

## “IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM IN LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR: TERMS OF EDUCATION”

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### **Abstract**

This paper was written using various research based sources to determine the effects of self-esteem on learning and behaviors and whether or not the use of magic tricks can play a role in raising self-esteem and in motivating learning for children with exceptionalities. There have been multiple studies that show self-esteem has a significant effect on a child's ability to learn as well as studies that show self-esteem plays a role in a child's behavior. There are opposing studies showing that self-esteem has no effect on learning and behavior in children with and without exceptionalities. Regardless of whether or not one agrees that self-esteem affects learning and behavior in children with exceptionalities, it is important that educators find ways to help all children with exceptionalities, as well as without exceptionalities, improve their self-esteem thereby possibly helping improve learning, behavior, and motivation. One possible way to help raise self-esteem in children with exceptionalities is the use of magic tricks inside and outside the classroom. Incorporating the use of magic tricks in lessons seems to motivate learning. The information on the use of using magic tricks to raise self-esteem is limited to few articles and only one study.

**Key Words:***Exceptionalities, Self-esteem, Learning performance*

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

One way to help students achieve academic success is to have positive self-esteem. Self-esteem seems to affect a child's ability to learn and to behave in class. Self-esteem also seems to affect motivation. Unfortunately, there is evidence that suggests students with exceptional needs have a greater risk of developing low self-esteem (Lyons, 2012). While not all students with low self-esteem will do poorly in school, there is research that shows low self-esteem can lead to less academic success (Daniel & King, 1997). It is important to understand how self-esteem affects learning and behavior for students and especially those with exceptionalities. It is also important to find a way, or ways, to raise self-esteem and to also motivate learning. Step inside a classroom and observe how students' attitudes and behaviors change as self esteem begins to decline. Students with exceptionalities often demonstrate this to a greater degree than those students without exceptionalities (Heward, 2005). Instead of being seen as “not as smart” the student would rather be known as the “bad” student or class-clown in the classroom or school. Learning can also be affected by a student's self-esteem. Students with higher self esteem are more inclined to take an active part in their education than a student with lower self esteem, although other factors also contribute to lower class participation (Phillips, Smith, Modaff, 2004). Students who participate in class have a higher success rate than those who do not (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Students with a positive view of themselves, along with other factors, have greater motivation to participate more in class than those who have a negative view

of themselves (Phillips, et al., 2004). Self-esteem is how children perceive themselves. According to Dr. Ingrid Schweiger (2008), self-esteem is not a process that comes to maturity and stays in place. It is a process that is ever-changing unlike a physical trait, such as eye color. Because self-esteem is not a fixed characteristic, it can be constantly in flux. Parents, teachers, and success can help students develop high self-esteem. The flip side is parents, teachers, and failure can cause students to develop low self-esteem. Self-esteem not only plays a role in behavior and learning; it can also play a role in motivation to succeed. According to Marzano (2003), motivation of any type is affected by emotions which are not easily controlled yet very powerful. Self-esteem can affect students' abilities to make and keep friends which also can have an impact on educational achievement due to behavioral problems. Due to the natural tendencies that children have to compare themselves with others, those with exceptionalities may have low self-esteem from lack of success in school, sports, and friendships (Lyons, 2012). Self-esteem, or the lack of it, can hinder motivation to learn, or develop friendships in students, especially those students with disabilities. According to Watson (n.d.), motivation to accomplish anything and self-esteem are negatively affected in children with disabilities. Motivation to learn can be intrinsic or extrinsic in nature depending on the student or circumstance. A difficult decision for teachers to make is whether or not to use rewards for classroom behavior management (Witzel and Mercer, 2003). There are arguments for and against the use of extrinsic rewards; however students with exceptionalities appear to need extrinsic rewards more than students without exceptionalities (Witzel and Mercer, 2003). Teachers must decide the best motivational choices for their classrooms and each individual student. Learning magic tricks can be both extrinsic and intrinsic in nature and may be a good strategy to motivate learning.

