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THE SELF CONCEPT AND ITS RELATION TO SPEECH AND READING

Dorothy Edna Smith and Katharine G. Butler

One of the most exciting prospects in our search for excellence in the teaching of reading is emerging from the field of psychology. By now it is axiomatic that our efficiency as teachers is inextricably bound up with the psychological aspects of the individual student. All of us have been told over and over again to Pay Attention To The Individual. As a matter of fact this admonition has become so universal that it now has attained the status of being called by its initials: PATTI.

The most troublesome problem connected with this, however, is that everyone has many "selves." For example, Suzanne who may seem cooperative, compliant, and efficient to her mother, may seem shy, a tattletale, and officious to her schoolmates, and she may appear to be a holy terror to her younger brother. Which of these views is right? Perhaps all of them. Perhaps none of them. And, perhaps it does not matter. Psychological research is beginning to indicate that the "self" which is an important and relevant factor in learning is the one the person himself perceives. The self *concept* the individual has—his own judgement of what kind of a person he is—is probably the self that learns easily or with difficulty.

We have all seen, at one time or another, evidence of this principle. If Billy drops his glass of milk in the lunch line at school and is called clumsy, then at home he stumbles over the dog when he is hurrying to the TV set and his mother calls him clumsy, and later he tears his best trousers on a protruding nail on a construction site near his church and is called clumsy—all occurrences which might easily have been fortuitous—Billy himself begins to think he is clumsy. And, the chances are, from this point on he will *be* more clumsy.

Most authorities in the speech correction field agree that this principle holds for stutterers. They say that everybody stumbles in his speech at some time or another, particularly during the first few years of speaking, and that the ones who are told to stop stuttering, the ones who end up believing that they stutter, constitute the bulk of the people who have a serious stuttering problem.

Some Questions

The apparent importance of self concept to behavior is raising many questions, questions of vital interest to teachers of reading. Is

there a relationship between a child's self concept and his communication skills?(1) Does one have an effect on the other? Would a child with a reading disability have greater ego strength than one with a speech difficulty? Would a pattern emerge if the two groups were judged in relation to each other? If a pattern emerged, which direction would it take? Children with a reading defect can hide their lack from the casual observer, whereas children with a speech problem announce their difficulty to the world every time they talk. What effect would these facts have on their self concept?

The Purpose of the Study

In order to get some answers to these questions the authors decided to investigate the relative self concept of speech defective children, reading defective children, and those children who can speak and read fluently.

Procedure

Ninety-seven children who were between the ages of 8-0 to 10-11 were tested. Socio-economic levels and urban-rural ratios were roughly approximate to the 1960 census.

Schools in Kalamazoo, Michigan and San Jose, California were contacted, and children of the appropriate ages were selected at random from these schools. Approximately half of the population came from each community. No attempt was made to divide the children equally as to sex, and the proportions were found to be 58 boys and 39 girls. All but four of the children were in the second, third or fourth grades, and those four were in the fifth grade.

The three tests were administered to all of the children, and when the speech and reading tests were scored it was found that 33 children who had no speech defect were at least six months retarded in reading, 26 children who read at grade level or above had articulation difficulties, and 38 children who had no speech problem read at grade level or above. This last group was used as controls.

The Draw-A-Person tests were scored on the Haworth-Normington Sexual Differentiation Scale(5) and the level for each subject was determined. The Chi² formula was then applied to the data to ascertain if there were significant differences among the three groups.

The three tests administered to all of the children were the Detroit Silent Reading Test II, Form A, the Bryngelson-Gillespie Speech Test, and the Draw-A-Person Test, scored on the Haworth-Normington Sexual Differentiation Scale as a Measure of Self Con-

cept. The first two of these tests are well known and more or less self-explanatory, but the third test might be more meaningful with a description.

Draw-A-Person Test

There have been many methods used in the attempt to assess self-concept; personality inventories, check lists, teacher rating scales, and analysis of projective material, among others. One of the quickest and easiest ways of eliciting submerged levels of self image is by the use of the Draw-A-Person technique. Tunnelle, an artist, once said, "The artist does not see things as they are, but as he is." Karen Machover's(4) extensive research has substantiated this thesis. Among the many other people who have conducted studies in this area, Hammer(3) suggests that one's felt or subjective psycho-maturational age tends to be projected, and Fisher and Fisher(3) found a relationship between the femininity expressed in females' figure drawings and their psycho-sexual adjustment.

