THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND STUDENT READING ABILITY, READING LEVEL, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

Loree J. Hisken

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development University of Central Missouri

December, 2011
ABSTRACT

by

Loree J. Hisken

What aspects affect a students’ level of self-esteem? This research is an examination of the correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. This research was completed using the University of Central Missouri library and online databases to gather articles and previous research on the areas of self-esteem, reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. The research showed that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. Students’ levels of self-esteem were positively impacted if they were successful in reading and other academics.
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

A student’s self-esteem is commonly affected during the school years. High and low self-esteem can cause different experiences for students. Self-esteem is defined as the complication of feelings that guide behavior, influences attitudes, and drives motivation (Dedmond, 11). The topic of this research is self-esteem and its impact on reading level, reading ability, and academic achievement.

The research discusses problems with self-esteem and how it can affect students. Struggling with self-esteem creates adverse affects on all areas of a student’s life from social to academic. Self-esteem is most often lowered by failure, criticism, and rejection (Leary, 34). Book selection of students is investigated as well. Book selections can either help or hurt students’ reading ability and level of self-esteem depending on the choices that are made. Finally, three programs to improve reading are described. Participating in reading programs produces noticed improvement in students’ reading skills and a rise in their level of self-esteem from their new reading abilities (Newlin, 43).

Researchers have assumed that people want to maintain a confident level of self-esteem because they posses the desire to feel good about themselves (Leary, 33). Some have suggested that a high level of self-esteem facilitates the achievement of goals (33). Teachers who are aware of the levels of self-esteem their students have about themselves can develop activities and lessons that lead to success for the students. Students, who are able to achieve their goals of being successful in school, experience a boost in self-esteem and encouragement.
Statement of the Problem

The problem discussed in this research is self-esteem in students and the factors that affect it. Self-esteem can be crucial for students of all ages, and the desire to foster positive self-esteem is an aspect of being in school and among peers. Students with a positive self-esteem have been shown to have higher levels of reading ability and reading skills, as well as a higher level of academic achievement (Sweet, 3). These students also have a more positive outlook in their daily lives. Students with low self-esteem struggle with problems they face in school, whether it is academically or socially. Their daily lives outside of school can also suffer from a lower level of self-esteem. The main problem seen with self-esteem issues is that students become more focused on how they are viewed by their peers rather than focused on their schoolwork (Hughes, 213).

If students have a high level of self-esteem as they move through their school years, it ensures that they will be as successful as possible. When high self-esteem is in place, students do not spend as much time worrying about the way they are viewed by their peers. This also allows students to focus on their schoolwork and learning more than how they are seen by their peers. When a high level of self-esteem is in place, students are able to be more successful academically and socially. Teachers and staff in schools can learn to recognize ways to foster positive self-esteem in all students. Encouraging students to explore their own interests when making books selections and planning activities and lessons that allow all students to feel successful are ways to foster positive self-esteem. Teaching students ways to deal with personal issues is another way for them to learn how to increase their self-esteem. By recognizing the struggles with
self-esteem and addressing them at an early age, students are able to spend the majority of their schooling being as successful as possible.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research and study is to review the literature to explore the correlation between self-esteem and various aspects of a students’ school success. The research describes both positive and negative effects of self-esteem issues. This study presents ways to increase or improve the level of self-esteem in students. The results of this study show that there is a correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement.

**Research Questions**

This study was focused around three questions that were intended to guide the research in a way to gain the most useful knowledge on the subject. These questions address all the areas mentioned in the thesis statement.

1. Is there any correlation between self-esteem and the reading ability of students?
2. What factors affect book selection of students?
3. Which library programs improve reading?

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study included a limited amount of peer reviewed journals and texts that are related to or discuss the proper aspects of self-esteem, reading level, reading ability, and academic achievement. The data collected included journals, articles, and dissertations dealing with all the subjects listed previously. There were also topics that were related to this research that were not appropriate to include in this literature.
review such as whether self-esteem predicts later outcomes in life, self-esteem in visually impaired students, and self-esteem and dyslexia. Final limitations to the study include access to articles with relevant information.

**Definition of Terms**

The terms defined below should be used to clarify their meaning when encountering them in the following research. Some terms have been defined by the researcher to give the clearest explanation possible.

