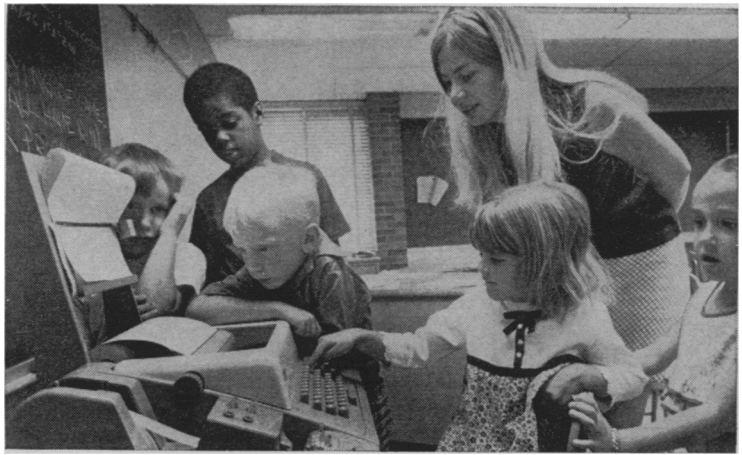


SELF-IMAGE



By assessing and attempting to enhance a schoolchild's self-esteem, researchers hope to make a more meaningful and humane classroom

by Robert J. Trotter

Change has always been a part of the human condition, and with rapid advances in technology, the rate of change has accelerated. But personal values such as mortality and religion (areas remote from technology) are slow to change. The American education system also lags behind the times. It attempts to teach 20th century technology but often uses 19th century methods.

Innovations and advances in the technology of teaching are available but not put to use. "We don't teach the way we were taught to teach; we teach the way we were *taught*," says educa-

tion Prof. Willard Congreve, superintendent of schools in Newton, Iowa. Dr. Theodore Kaltsounis of the University of Washington in Seattle agrees: "While some teachers are familiar with the innovations and have been influenced by the new trends, the majority of them are too far behind and frightened by the volume and the rapidity of change."

This fear of change has caused Victorian attitudes to persist in many elementary and high schools. Students are subjected to repressive and dehumanizing atmospheres and the result too often is disruption or apathy rather

than knowledge. Surveys show that active student protest has taken place in two out of three city and suburban high schools. And in rural areas more than half of the high schools and junior high schools have reported unrest. This unrest includes walkouts, arson, personal violence and vandalism.

In an attempt to get more humanity into the classroom, Project IMPACT (Innovation and Motivation in Polk County for the Advancement of Creativity in Teaching) was started in 1967 under the sponsorship of the Polk County Board of Education in Des Moines, Iowa. The project's major goals are to help teachers examine the variables that influence the humanness of the classroom and to help them elicit more productive and creative thinking on the part of students. More than 400 teachers have taken part in the program thus far.

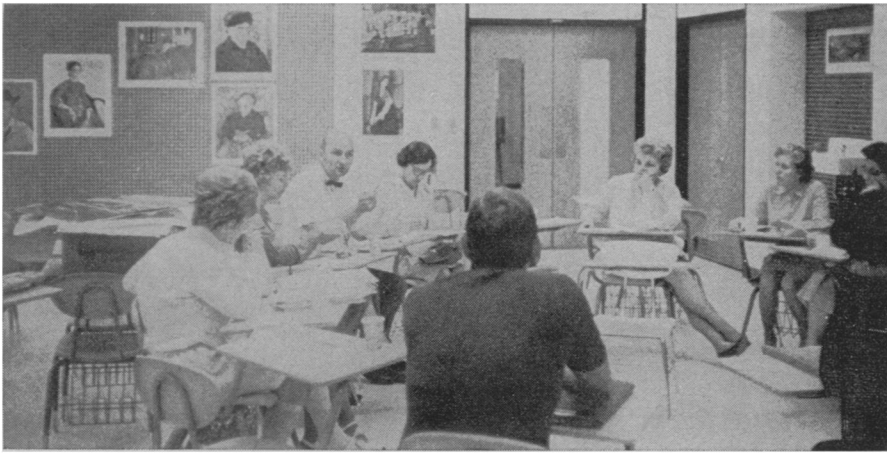
"To measure the extent of success of a project in terms of humanizing the classroom is admittedly difficult," says IMPACT's director of research, Dr. Norma Trowbridge (now at Howard University in Washington, D.C.). Therefore, she says, a criterion to measure the humanizing goal had to be chosen.

