

The Development of Self-Esteem and a desire for Continuous Educational Growth in Young Learners of English

Written by Paul Mitchell

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Canada

June, 2008

The following is a written integration of what I have learned over 17 years of being a social worker/counselor (especially with survivors of abuse), psychological and developmental research I have done and what I have learned about teaching young learners – of English - and in this case, as it relates to the importance of self-esteem. Whether it is counseling, parenting or teaching English to children, all practical applications promoting psychological and developmental growth, regardless of the material way this is achieved all of these are ways of teaching.

In addition to teaching English, an English teacher also has the added responsibility and benefits resulting from positively affecting a child's self-esteem. An English teacher can nurture healthy levels of self-esteem in conjunction with teaching the English language.

Although a teacher might specialize in a certain area of instruction, all teachers should teach with a philosophical, ethical and professional goal of assisting their students to develop a desire and methodology for continuous learning. Hopefully, this will affect all areas of a student's life that touches upon **or has potential** to positively effect and help the child develop an integrated life perspective; in other words, a well-rounded and educated individual.

Encouraging and nurturing student originality and individuality is a way of teaching children to become open-minded and creatively oriented. An English teacher should use as many ways and resources as possible to develop the - unique – talents of students in helping them to learn the English Language. Role-play, reading, crafts, projects, games and a virtually endless supply of variations and additional opportunities can present themselves to teachers over time.

A human being lives within a social, living environment; an environment dynamically expressed by interdependent relationships, within all areas of nature. Integrated orientations provide a greater ability to learn, in all areas of interest or need. Naturally, this includes a greater ability to learn English.

When a teacher has a simple focus on the acquisition of technical skills used for a specific purpose - mechanical and sterile, a specialization that fails to

take into account students' whole, individual selves, this actually decreases and limits a teacher's ability to teach in the responsible and ethical manner that all teachers are supposed to teach because it limits a student's ability to learn. This psychic mindset has an negative and constricting **attitudinal** and therefore interactive-interpersonal affect and parallel impact on those people the teacher comes in contact with – in this case the students. Similar to the attitude presented by the teacher, this method of teaching also has a similarly limiting, constricting and uncreative outcome.

A very simplistic but effective way to visualize the dynamics I am referring to is by comparing a teacher who teaches almost word-for-word from a book. The focus is on memorization and a mechanical reproduction as output. This is opposite to someone who uses the contents of the book to teach in an imaginative and creatively stimulating way, a way that will instill the same, empowering type of ability in the child. The first method of teaching programs a child – it is boring, uncreative and is non-reinforcing. The second method empowers the child and equips him or her with an actual ability to learn. It will ignite within the child a creative impulse that will grow as their creative ability cyclically reinforces itself.

A world-renowned author, of a variety of related writings: philosophical, psychological and developmental, that has had a huge impact on developing my views in these areas is Ken Wilber. This ingenious thinker has developed a whole theory on the idea of evolutionary integration (my terminology in this case) and the fact that all intelligence stems from building upon the knowledge that preceded it, but ultimately stresses that virtually all aspects of knowledge that preceded it must be kept intact or everything else that follows will crumble.

A good but very simplistic example of how this dynamic operates is when something becomes overly specialized, isolated and separate from the roots that gave it birth. An example is technology developed within closed and controlled environments that cause environmental destruction and damage or inversely is damaged by unforeseen environmental factors when used or implemented within an open environment. Because I am an English teacher, what I am suggesting,

and for similar reasons is that as much of the whole child learner has to be taken into consideration in order for true learning to take place.

A narrow focus on a particular educational perspective, for example, a technical and quantitative one fails to appreciate qualitative, interpersonal and other related factors. It fails to appreciate the simple fact that one can get a much better appreciation for, understanding of and ability to teach with artistic flair – in this case English to young learners - when as many resources, factors, relationships and interdependent dynamics as possible are taken into consideration. Although a technical knowledge of how memory, phonetic relationship and other aspects of linguistic understanding are useful, perhaps even necessary for teaching L1 (mother tongue) or L 2 (second) languages, a knowledge of and appreciation for human relationships, emotional needs and personal motivation – beyond a purely competitive level – will assist in teaching.

Teaching in this manner will involve using an eclectic approach that utilizes students' individual and group strengths and their communication needs. This works in conjunction with a developing ability to learn through the process of listening, reading, speaking and writing: encouraging students to use all opportunities for learning as they present themselves during the teaching-learning process.

Intelligence develops from an integrated mind and this helps create and maintain self-esteem. Visualize a dynamic, two-way integrating flow – of energies - and cyclical maintenance in relation with the connection between an integrated intelligence and self-esteem. This concept has been masterfully developed, especially in a chronological sense and described by the developmental psychologist Joseph Chilton Pierce in his book “Evolution’s End: Claiming the Potential of our intelligence”. He describes in clear, developmentally psychological ways how a child’s “self-system” or integral personality, their integrity, has to be maintained and kept as whole as possible for the incremental growth of intelligence and the complementary dynamic growth of self-esteem to develop. With the perpetration of any kind of violence against the child or young learner, such as coercive conditioning or the constriction of thought, what suffers

is the interdependent dynamics of self-esteem and integrated intelligence. Both of these dynamics can work together to produce healthier and more intelligent human beings.