*Academic Achievement* - The level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area, as opposed to one's potential.

*Reading Ability* - The reading comprehension skills of a reader.

*Reading Level* - Grade level text that a student is successfully able to read.

*Self Esteem* - The complication of feelings about ourselves that guides our behavior, influences our attitudes, and drives our motivation (Dedmond, 11).

**Research Design**

This research study was based on relevant articles, journals, and dissertations. These articles discussed self-esteem, reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. I used the University of Central Missouri Library to conduct research. Articles and information were retrieved from the following databases, Academic Search Complete; Education Research Complete; PsycArticles; Library Literature and Information Science Full Text; Academic One File; and JSTOR. Search terms used
included “self-esteem”, “self-esteem AND reading ability”, “self-esteem AND reading level”, “academic achievement”, and “self-esteem AND academic achievement”.

**Conclusion**

This research includes three chapters showing that there is a correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. This information is presented through a literature review in chapter two. Chapter three includes answers to the research questions that were posed in chapter one as well as conclusions. The information presented in this study is useful for teachers, administrators and staff in all levels of schools. It can be used to help students have the most successful education experience possible. The results of this study show that there is a correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Self-esteem is something that many people struggle with at some point during their lifetime. Self-esteem is defined as the complication of feelings about ourselves that guides our behavior, influences our attitudes, and drives our motivation (Dedmond, 11). Competence and self-worth are two important parts of self-esteem. The ability to feel capable and have a sense of value about oneself are indicators of the level of self-esteem a person has (Dedmond, 3). Barrow explains self-esteem as the ability to cope with life’s challenges, the feeling of being worthy, and deserving and the right to enjoy the product of hard work (41). Adolescence especially is a period in life with rapid changes that affect self-esteem, shifting expectations, changing roles, and complex relationships (Block, 909). Self-esteem is a crucial factor in the developmental process of teens (909). Self-esteem can affect many things in a student’s life from their relationship with peers and teachers to their academic success. The reading ability of students can be a direct indication of their level of self-esteem (Sweet, 3). There is a correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement.

This literature review will describe the correlation between self-esteem and reading ability. The next section, on self-esteem and reading ability, will look at how high or low levels of self-esteem affect a student’s reading skills. There is also discussion in this section about whether the reading ability of a student can affect his or her level of self-esteem. The section on book selection and self-esteem will review the
ways that students make their reading choices. Choices that are based on personal interests, social relationships, and reading ability allow for students to feel the most successful. The final section presents programs to improve reading and reviews different ways for teachers, parents, and librarians to help students feel more successful while reading. These programs can be used to help raise self-esteem levels as well.

**Self-esteem and Reading Ability**

Factors related to self-esteem that can impact reading are considered first in this section. Issues with self-esteem and motivation, as they relate to reading ability, are also investigated to determine how they are involved with each other. Self-esteem and reading ability are shown to go hand in hand. Students with low self-esteem tend to have lower reading abilities because they do not feel confident enough to take risks in their reading. They are not confident enough in themselves or their ability to try new genres, authors, or types of reading materials. Thus, finally the relationship between motivation, reading achievement, and self-esteem is described.

**Factors in Self-Esteem**

Researchers have found that people want to maintain a confident level of self-esteem because they possess the desire to feel good about themselves (Leary, 33). Some have suggested that a high level of self-esteem facilitates the achievement of goals (33). High self-esteem can help with coping skills and low self-esteem can lead to avoidance of problems, these both relate to how students achieve goals in their daily lives. Children learn to develop a healthy self-esteem when adults around them show them support in
their attempts to try new things (Egertson, 58). Children who have a healthy self-esteem are satisfied in their activities without the constant need for approval (58).

Having high aspirations is common among students that show academic achievement. Students with high self-esteem usually set higher goals for themselves and become more willing to continue in the case of failure (Baumeister 10). High self-esteem may also help students have the confidence to tackle difficult situations as well as see satisfaction from their progress and success (10). El-Anzi found that there are many factors that can reduce or enhance the level of academic achievement in students (95). Factors that may lower academic achievement are anxiety and pessimism, while self-esteem and optimism may increase academic achievement (95). The results of El-Anzi’s study revealed that there was a significant relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem, though it was not found whether self-esteem is the cause of academic achievement or if academic achievement is the cause of self-esteem (100).

