



Self-esteem: A Guide for Teachers

By David Miller and Teresa Moran

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Miller and Moran state this book is written for “student teachers, their tutors and teachers in primary classrooms”, a wide audience indeed. The early chapters delve into the theory behind why the enhancement of self-esteem needs to be the business of educators. They critically examine some theories of the development of positive self-esteem in children. The authors firmly come down on the side of a two-dimensional model espoused by Christopher Mruk, that self-esteem is made up of two components; self-worth and self-competence. They further suggest that successful programmes require intervention in both of these areas.

Chapters Four to Eight suggest strategies for classroom practice to enhance feelings of self-competence and self-worth and is likely to be of greatest interest to practitioners/teachers, especially those working with children with special educational needs. Many will agree with the authors’ contention that praise lavished on work of a poor standard from some pupils does not enhance their self-esteem, and may have a detrimental effect on their willingness to put in the effort required to achieve their potential. The importance of the role of effective differentiation and formative assessment in enhancing self-competence is reiterated. Setting worthwhile targets which a pupil can achieve with scaffolding, and using words of encouragement when the going gets tough, have a better chance of enhancing a pupil’s self-competence, and the resultant sense of achievement will add to a positive sense of self-worth.

Interestingly, the case is made for allowing children to fail as part of the “learning process”. The point is made that failure is part of life and learning from our failures is facilitated when failing at a task is not linked to shame or guilt, but is viewed instead as an opportunity to examine how things could be done differently. Opportunities to achieve success should always outweigh experiences of failure in order to build confidence in one’s competence, but the latter should not be ruled out of a child’s life. Other strategies discussed include the roles of ICT and game based learning, group based learning and peer tutoring.





Chapters Five and Six cover, among other interesting themes, the topic of motivation for learning. The authors point out the value of moving away from reliance on star charts and other *extrinsic* rewards as popular incentives, and moving towards developing more *intrinsic* motivation in our pupils. Valuable teaching tools in this area include honest discussions; the experience of success as a learner; high but realistic teacher expectations clearly communicated to the pupil; rewarding effort and acknowledging progressions in learning. In the area of special educational needs I feel it is vital to train the pupil to keep a record of their own progression as many attribute their successes to luck and their failures to a lack of competence. Looking back on how far their learning has come can have far reaching effects on their self-competence and their motivation. Realistic challenges and authentic achievements, the stimulation of curiosity, allowing the learner some level of control over their own learning, as well as encouraging the use of imagination in learning, encourage the development of intrinsic motivation.

Chapters Seven and Eight cover strategies to build a sense of self-worth. The ethos of the school and classrooms is elemental, where practices which dictate routines, responsibilities, learning and relationships should daily affirm the intrinsic worth of each individual. Pro-social behaviour is to be encouraged at every opportunity. Thus, when praise for being kind, caring and considerate of others, such as helping a peer with their work, or including others in their games, is as frequent as attention given for academic progress, a sense of personal self-worth of the individual is encouraged, and an example of what is valued is underlined for other pupils.

While the book tackles a delicate subject and contains no guarantees that any particular strategy will definitively work, it is full of useful ideas, some new, some not. It is well laid out, contains thought-provoking questions and the clear summations make it easy to identify what is of greatest relevance to the reader.

SELF-ESTEEM: A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS by David Miller and Teresa Moran is published by SAGE Publications, 2012 and costs STG£22.99.



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