



**The New Teacher Support Program  
Wilson County Schools  
Terry Edwards, Consulting Teacher**

# **TIP OF THE WEEK!**

**Issue #2**

**“To me the sole hope of human salvation lies  
in teaching.” --George Bernard Shaw**

## **Activities to Improve Students' Self-Concept**

A student enters school as a unique individual, molded by genes, environment, and a certain spark within himself. An increased awareness of how special that unique spark really makes him helps that student retain that quality when the pressure is on to follow the pack.

However, as he winds his way through the curriculum, frequently a desire to fit in -- to be like everyone else -- grows, diluting the spark that makes him unique. Here are 10 simple activities that can be used to increase student self-esteem on any grade level.

### **The Interview**

This is a great beginning-of-the-year activity. I have students break into dyads. Each is paired with someone he does not already know well. Allowing five minutes per interview, the students interview each other. Then standing behind the person he has just interviewed, his hands on that person's shoulders, each child tells what he has learned about the other, introducing him to the class.

### **The Journal**

As a journal entry each student might write a poem, describe a dream, or share something

he is pleased about or unhappy about. It is the student's journal; I read an entry only if the student says I may. However, I do check regularly to ensure that there are at least three dated entries per week.

### **Designing Self-Collages**

Using pictures, words, or symbols clipped from magazines that represent things they enjoy doing or own, places they've been, people they admire, or careers they desire, my students create a collage. They place their names on the back, and I post the collages around the room. I have the other students guess which collage belongs to whom and state why they made that guess.

### **Ranking Traits**

I ask students to rip a piece of paper into ten strips. On each they write a word or phrase that describes them. I assure students that no one will see what they have written, so a student can be extremely honest. Then the student arranges the traits in order from what he most likes about himself to what he least likes. When done, I say, "Do you like what you see? Do you want to keep it? Now give up one trait. How does the lack of that affect you? Now give up another. Give up three. Now what kind of person are you?" After giving up six of the qualities, I have students regain the traits one by one. Frequently I see great tension as students decide which traits they will give up. I hear comments about how incomplete the student feels without those traits, and I see great relief, and a new understanding of the importance of those traits, as they are regained. After the session, I have students write in their journals what they kept and what they learned about themselves from the experience.

### **Accentuate the Positive**

Breaking the class into groups of four to six, my students focus on one member at a time. I have all the students in the group tell all the positive things they can about that person. I encourage compliments that focus on behavior rather than something that cannot be altered or developed like a physical characteristic. No put downs are allowed. Every comment must be positive. One student acts as the recorder. This list is then given to the person for his journal.

### **Thumbprints**

I have each student place his thumb on an inkpad and make a thumb print. Beforehand I photocopy the five general fingerprint patterns shown in the encyclopedia, so students can identify their type of print. I discuss the fact that each fingerprint is special because it is totally unique. Then each student creates an animal using the thumbprint as the body. The students place this in their journals.

### **Create a "Me" Commercial**

I have each student write a two- to three-minute television commercial. The topic is why someone should hire him. The commercial depicts the student's special qualities. After they work on these, the students present their commercials in front of the class. Another variation is for a group of five to create a commercial for each one and then present this in front of the class.

### **Shared Learning**

At the end of each quarter, after each student rereads his journal, the class sits in a circle and each student shares one thing he has learned about himself so far this year.

### **Write Yourself a Letter**

At the end of the school year, I have students write themselves a letter. I tell them that no one but they will read this letter so they can say anything they want in it. However, a part of that letter might include who their friends are, their current height and weight, favorite movies and music, and special things both good and bad that occurred during the year. I encourage my students to also include a current picture. On another sheet of paper or the back of that sheet I

ask my students to write ten goals they would like to accomplish by this time next year. Students seal this letter in an envelope, self-address it, and give it to me. In a year I mail the letters back to the students. (The directions are slightly different for my eighth-graders. I ask them to write ten goals they would like to accomplish by the end of the next four years. They seal these, self-address them, and give them to me. I mail those letters back to them when they are seniors in high school and once again ready to leave a school.)