Self-perception is often referred to as self-esteem or self-worth (Caselman, 353). Research initially showed that children do not distinguish between their self-perceptions in different contexts (353). However more recent research has identified that children do view themselves at different levels of self-esteem for different areas of their lives (354). Some of the areas shown to have different levels of self-esteem for students include math and reading concepts, peer relationships, parent relationships, and physical appearance (354). Peer relationships in children and teens can be seen as the building blocks to intellectual, social, and identity issues (Caselman, 355). Teens especially start spending more time with their friends than their family members, and it is their friends that
see as an important source of support (355). It is from these friendships that a teen’s self-perception grows and develops. While friendships can help self-esteem grow, they can also harm a student’s level of self-esteem. Feeling inadequate as a friend, by either not feeling capable of showing support or not having the same level of friendship in return, can lead to problems in classroom participation and social adjustment (355). Intimate peer support, such as from close friends, is just as beneficial as global peer support, such as from classmates (366). School and classroom settings can be a factor in building a students’ self-perception or esteem since this is where children make most of their peer connections. Creating positive school atmospheres, where students can connect with others, will help them become successful, self-confident students (Caselman, 369).

**Issues with Self-Esteem.**

The desire to “feel good about oneself” is a primary aspect of the human nature (Leary, 32). Struggling with self-esteem usually creates adverse affects on all areas of a student’s life from social to academic. Self-esteem is most often lowered by failure, criticism, and rejection (Leary, 34). When students have a low self-esteem, research has shown that they can suffer from a range of psychological difficulties such as loneliness, academic failure, and depression (34). “A healthy self-esteem must be carefully fostered in our youngsters if they are to realize, and eventually assume, all the promises and challenges that life sets before them” (Curtis qtd. in Greenstone, 675). However extremely high self-esteem is not always healthy self-esteem (Egertson, 58). When a child becomes arrogant instead of just having good self-esteem it can become unhealthy and lead to poor outcomes because they have an inflated idea of what they can do (58).
More research has shown that children who move towards negative or dangerous behaviors and take others with them have an unusually high self-esteem (58).

Self-esteem is an area that affects almost all decisions young students, especially girls, make throughout their lives (Dedmond, 4). Greenstone explains how children’s writers have produced heaps of books meant to boost self-esteem over the last three decades (675). One way to build self-esteem is to introduce students to books with images and stories of characters that have a positive outlook on their lives and those around them. However some of these books rely on the assumption that reading about someone else with high self-esteem will actually boost the self-esteem of the reader (678). Also self-esteem stories can lack some of the building blocks of storytelling, such as conflict. They tend to focus on the protagonist’s self-satisfaction, even when failing, rather than the ability to overcome a challenge or conflict (678).

Teachers, administrators and other school personnel are key influences in students’ lives (Dedmond, 5), and the influence of these adults can be a positive force for high self-esteem in students. Having positive, encouraging interactions with adults they see every day at school can help students feel more confident. It can also remind students that the adults are interested and aware of how they are doing in school and the students may be more likely to make sure they do not disappoint the adults around them. When students observe their teachers showing excitement about reading and taking part in their own personal reading they see the importance of reading for personal pleasure (Sanacore, 181).
Shyness is characterized as a temperamental trait that is shown as a sense of wariness and self-consciousness in social situations where children feel like they are being evaluated (Hughes, 213). Being shy can be a problem for students’ self-esteem because they may not have enough confidence to see themselves in a positive light. Shyness can be associated with a range of socio-emotional difficulties including poor peer relationships and loneliness (213). There is some indication that shy children have greater difficulties in school compared to those students who do not appear to be shy. Some of the difficulties shy students may experience are trouble with school adjustment, forming positive relationships, and having a high sensitivity to less positive classroom climates (213).

