THE SELF –CONCEPT: DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS.

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the development and educational implications of self -concept. Beginning with its definition, it traces development from the formative stage in child-hood when a child becomes aware of himself largely through significant influences from the environment of his development such as parents, teachers and peers in the home and school setting. These influences are considered critical to the formation of new self-attitudes, which significantly affect the educational achievement of the child.

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INTRODUCTION.

The term self-concept has been variously defined by psychologists. Johnson and Medinnus (1974:367) see it as "an individual's attitude toward his physical self and his own behavior". Chauhan (1978), defines it as a means by which we create our image and identity Simply put, self-concept is the way an individual conceives himself, and this goes a long way in determining his personality make-up. Every individual has a sense of his "self' usually reflected in "f', "me" and "mine", and this is the very essence of an individual. A proper understanding of self-concept therefore will aid guidance counselors in better perception of their clients and the factors underlying their psychological problems. The need for better self-perception cannot be overemphasized. Individuals view themselves in very complicated ways. Morse and wingo (1969), suggest that [208] the degree of ability an individual possesses is relative to his self-perception, which is how he sees himself. Psychologists usually see this by way of attributes such as good health, physical attractiveness, and intelligence e.t.c. Which are normally rewarded by society, while an individual who lacks these attributes becomes disadvantaged. We will not forget also that it does not really matter how much of these attributes a child possesses, but whether he perceives himself as having it. In other words, it is the self -perception of the individual that makes up his self-concept. It is against this background that this paper explores what self-concept is, its development and educational implications.

DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT.

The "self' depicts how an individual perceives his personality. There are various ways in which this awareness develops in an individual. One way is through vision, traceable to early

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childhood or infancy when the child begins to learn that there are distinctions between him and objects in his environment. What he perceives as he explores his environment around him with his sensitive organs like the mouth and fingers give him a broader perspective of himself He comes to realize as Gleitman (1981), puts it that some things feel quite different from others. This feeling he classified as muscular movement. Strain, aches and pains, which is the foundation upon which the complex self-concept is built.

Elkind and Weiner (1978), discovered that as the mental perception of the child gets crystallized and concretized through experiences, he progressively becomes more aware of his body image. Body awareness starts from infancy, when the child becomes more aware of parts of his body, and is able to identify the sex he belongs to. It becomes more glaring when he is more conscious of himself with his peers other than his parents. They further discovered that children [209] between the ages of 2 and 5 years often express pride or concern about their size. Games consisting of undressing or sexual exploration are very common by age 4 -5 years. They ask questions pertaining to sexual matters. For instance, the boys would want to know why they couldn't have babies. A lot of concern is shown when there is any injury or scars on their body. They feel emotionally bad when a tooth is lost or a fingernail is damaged. A lot of attention is beginning to be attached to their physical attractiveness. A parental reaction to all these body awareness of the child affects him, as he is increasingly forming new self-attitudes. Parents who show concern and pleasure at their child's physical growth help the child to feel confident and proud while parents who neglect this strong interest in physical growth make a child look foolish and unimportant.

Herbert Mead in Elkind and Weiner (1978), observed that self-concept can be developed from what he called "reflected appraisals" of others. A child cannot be conscious or aware of these reflected appraisals, until his mental faculties are fu1ly developed and this is usually during early school years. A child becomes critical of peer appraisals and tends to behave him self or her self accordingly. The peer group plays an important role in shaping the self concept of a child, by acting as a mirror through which the child perceives and conceives himself more clearly than before. Apart from this role, the peer influence attaches some values to the traits of its members, thus creating status or class amongst them. These values attached by the peer group, depend on the sex and social class of the group (Goodwin and Herbert, 1975). Close association among members, place, them in a position to know more about one another's physical and mental characteristics. They usually identify their peers through some of their peculiar traits, which either [210] popularize a member or cause him to be withdrawn.

Self-concept can be developed or acquired also from the sense of satisfaction and adequacy a child feels when new skills are mastered and this is common during the preschool years. For example, it has been observed that children laugh and smile when they achieve mastery in act -like bicycle riding. It encourages them at further attempts in mastery and fosters positive self-attitudes. Positive self-attitudes can be influenced by how well a child can perform those activities his peers value. Elkind and Weiner, note that among the children who value sports, being among the best or worst athletes can affect a child' s self concept in sports negatively or positively.

There are significant factors that influence self-concept development in any child. They include the home and school environment. In the home environment, the family is dominant factor in moulding a child's se1f-concept and his total personality during the early childhood. A child readily identifies with what his parent approves or disapproves. The family as a major agent of socialization passes the child through specific training procedures, by providing an atmosphere in which the child learns socially approved values, morals and behaviours, and socially condoned manners and behaviour like being aggressive, and disrespectful. Through socialization, the fam-

ily encourages moral value concepts in a child while the unwanted behaviour are inhibited by strong disapproval. As these behavioural traits are reinforced in a child he becomes aware of a particular behaviour that incurs strong disapproval: from the parents, he or she begins to learn how to conform to approved standards.

Attitudes of parents are very important in the development of self-concept in children. Morgan and King (1971) noted that parents who are well adjusted who love and respect their children tend to encourage and give them a sense of self- worth, self acceptance and self confidence. This enables them face little life's problems. Most parents who unfortunately do not care and encourage their children end up having the children entangled in their emotional problems. Such children grow up with a negative self-concept. [211]

Parents also influence their children's self-concept by acting as models. The boys learn how to be a man by looking at their fathers and the girls likewise act like women. Whether their models are good or bad ones, will go a long way in developing in them, a positive or negative self-concept. Through perceptual learning, they imitate the characteristic traits of their parents, mannerisms and ways of solving problems or facing challenges. A child whose father is a medical doctor for instance, begins to demonstrate or acquire some mannerisms and behaviours peculiar to medical doctors.