### **Drawing Self Portraits**

Using a small mirror, students draw themselves. My students use black or colored pencils, but any medium could be used. The picture does not have to be exact, but it should be representative of that student. These portraits also go into the journals. An optional variation is to divide the shape for the face down the center lengthwise. Half the face can be a depiction of how the student sees himself, and the other how he thinks others see him. This is accompanied by a journal entry that describes how the student sees himself versus how he thinks others see him.

**These activities are just the tip of the iceberg. There are many other activities through which a teacher can help her students build a positive self-concept. These types of activities hopefully give students the strength to withstand the pressures of the pack; they hopefully enable students to resist that pull to metamorphoses into who they're not.**

## **PROMOTING POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM: MARKING PAPERS**

### **GRADES K-12**

**Many of the things teachers do to promote, or inhibit, positive self-esteem, comes from unintended actions. There are obvious things teachers do, such as who is called on in the class, who's papers are posted on the bulletin boards...but there are less obvious things that are done; actions which directly affect the students positive self-esteem. The most frequent area where this is the case is with marking student papers.**

**The following are some quick tips which any teacher can immediately use in improving the positive self-esteem in the classroom:**

- 1. NEVER GRADE IN RED INK.** Red is a "negative" color. Think: stop signs and lights, warning labels, poison, etc. Our society has conditioned us to immediately view red as something negative. Subconsciously, (and often conscientiously), a paper that is handed back full of red marks tells the student that he or she is a "dummy". A "self-fulfilling prophesy" often results with these students!
- 2. USE GREEN OR BLUE INK.** Green, on the other hand, is a "positive" color, as is blue to a lesser extent. When green is used, corrections, or markings, become more of a "constructive criticism" type of comment.

3. **USE A SLASH "/" RATHER THAN AN "X" WHEN MARKING A WRONG ANSWER.** Again, for the same reasons one does not use red ink. The "X" is a negative symbol.
4. **MARK NUMBER RIGHT OUT OF THE TOTAL, VERSUS MINUS THE NUMBER WRONG.** Do you accentuate the positive, or the negative? 2/20 still looks better than -18.

Also be aware of cultural differences. For instance, NEVER write a Korean student's name using red ink (even if it's a friendly note to the child). In the Korean culture, writing someone's name in red is a sign of death! Korean parents are often horrified when papers come home with their child's name written in red!

## **Strategies for teachers to use to help raise student self-esteem:**

**All grades. Any subject area.**

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### **Strategies:**

- Use student names
- Shake hands with the students
- Have conversations with every student
- Provide multiple ways for students to be successful in your class
- Display student work
- Give each student a responsibility in the classroom
- Provide opportunities for student work to be judged by external audiences
- Take time to point out positive aspects of your students' work
- never criticize a student's question
- Take time to help struggling students understand the material
- Try to get to know about the student's life outside of school
- Ask students about their other activities (ex. "How was the soccer game, Natalie?")
- Help students turn failure into positive learning experience
- Encourage students to take risks
- Provide opportunities for students to make their own decisions about certain aspects of your class - maybe what kind of paper to use, what colors to make something, etc.
- Provide opportunities for students to work with each other
- don't make assumptions about student behavior
- Allow students to suffer the consequences of their behavior - don't be overprotective
- Allow students to explore options in different situations
- Celebrate your student's achievements, no matter how small

**ATTACHMENTS: Three handouts promoting self-esteem: 1)**

# **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES OF THE WEEK:**

## **Labeling**

A form of classification that includes categorizing and then naming a concept, object, action, or event.

## **Numbered Heads Together**

Each student is assigned a number. Members of group work together to agree on answer. Teacher randomly selects one number. Student with that number answers for group.

## **Paragraph Shrinking**

Partners read in pairs. For the first paragraph, one reads and the other summarizes by stating the main idea of that paragraph. The partners then switch roles for the second paragraph.

## **Ticket to Leave**

Closing activity where students respond in writing or verbally to short assignment.



**"When I asked for a smaller class, I meant fewer students."**

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