In more recent research it has been found that “shy children may be perceived as having underdeveloped academic skills because of their lack of participation in classroom activities” (Asendorpf & Meier qtd. in Hughes, 214). These findings are a realization that shy students are not always unmotivated students who cannot function at the same level as the rest of the class. These students are shy, which may cause them to speak less and not participate as often as their peers. Teachers may see these students speak with fewer words or shorter sentences (214). Shyness is related to self-esteem, and it can cause shy students to feel left out so that their level of self-esteem suffers further. Only by individually evaluating shy students can it be assumed that they are struggling in their schoolwork. For example, shyness does not have an affect on standardized testing situations, which shows that there is probably not a significant effect on reading comprehension or math skills (Hughes, 218). The students should be encouraged to form
positive relationships with their teacher and a few select peers to help increase their level of participation.

The school setting can cause issues for students and their level of self-esteem. It can either hurt them or equip them with the tools to maintain a positive level of self-esteem. Students spend such a significant amount of time in school that it is imperative that they are able to build high levels of self-esteem through relationships with their peers and teachers.

**Motivation, Reading Achievement, and Self-Esteem.**

When discussing motivation there are two types that can provide different reasons for student achievement. Intrinsic motivation comes from students’ interest in a topic or activity and their desire to learn or complete the activity for their own personal benefit. Extrinsic motivation comes from students participating in an activity for a reward of some sort usually given by the teacher (Unrau, 81). Some feel that giving rewards for participation prevents students from learning to become intrinsically motivated on schoolwork. Studies show that academic reading is most likely driven by a combination of both types of motivation. Middle school students can have different reasons behind their motivation, and finding out what those are can be essential to their engagement and their growth in literacy and learning (Unrau, 100).

Students’ self-esteem may have an affect on their achievement and motivation level. Underachievers commonly have low self-esteem, and in turn these students don’t always seem diligent enough to use and modify proper strategies when it comes to challenging tasks (Carr, 109). Also students who choose poor strategies or don’t have
adequate skills to solve problems may develop a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed (Galbraith, 29). This will cause those students to begin avoiding situations where they may feel embarrassed because they don’t want to take the risk of failure (29). The response of peers and others to success or failure is key to a students’ self-esteem (31).

Students today are being assigned to read increasingly complicated texts, and there is not always enough time being spent on showing them the proper strategies to understand these materials (Ivey, 350). Most students today begin school with an adequate level of self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, so it is becoming evident that the problems with motivation and self-esteem are affected by factors in school (Carr, 116). Parents can be a factor too though; “parents who believed in the importance of effort and who gave their children strategic-oriented experiences were more likely to have children who were strategic” (116). Proper reading strategies and strategies for making decisions help students make proper reading selections.

Research from Zimmerman and Allenbrand found that poor readers often didn’t have a sense of personal worth and adequacy and in turn avoided certain activities (qtd. in Jiao, n.p.). These students found it unbearable when they were to study hard and still fail, so many of them chose to not even try. Research also shows that students with positive self-perception or esteem are more self-motivated and are more willing to keep trying (Jiao, n.p.).

Students’ attitudes toward reading and their views of their own reading ability are a vital aspect of their literacy outcome (Martin, 14). Students who see themselves as
good readers tend to have a history of reading and are more likely to continue to have positive interactions with text (Martin, 14). The students who feel like they are not strong readers have usually not experienced much success in reading (14) and have a lower level of self-esteem.

Another issue with reading motivation is that students are expected to read critically and become independent readers but are getting limited time to explore their own interests, read at their own pace, or make their own decisions about whether they want to read a book (Ivey, 350). Students in middle grades, in particular, need the time and ability to be able to explore their personal interests. Students at this level are still developing as readers and beginning to explore their identity and role in their world. Some students may be proficient readers and writers outside of the school setting because they do not feel confined or restrained by curriculum or subject matter that is either uninteresting, too challenging, or both.

School reading can evolve to adapt to the changing reading habits of students. Young people are engaging in reading that is from a variety of medias and technologies, not just the traditional text (Ivey, 354). In surveying students, Ivey found that the biggest motivational factors for students wanting to read in class were good materials and having a choice in what they read.

