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Submission to the INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS
on the points of
Social Factors and Socialisation Skills

There is great concern about declining literacy levels of young people, particularly that of boys. Low literacy level causes low self esteem, which leads boys into trouble. Conversely, low self esteem is a causal factor in poor literacy skills. This submission tackles the issue of low self esteem and how it hampers learning.

Boys' low self esteem creates conflicts

Boys' need for approval from their peers drives them to conform to the peers' masculine role expectations. There are strong expectations on how to learn, behave and communicate. When there is internal conflict between these expectations and the desire to learn, behave and communicate in another way, a person with low self esteem will conform rather than risk being regarded as non-macho, uncool or even feminine.

Parents' low self esteem influences children's self esteem

Low self esteem in a parent blocks their 'general competence' and their 'parental competence' – the ability to guide confidently, firmly and consistently. The relationship between parent and child is affected (Rich, 2000), as is the relationship between the parents, also family stability.

Buckingham (1999) considers the adverse effects on boys' education of spending time in single mother families and suggests it may stem from the absence of a male role model. Additionally, low self esteem suffered by those single mothers' would also contribute to the adverse effects.

**This submission offers an unusual method of *preventing* low self esteem –
with easy-to-teach tested concise, definite and practical Self Acceptance skills.**

Discussed below are:

- ▶ From 'Raising Self Esteem' to 'Teaching Self Acceptance'
Self Esteem
Self Acceptance
- ▶ What Self Acceptance means to Boys
- ▶ What Self Acceptance means to Parents & their Offspring
- ▶ Conclusion

The Recommendations on page 4 are followed by professional comments about this method and other attachments.

From ‘Raising self esteem’ to ‘Teaching Self Acceptance skills’

The usual practice is to try and raise children’s self esteem. Unfortunately, this has pitfalls. These pitfalls do not occur with Self Acceptance.

Self Esteem

The main pitfall is that for ‘high self esteem’ we need the approval of others. They bring us the sense of worth that leads to self esteem. We depend on them but we cannot control what they will say or do. We can’t be sure if our self worth and self esteem are about to rise and make us feel great or ‘high’, or about to fall and make us feel worthless and low. The dependence on others for approval has us vulnerable and insecure.

Low self esteem is excruciatingly painful.

Boys in particular will take desperate, ill-judged actions and risks in an effort to boost their self esteem.

Inability to gain and maintain constant approval is the groundwork for unworthiness, low self esteem, depression and suicide.

Self Acceptance

‘Self Acceptance’ is, simply, acknowledging yourself. It is accepting totally the fact that ‘I am Me’ and recognising that everything about you is a fact. It is realising inside yourself that this total you is a fact, whether you like different aspects about yourself or not. Self Acceptance is unconditional.

When the notion of ‘self esteem’ is replaced with ‘Self Acceptance’, there is no such dependence on others. For Self Acceptance learners rely totally on themselves – ‘I can take it in my own hands’ – and create their own security. In this *inner* security they find inner strength. Their potential is released.

Twelve simple skills make up Self Acceptance. The skills were devised and tested over a period of 20 years until I was sure that they do achieve what I had sought – a set of easy-to-teach, easy-to-learn practical cognitive skills to prevent damaging low self esteem.

An example is, give yourself your own encouragement when you need it, and give yourself your own praise (when warranted) to be sure of it, without waiting for someone else to do it first. If they give you praise or encouragement too, that’s great. If they don’t, you don’t feel bad because you haven’t missed out.

Evaluation confirmed that the Self Acceptance skills produce self-identity and confidence, improve relationships, and prevent needless problems.

What Self Acceptance means for Boys

Self Acceptance gives boys independence from peer expectations. Released from the pressures of high *or* low self esteem, there is no internal conflict. If peers regard their actions as uncool, non-macho or even feminine, that's a pity but it's not the end of the world. Self-reliant Self Acceptance has them free to consider their own wishes, to judge *realistically*, and to make their own decisions. The decision to learn literacy and communication, and to behave in socially acceptable ways can be asserted comfortably and in a uniquely personal way.

'Unconditional self acceptance allows you to become secure and confident and to relate to others as equals. .. For children .. with a learning disability this would indeed be liberating' (Rowena Harding-Smith, see attachment).

Self Acceptance can **prevent later trouble** with dangers such as alcohol, drug and smoking abuse, depression and suicide, and dysfunctional social, couple and family relationships.

Acquiring the skills to Self Acceptance is a means to acquiring maturity, and maturity is the route to responsibility.

What Self Acceptance means for Parents & their Offspring

Adults learning the Self Acceptance skills gain access to the competence within. They release an astonishing ability to judge situations well, to pre-empt or to handle them with spontaneously emerging communication.

The self-accepting parent, single mother or not, handles sons, daughters – and the other parent – confidently, firmly and consistently. As a result, parent-child relationships improve, as does the relationship between the parents (even where father lives separately). Family stability provides security for offspring.

Parental Self Acceptance provides both boys and girls with a sound basis for learning.

Conclusion

Tested, practical and definite, these simple skills are easy to teach to children in the early and middle years of schooling (see pages 3, 4 and 5 for comments and reviews).

When implemented they can enhance the effectiveness of other successful strategies adopted by schools.

To make the Self Acceptance skills widely accessible, I put them into an easy-to-read book, *Happiness – It's Up To You, Easy Steps to Self Acceptance and Good Relationships* (first published by Collins Dove, now by Boolarong Press), adding essential communication skills such as 'the "S-hook" of listening and responding' for either closeness or distance, and to resolve conflicts.

It can be used to support the following recommendations.

The Recommendations

- That these fundamental Self Acceptance life-skills will be a compulsory subject taught throughout all schools either formally or informally
- That they are included in teacher training at all teachers colleges
- That there is a whole-school approach to teaching them, backed by the principal and school guidance counsellors, and continued as new personnel join the school
- That the skills are taught by each teacher, either informally in a fun way or in specific lessons (also in a fun way)
- That all school personnel reinforce the skills informally at every opportunity
- That Self Acceptance courses are offered regularly to parents for their own benefit and their children's, and taught to individual parents as required.

Excerpts from Reviews and Feedback

I have only just started to use your methods but already have managed to feel better about a number of incidents which were bothering me. My husband and I have started to use your recommended language on our children. My 6 year-old now corrects me and says "I'm not naughty. I just did a naughty thing when I smacked Michael".

Parent from country NSW

Over this last month or so I have been able to deal with a lot of "inside hassles" I was previously only vaguely aware of. My nine year old is also using your guidelines to help understand and rationalise a lot of worrying thoughts.

Our relationship has broadened in a most wonderful way!

Mother from Melbourne

.. Teaches skills such as turning discouraging self talk into encouragement. .. A common sense approach to dealing with problems which highlights the fact that individuals have more control over problems than they may at first realise.

A. Soutter, SCAN

.. Ways in which a person may go about taking charge of negative thoughts and actions, converting these into positive approaches which in turn will lead to better self image and more satisfaction with life. ..

I recommend that teachers, both primary and secondary, add (this book) to their list of essential reading.

Ted Campbell, Principal Education Officer/Guidance, Metropolitan North Region

A simple and articulate tool to use with kids to help them handle their feelings and self-image in a sensible and understandable manner. .. To assist young people to come to terms with being responsible, I cannot recommend (this method) too highly.

Dave Kendall, Youth Worker