

Enhancing students' self-esteem

Teachers can enhance self-esteem both through their day-to-day contacts with the students and through their teaching methods. A number of factors need to be borne in mind by the teacher consciously setting out to enhance self-esteem in his or her students. We summarise them thus:

Teacher self-esteem

A teacher with high self-esteem is likely to engender high self-esteem in his or her students.

Desirable personal characteristics

Originally stressed by Carl Rogers (1969) these are:

Acceptance

This means being non-judgmental with respect to the student and accepting his or her personality as it is.

Genuineness

This means being a 'real person' and not hiding behind a professional mask. Being spontaneous rather than defensive.

Empathy

This means being able to appreciate what it feels like to be another person and involves the challenging task of 'listening to feelings'.

Communication

This takes two forms:

Verbal

Verbal messages can enhance or reduce self-esteem in a student. To achieve the desired enhancement of self-esteem, the student teacher will need to use words and phrases that are encouraging, praising, valuing, and generally relaxing.

Nonverbal

Nonverbal behaviour is particularly powerful in this context, students being extremely sensitive to such signals. Body posture, body orientation, eye contact, pauses in speech, tone, speed of delivery, gesture, can all be used to indicate the extent to which a person likes or dislikes, feels involved or uninvolved, feels superior or inferior to another.

Preferred teaching style

Self-esteem can be enhanced more effectively when a teacher uses a teaching style of his or her choice.

Everyday contacts

A self-evident truth is well supported by research. Of all the factors considered, a student teacher's everyday contacts with students have most effect on self-esteem. Desirably, personal contacts should be made each day – a smile, a word of praise or encouragement can sometimes be sufficient.

Reference

Rogers, Carl (1969) *Freedom to Learn*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.