## **1.2 EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM ON LEARNING**

Low self-esteem can affect achievement in the classroom (Watson, n.d. (a)). Self-esteem is not a constant and changes depending on the messages received from others (Schweiger, 2008) as well as self perceptions of oneself (Roman, Cuestas, & Fenollar, 2008). Roman et al. (2008) maintain that self-esteem is perception and is based on a person's feelings about themselves and not necessarily what others think of them. David Copperfield's Project Magic Handbook states, "Most people with disabilities have come to believe that they are less capable than a nondisabled person" (as cited in Levin, 2006. p.15). This does not mean that they are less capable but merely perceive themselves as so. Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) began analyzing factors, such as self-esteem, that influence academics. They found that while family, others' expectations, and learning approaches do affect academics, self-esteem has the strongest impact on learning and that improving self-esteem is important. Daniel and King (1997) studied the effects of self-esteem on inclusion placement vs. non-placement. Among their findings is that lower self-esteem does affect academic achievement. Not only were the students' affected, but parent's attitudes were also affected by their children being in inclusion classrooms (Daniel and King, 1997). They found that behavior is negatively impacted in inclusion classrooms. In addition, they found that self-esteem is affected negatively when students are placed in inclusion classrooms. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that self-esteem is how one feels about oneself and can be affected by others, including parents and teachers (Roman et al., 2008). Franks and Marolla (1976) studied self-esteem and found that self-esteem has two dimensions- an outer (how others feel about oneself) and an inner (how oneself feels about themselves) dimension. They found that both dimensions were important to scholastic performance with the inner dimension being the most important. Perhaps a student with exceptionalities when placed in a classroom with nondisabled

peers, especially peers without learning disabilities, compare their abilities to those children without disabilities. This may lower their self-esteem as they may not be able to perform as well on classroom assignments. Renick and Harter (1989) explain that students with exceptionalities not only deal with special education, but also classes that do not include students with learning problems. Renick and Harter (1989) note that while it is true that not all students with exceptionalities compare themselves to nondisabled peers, resource students that were learning disabled wanted to be more like students that were not students with learning disabilities. Those that do compare themselves may also feel that other students think less of them due to their learning disabilities which can also lead to a decrease in self-esteem. Reinjtjes, Thomaes, Boelen, van der Schoot, Castro & Telch (2010) found that some students felt lower self-esteem when others disapproved of them. It seems to be a circular effect: lower self-esteem affects learning and failure in academics or the perception of how others feel about one can lower self-esteem. Franks and Marolla (1976) note that a source of higher self-esteem is feeling that one has the ability to succeed. If one feels one has the ability to learn, that positive feeling may enable that student to learn. This feeling of competence comes from having a higher self-esteem. Romain et al. (2008) found a strong link between self-esteem and deep processing as well as effort and came to the conclusion that higher self-esteem is important in learning. Heyman (2001) suggests that there is a link between self-esteem and academic self-concept.