Another major factor that affect the development of self-concept in a child is the school environment. This comprises the teachers and the peer group. The teacher's role is very significant in the self-concept development of children. At this formative stage, the children are beginning to be conscious of how people feel about them. The teacher's attitude towards a child's feelings and behaviour is of great influence on a child. Positive attitude towards a child helps him build positive self- concept and vice versa.

Peer group interaction is important to the child's life. As a result of continued interaction with one another, a lot of self-attitudes are formed. They become sociable, develop a sense of belonging or alienation as the case may be. Interpersonal relationships amongst the peer group influence the personality characteristics of the child, which is carried on into adolescent and adult years.

Costanzo and Shaw in Elkind and Weiner (1978), showed the level of peer group influence on a child. They found out that peer group influence on a child becomes remarkable from the 1st to the 6th grade, and that the degree of influence exerted depends on a number of factors. First, the number of times children spend with their peers in the classroom or after school activities, affect the influence they exert on each other. Second, the less active they are with their parents, the greater the tendency to copy what their peers do. Third, children who are held in high esteem by their peer group, tend to exert more influence on their group attitudes and behaviour than those held in low esteem. In turn the low-esteemed children are more susceptible to group influence than the high esteemed ones. Such children find themselves in a dilemma in an attempt to conform to peer norm and satisfy the peer group. They get stuck because there is no clear-cut way of dealing with the situation they have found themselves. It is only children who are sufficiently equipped through some other learning experiences that are able to cope effectively with possible negative influences that accrue from peer group interpersonal relationship. [212]

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF SELF -CONCEPT

Self-concept has a tremendous impact on learning. Achievement of school- age children depends foremost, on how they perceive themselves. The specific training in achievement activities provided by parents for their children during the preschool years help the children to become

self-confident and independent as they face the challenges of new experiences in school. They are better placed to strive for success and mastery in school which their background experience has provided for them.

Teachers are very central in the way children perceive themselves in school. Ensuring a healthy relationship with the pupils is very important in building positive self-concept. Every [213] child wants to be accepted and loved. When teachers show love to the children by way of paying attention to them and seeking to know their individual problems, it builds in the children reassurance and trust. In this way, a child is greatly encourage.

Teacher should be careful in their attitudes and reactions towards under- achievers and problem children. These groups of children already perceive themselves negatively due to possible unwholesome remarks from teacher, parents and peers. The teacher has to be skilled enough to handle such children until confidence and self worth is regained. This can be achieved by counseling with the children, making them recognize their potentials and encouraging them to participate in tasks in school. The way a teacher reacts to pupils' answers to questions is important. At times, teachers criticize and scold children when they fail questions in the class. This is usually expressed through name calling and other forms of derogatory remarks. This makes a child withdraw and alienate himself from others, and results in a sense of self-rejection, failure, and a negative self perception as a "never do well". When a child is commended even when he fails a question like "try hard next time", or "a good attempt" his interest in learning is stimulated. Any sensitive teacher who is committed to his work aims at helping the child to identify his strengths and build up his assets while he is helped to minimize his failures; and learn to live with his liabilities and limitations. In this way a child's self-concept is enhanced and his achievement motivation maximized. An insensitive teacher who is not interested in his children' s welfare can make them to increasingly develop a sense of inferiority , worthlessness and humiliation.

Teachers serve as models to their pupils. Often school children imitate their teachers and demonstrate some of their peculiar qualities which " they admire. This influences the behaviour of the children and help them to build up a positive self image. It has been observed that teach- [214] ers who praise and encourage their children reinforce their industry, and also influence other children in the class to do so. Where children observe the teacher ridicule or scorn a child, they tend to give the same treatment to that child also.

Asagwara (1986), suggested that self-concept in school children can be boosted by encouraging creativity in them. This can be achieved by giving a child responsibility and making him participate in activities that will help him discover himself.

Teachers who teach their children some complex tasks with patience and admiration tend to strengthen the children' s sense of industry for what they are able to accomplish. The children feel confident and motivated at their ability to master new skills. When children are belittled in class it evokes a sense of inferiority and inadequacy,

Biehler (1974), observed that elementary school children are highly sensitive to social comparison, therefore teachers should be careful on how they compare children's academic ability and other abilities to accomplish set tasks. It can be enhanced by engaging children in quizzes and puzzles.

Silverman in Elkind and Weiner (1976) showed that teachers' attitude toward children in the class affect how they perceive themselves. Such attitudes includes calling on children infrequently, giving them only a short time to answer before calling on someone else, accepting or even praising poor work rather than encouraging better work, paying relatively little attention to what children are doing, assigning them to seats in a corner or back row of the class room. The

impact that these can have on children can be devastating to their self-concept.

Asagwera (1986) also feels that teachers should show equal love to their pupil's in spite of differences in their academic abilities and behaviors and should not use force or threat to instill discipline, this will create insecurity and fear in a child, a condition that can undermine academic achievement and may subsequently lead to self-rejection and school drob-out. [215]

CONCLUSION

Self -concept is a very important psychological construct in the development of any individual. Every individual wants to have a complimentary picture of him self but when the facts are not favourable they tend to cover up by way of rationalization and self defense mechanisms. Children usually don't like to be embarrassed or made to look stupid, they will resist any attempt to make them feel so. Any child will readily respond to any activity that can enhance his self-esteem or ego. Teacher's approval or disapproval of children's attitudes and behaviors, which are either punished or rewarded affect the way they perceive themselves; and consequently affect their performance in school. Teachers should therefore recognize and emphasize the potentials of the children in either academic or extra-curricular activities to stimulate the children's interest and build up confidence in them. A positive self-concept in terms of self-esteem and self-acceptance is the foundation for healthy personality -development.

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