Some authorities in the area of self concept have used the Draw-A-Person technique as a method of measurement. Haworth and Normington developed a Sexual Differentiation Scale which permits analysis through the child's portrayal of female and male figures, and provides a developmental index of psycho-sexual maturity. Normal children reveal a gradually increasing ability to differentiate the sexes by means of this visual-motor task.

For the Draw-A-Person test the child is asked to draw a male and a female figure, one on each side of the paper. The Sexual Differentiation Scale assigns ratings to the drawings of 1, 2, 3, or 4. According to the scale, children with a rating of 4 have an excellent self concept, and those with a rating of 3 have a better than average adjustment with themselves. The rating of 2 is considered inadequate, and anyone with a rating of 1, it is presumed, does not perceive himself as being worthy of consideration.

Test Results

Using the first two tests, the Detroit Silent Reading Test and the Bryngelson-Gillespie Speech Test, the ninety-seven children were divided into the three groups mentioned earlier. Thirty-three of the children were at least six months retarded in reading and had no speech defect. Twenty-six children who read at grade level or above were found to have articulation difficulties, and thirty-eight children read at grade level or above and evidenced no speech problem.

The Sexual Differentiation Scale was applied to all of the children's drawings, and the frequencies for each group were determined. The obtained frequencies show that the control group (the children who read and speak adequately) were most heavily concentrated in the Sexual Differentiation Scale Level 3, indicating good self concept. The speech disability group was mainly at the Sexual Differentiation Scale Level 2, and the poor readers scored at the two lowest levels, 1 and 2.

The lowest category on the Sexual Differentiation Scale, Level 1, which indicates inability to make any distinction between maleness and femaleness, included less than 3% of the control group, 7½% of the speech defectives, and 42% of the reading defective children. Minimal differentiation (Sexual Differentiation Scale Level 2) was recorded by 13% of the control group, 69% of the speech defectives, and 45% of the poor readers. Sexual Differentiation Scale Level 3, wherein one figure is more clearly differentiated than the other, was reached by 23% of the speech defectives, but only 6% of the defective reading group. This contrasts with 71% of the control children. No child in either of the two experimental subgroups was able to differentiate clearly both figures (Level 4), whereas 13% of the control group made this distinction.

Some Conclusions

The results of this study support the conclusion that children with speech disabilities have an inadequate self concept. The mean of their Sexual Differentiation Scale scores was 2.25. Even more conclusive is the evidence that poor readers have a greatly diminished self concept. The mean of their scores was 1.59. The so called "normal" children—those with adequate speech and reading abilities—tended toward a good concept of self, with a mean of 2.93.

Statistical analysis reveals that there is a highly significant difference in self concept, as measured by the scale, between normal children, those with a speech problem, and those with a reading problem. Each one of these three groups is significantly different from either of the others.

The analysis also indicates that among speech defectives, the greater the ability to differentiate on the Sexual Differentiation Scale, the higher the reading level. Children with reading problems reveal a lowered Sexual Differentiation Scale level correlated with depressed reading scores. There was no statistically significant relationship

between the number of articulation errors exhibited and the ability to read at or above grade level.

The findings of this study would appear to substantiate the belief that a child's perception of himself is a vital aspect of at least two of his communication skills; speech adjustment and reading adjustment. It also seems to be significant that children with covert difficulties (reading problems) have lower self concepts than children with overt difficulties (speech problems). Perhaps this could mean that the open acknowledgement of the disability, whatever it might be, could render it less harmful. Whether this is true or not, it is surely true that reading therapists must recognize their dual responsibility. Although there is no evidence to show whether poor self concept is a cause or an effect of poor reading, the correlation between the two is so great that there can be no doubt that the goal of the therapist should be to improve the self esteem as well as the communication skill.

Shakespeare's Iago in Othello said, "I've never met a man who thought well enough of himself."

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