### **1.3 EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM ON BEHAVIOR**

Lower self-esteem can lead to behavior problems (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011) and to increased aggression in some children (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005). In contrast, being bullied can lead to lower self-esteem (Guerra et al., 2011). Not all children will experience a lowered self-esteem during adolescence, due to multiple factors; others will, especially as they enter into adolescence (Kort-Butler & Hageman, 2010). Keeping students from experiencing the destabilization of self-esteem during adolescence should be a goal of all educators as it may diminish the incidents of bullying. A look inside any classroom will yield various levels of self-esteem among the students. It usually is not difficult to pick out the ones that have lower self-esteem vs. those with higher self-esteem. The ones that have the lower self-esteem tend to be quiet, withdrawn, sit in the back of the class, and do not readily participate in class activities as those with higher self-esteem (Phillips, Smith, & Modaff, 2001). Students with exceptionalities are more likely to be among the lower self-esteem set (Lyons, 2012). Ironically, the school setting seems to contribute to the decline of a child's self-confidence due to bullying (Cho, Hendrickson & Mock, 2009), the attitude of their teachers or other school personnel (Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 1996), and rejection by their peers (Reijntjes et al., 2010). Younger children are usually very confident, if not overly confident, in themselves and their abilities (Plumert, 1995). A child's self confidence seems to decline as the child approaches adolescence (Schunk & Meece, 2005). While aggression seems to rise during adolescence as indicated by incidents in violence in schools such as the Westside Middle School massacre and the Columbine High School massacre, it is not always due to lowered self-esteem. According to Colvin, neither Harris nor 11 Klebold, the Columbine shooters, had low self-esteem (2000). While Donnellan et al. (2005) did link low self-esteem to aggression dependent upon age; they also linked aggression to narcissism. Due to this link, it appears low self-esteem is not the sole indicator of aggression and may in fact not be a factor in aggression in some school incidents. Guerra et al. (2011) studied the predictors of bullying, as well as victimization, and found that some bullies do have high self-esteem. They also linked lower self-esteem to both bullying and being the victim of bullying (Guerra et al., 2011). Low self-esteem seems to affect behavior,

but how a person behaves towards a person may also play a role in aggression. According to Cho et al. (2009) a large percentage of students with a Behavioral Disorder (BD) are labeled as bullies. They also reported that students with BD are not readily accepted by their classmates which may influence how they are treated as well as how they behave. Guerra et al. (2009) report aggressive students that have low self-esteem bully as a means of spreading low self-esteem although not all bullies have low self-esteem. Bullying can be seen as acceptable behavior by many students (Guerra et al., 2011). Guerra et al. (2011) also noted that not all students who are bullied go on to become bullies themselves. Donnellan et al. (2005) found a correlation between self-esteem and behaviors. While there is much information linking low self-esteem to behaviors, there is a limited number of studies or amount of research that link lowered self-esteem to bullying. In addition to behavior, low self-esteem has also been linked to school delinquency (Morrison & Cosden 1997; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). This school delinquency can lead to increased dropout rates (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Morrison and Cosden (1997) linked individuals with learning disabilities to increased risks in societal outcomes as well as to delinquency and lowered self-esteem. In addition, children with low self-esteem have been known to act out in class in order to gain attention that may be lacking due to declined academic success (Witzel & Mercer, 2003). A child may act up in an attempt to cover up failure (Broome, 1989). Regardless of the form a behavior issue takes, it is important to find ways to avoid behavior issues and give students a way to improve self-esteem and gain academic achievement in school.

#### **1.4 CONCLUSION**

The limitations for this paper are the small amount of published information on the use of magic tricks in the classroom and on how the use of magic tricks improves self-esteem and motivates learning in children with exceptionalities. The research turned up only one study that researched how the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem. While the research found the published information agreed that the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem and motivate learning, the amount of information was limited.

The information on the use of magic tricks in the classroom is limited, but all agree that it can improve self-esteem in children with exceptionalities and to motivate learning. While the research is in agreement that the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem and motivate learning, more studies need to be conducted before the use of magic tricks in the classroom will be considered as evidence based practice. While there are recent studies that indicate self-esteem does not have an effect on learning or behavior, there are many more studies that counter those outcomes. Due to the conflicting information regarding whether or not self-esteem affects learning and behaviors, more studies are needed to determine the effects of self-esteem. It certainly does not appear to harm a child, hinder learning, or cause misbehavior to help a child improve their self-esteem; therefore, improving self-esteem should be implemented both inside and outside the classroom. While learning to perform magic tricks seems to help a child in many different ways, all positive, more research is needed as the research to date is very limited and there is not much recent information to be found. Not only does learning to successfully perform magic tricks have the potential to improve self-esteem, but successfully learning to perform magic tricks also has the potential to generate more interest in the lessons presented in a classroom. The majority of studies exploring the link between

low self-esteem and bullying do claim there is a link, but, there are a few that claim that bullying is often associated with narcissism including the one by Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, and Caspi (2005).

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