overall and student self-concept in particular.

The trend toward student assistance teams and committees organized to help "at-risk" students are a welcome addition to the many parts of an effective guidance program (Hansen, 1991). By meeting on a regular basis with diverse members of the staff, the counselor gets information from many perspectives. Inclusion of secretaries, bus drivers, teachers, administrators, nurses, and others on a team, helps to build an "information web" of great use in determining problems, forming and facilitating interventions, and ultimately, helping students develop a positive self-concept. This involvement also enhances the connections of the entire school, creating esprit de corps and a climate conducive to mutual understanding and respect. An important element in any educational endeavor is school environment. It would be difficult
to develop appropriate self-concepts in learners without
the professional staff first having reasonably healthy
self-concepts themselves.

Conclusion

Poised at the brink of the twenty-first century,
guidance and counseling programs are charged with the
tremendous challenge of building healthy self-concepts
in students faced with difficult issues relatively new
to this generation. Each of us is somehow affected by
marital discord and break up, unemployment, inflation,
plant closings, loss of confidence in government, and a
national debt of titanic proportion. All of these, and
other issues, taken together have created an atmosphere
in which our society's values are dramatically changing.
The traditional support system of the nuclear and
extended family has been seriously eroded. Incredibly,
elementary students now deal with critical issues of
suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, sexuality and sexually
transmitted diseases. All of these considerations
profoundly effect the world of the student, our
community and, thus, the guidance program of the school.

A positive self-concept is vital to optimum human
development, especially in view of this rapidly changing
world. The school counselor is the leader in creating,
maintaining and refining a program which assists students in building these productive self-concepts. The leadership of the counselor in the school is one of utmost importance. Without vigorous leadership at the head of a guidance and counseling program, the strength of the program must be in question.
References