The important point for English teachers is that the healthy, well-rounded integration I am referring to is characterized and maintained or hampered by high or low levels of self-esteem.

The importance of positive feedback and reinforcement is an example of a teaching style that can use very specific methodologies while at the same time instilling a positive and open-minded attitude within the student. High self-esteem allows and teaches the child to be tolerant, especially of her or his own views. I am talking about an attitude that expands the scope of potential development. This would benefit English teachers by providing students with an attitude – and permission - that gives them a vastly increased, creative view of (potentially) beneficial resources or viewpoints and ways of thinking to assist them in learning English.

In a real-world sense, a student's progress can be demonstrated using different types of alternative assessment tools. These tools are student-friendly because they accurately reflect a student's true abilities. This is opposed to the counter-productive dynamics – and negative physical and psychological symptoms, stress being the most notorious - that result from using sterile, impersonal, standardized testing methodologies.

These alternative methods are more natural, spontaneous and they are non-threatening, usually fun and encourage a lowering of affective filtering the children might have in place. Alternative methods of testing can include everything from role-play, journal writing, even creating a type of craft or project

that can be used to demonstrate a variety of abilities related to language acquisition; even games could be used. In addition to the growing acceptance of using all of these methods for teaching, not testing, what may be understood to a lesser extent is the integrated dynamics these methods working together represent, including a greater opportunity to positively affect student's self-esteem.

High self-esteem and the related development of tolerance will foster a desire for students to learn the second language, in a self-generating, increasing cycle of learning. Teachers' deliberate attempts to increase or nurture a child's self-esteem increases this potential. Positive results in learning directly affect self-esteem and vice versa in a positively dynamic way. Children with high self-esteem will be more open-minded, tolerant and relaxed. They will express more creativity and spontaneity. This will give them access to greater learning (resources) potential. This encourages a child to act with trust and enthusiasm. A child with high levels of self-esteem will be more willing to "take risks" in learning.

This is similar to the TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) course material that demonstrated students with a solid background in L2 (2nd language) development have a greater ability at using creative ingenuity - read: intelligence - due to the combined perspectives of two rather than a single culture. They had higher levels of self-esteem, intellectual and character development. They also had higher levels of psychological integration. Developmental psychology demonstrates that literally all of this is interrelated.

To highlight what I am saying I will contrast this with teaching methods that use, no matter how mild they appear to be, corporal or psychological types of humiliating and intimidating punishment - abuse. These methods of "teaching" instill and condition rigid perspectives and attitudes, whether in respect to a specific subject, tolerance for differences or an overall personal, community or social perspective. Even if these latter methods of teaching use identical forms of technical methodology for learning as the positive methods, the positive will be

more effective in actual teaching and instilling a desire to learn (English) in a greater number of students. Instead of using fear and humiliation to force a child to learn for survival and utilitarian need, learning would be for positive and healthy reasons.

My view of and understanding the purpose of teaching is very similar to the main purpose of the first Greek universities. This purpose was not necessarily to teach the student about a certain subject or area of specialization, although that was most certainly a factor. The original intention of the Greek university was to teach a student the art of learning, an art that is as much psychological as it is practical. It taught the student a psychological/philosophical and practical methodology for life-long learning. When I say this, I am pointing out that, today most teaching methods have developed into types of vocational training. Most students who graduate from schools today, including university, have been trained how to perform specific functions, some of which would become obsolete over time if it were not for the infusion of technical and mechanical updates. This, rather than the qualitative and constant changes made by truly educated people, in human as much as in practical ways.

All teachers have an ethical responsibility to teach and in this case I am referring to children, how to **learn**; not simply how to make widgets, regardless of whether or not those widgets are words, quotas or graduate students. It is a teacher's responsibility to teach a child how to learn in an integrated fashion; one that connects one area of learning with another, one area of life with another or people from different cultures and backgrounds with one another. A type of learning that recognizes and connects, complementarily, apparently unrelated subjects and areas of interest. This should most poignantly include ways of learning language (s) because it is through and by language that we are able to speak about, connect with and make intelligible virtually all areas of conscious living.

Intimidation, fear or any type of coercion and humiliation used in "teaching" will limit students. Fear – characterized by low self-esteem, primarily caused by separation and isolation - necessarily creates rigid and close-minded

people, afraid to expand their perspectives, their personality and their potentiality. They fearfully limit their potential to areas and in ways and attitudes that are “safe”. This contrasts with children nurtured into creative, inclusive and tolerant ways of thinking. Discipline is used but so is an attitude and method to achieve open-minded perspectives, encouraged with positive reinforcement. The intentional strengthening of student’s self-esteem will increase their potential ability to master what they are learning. If the subject they are learning is the English language then high levels of self-esteem will help create an increased ability to, productively, use all avenues available. All of these different avenues can enhance and increase the likelihood that students will learn the English language.

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