Humanizing involves positive efforts to increase an individual's self-esteem, his self-confidence and his feelings that he can make a worthwhile contribution to society. The researchers thus decided that self-concept (the body of attitudes a person holds about himself) could be assessed and used as a measurement of the humanizing goal.



IMPACT

An IMPACT teacher involves children and creates a more human atmosphere.



IMPACT

To affect changes in self-esteem, results were reported back to teachers.

The Self-Esteem Inventory developed by Stanley Coopersmith in 1967, was used to evaluate each child in September and again the following June. The results of four years of this testing are now available.

The tests were conducted in the central United States on a sample of 3,800 children between the ages of 8 and 13 years. One of the first findings concerned the relationship between self-concept and intelligence. Those students scoring above the 90th percentile on a group intelligence test comprised the high-intelligence group and those scoring between the 40th and 60th percentiles made up the average-intelligence group. The researchers discovered that children with high-intelligence scores had significantly lower self-concepts than their average-intelligence counterparts. Only on the subscale involved with home and parents did the high-intelligence group score higher.

The tests indicate that the child of average intelligence feels he is easy to like, believes kids usually follow his ideas, thinks he is popular with kids his own age and perceives himself as fun to be with. But the child of high intelligence feels that teachers expect too much of him because of his exceptional intelligence. He also tends to think something must be wrong with him when the problem is actually with the teacher or school system. And 78 percent of the high-intelligence group report that their parents are pushing them and expect too much of them, compared with only 27 percent in the average-intelligence group.

The self-concept tests, however, were not administered only to determine the relationship between intelligence and self-concept. They were aimed at teacher improvement. "Therefore," says Dr. Trowbridge, "there was a strong commitment to report results back to teachers in ways that they could understand." The teachers could then effect changes in the classrooms. Some,

for example, found it meaningful to know how the kids responded to items such as, "My teacher makes me feel I'm not good enough."

Because previous studies have shown that a person's self-concept can "be correlated with his ability to learn," Dr. Trowbridge and the IMPACT researchers investigated other factors contributing to self-concept. They found that children of low socioeconomic status (SES) scored higher than children of middle SES at all ages, in both sexes, black and other races and in rural as well as urban areas. The lower-class youngsters scored higher except on the home-parent subscale.

This relationship, however, is unclear because other investigations find conflicting results. Some older research indicated that children of low SES reflect the negative image that society holds of them while some suggested no significant differences in children of different SES. And current findings agree with IMPACT results. "Though the findings and research results vary," Dr. Trowbridge says, "the notion that self-concept is an important variable in school performance and in life is widely accepted." The dominant find-

ing of the IMPACT investigations was that lower-class children have a more positive perception of self.

The low SES child, like the average-intelligence child, is comfortable with his peers, thinks he is easy to like and perceives himself as popular. The middle-class child, like the high-intelligence child, does not think much of himself in terms of school because he thinks the teacher perceives him as less able than he is. One reason may be that the lower-class child has a lower level of aspiration than the middle-class child and therefore is happy with his level of achievement. The middle-class child has been taught that school is important, meaningful and relevant and therefore loses self-esteem when he does not achieve success (even when it is not his fault). Another reason may be that the lower-class child is forced to develop a strong self-concept in order to protect his ego in a middle-class environment.

These results, like those of the intelligence study, were reported back to the teachers because, concludes Dr. Trowbridge, "the real value of the study will lie in the extent of constructive change it effects in children's self-concept."

The national mean for the children's Self-Esteem Inventory is 70. Those children participating in Project IMPACT classes in 1968-69 were rated at 69.9 at the outset of the school year and at 72.9 at the end of the year. In 1970 the children's self-concept rose from 71.2 to 73.1. These figures are based on a 100 point scale and the changes are considered to be significant.

The data suggest, say the IMPACT researchers, that teacher participation in the program produces increases in student self-concept. And, they feel this participation has helped to create a more personal and humane climate for the student. □

SUBSCALES ON THE SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

ITEM	Percent of children responding "like me"	
	high intelligence	average intelligence
There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could	64.2	31.9
I really don't like being a boy/girl	45.9	19.8
It takes me a long time to get used to anything new	22.0	5.6
I'm often sorry for the things I do	63.6	47.9
Things are all mixed up in my life	35.9	22.4
I get upset easily when I'm scolded	47.7	34.6
I'm pretty sure of myself	43.0	56.0
I often feel ashamed of myself	21.6	8.9
I can usually take care of myself	71.8	35.2
If I have something to say, I usually say it	74.8	51.7
I can make up my mind and stick to it	68.1	46.7