Sweet found in a study done in 1976 that self-esteem is more likely to affect reading levels rather than reading levels affecting self-esteem (22). More specifically the study found that increases in self-esteem lead to increases in reading comprehension (3). Kaniuka stated that there seems to be little evidence that increasing a student’s level of
self-esteem will raise their level of achievement. However in his study of elementary students, those showing academic success possessed more positive attitudes towards reading and higher levels of reading related self-esteem (184). When other variables are considered such as ability, background, and family factors, these may have more impact on a student’s level of self-esteem than their level of academic achievement. Some students may be more successful in their reading achievement if they begin with a high level of self-esteem because they will not feel as discouraged if they struggle. Other students may see an increase in their level of self-esteem when they become better readers.

Pyszczynski has asked the question “Why does self-esteem facilitate well-being, positive affect, and successful coping?” (452). From his perspective self-esteem provides a buffer against anxiety which in turn helps maintain a psychological well-being and helps with coping (452). Anxiety can interfere with performance ability and coping strategies in many areas of a person’s life. By increasing self-esteem, levels of anxiety can be controlled and people are able to function more successfully and cope with more challenges than without it (Pyszczynski, 452).

It has also been shown that students who spend a lot of their time reading a variety of materials will be able to develop a lifetime habit of reading, as well as a context for learning vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and other literacy skills (Sanacore, 180). Reading a high quality level of literature helps increase students’ knowledge base and can help them become smarter students. This is even more effective when it is independent reading that students have chosen for themselves.
**Book Selections and Self-Esteem**

This section describes book selections that students make and how their self-selected choices can reflect and affect their reading ability and desire to read. The relationship between book selections and social relationships will also be described. Finally, book selections and self-esteem are compared to see the connections between how and what students are choosing to read and their level of self-esteem. A student’s reading ability and desire to read can directly affect his or her self-esteem. Personally engaging materials encourage reluctant readers to read more (Ivey, 353); so by allowing students to choose their own selections, they can become stronger, more independent readers.

**Self-Selected Reading.**

Book selections, whether chosen by a teacher or student can make or break the way a student feels about reading. Learning how to choose books they will be able to read and enjoy is part of the process of becoming a reader (Ollman, 648), but it is not something that comes naturally to all students. Self-selection allows students to enjoy reading about their personal interests. When they are able to define and realize what they care about, they can begin to define who they are as a person (648).

Choices that students make for their personal reading can be a good indicator of their interests. Teachers strive to help students learn to read critically and become independent readers, but in school students are rarely given time to explore their own interests, read at their own pace, or decide which books they want to read (Ivey, 350).
Arnstead found that there are many factors that contribute to student reading choices, the main ones being: series books, cover art, reviews on the Internet, and Accelerated Reader programs (34). Series books provide students with a comfortable place to choose, they know the author, the style of writing, and the characters; and, if they enjoyed the first book, they will more than likely continue to like the series. Cover art has an impact as well on self-selected reading. Covers that are up-to-date are more appealing. The summary about the book, found on the cover, is the most common element used when choosing whether to read a book or not. The Internet can contribute to student reading choices through book reviews. There are many sources online to view book reviews and evaluations. Students learn to judge their interest in a book though the validity of the person writing the book reviews. Accelerated Reader programs don’t always allow students to choose books completely based on their interests. The program does however introduce students to a variety of books at their reading level.

A 2001 study discovered five areas that avid readers use when choosing books (Arnstead, 36). The type of reading experience, the sources they use to find new books, certain elements of the book, clues on the book itself, time to find the book and cost to acquire it all come into play. There was no indication in the study that these strategies apply to all readers, however (Arnstead, 37).

Literacy was found to be another factor in personal reading choices for students. Boys see literacy as a social practice that helps them develop relationships with peers, while girls’ practices are more similar to the activities encouraged by their teachers (Arnstead, 35). Protagonist gender has been found to be somewhat similar among boys
and girls and usually both prefer to read about a male protagonist. Finally, girls tend to choose books based on recommendations from their peers while boys tend to choose by genre and look for action in the story. “The primary male interests were transportation, sports and war. The female choices were horses, mystery fiction, romance fiction, and fine arts and crafts” (Arnstead, 36).

**Book Selection and Social Relationships.**

A personal desire to read can be affected by students’ book selections, social relationships, and their reader identity. All three of these aspects help build a strong student and can help foster a high level of self-esteem and a desire to read for personal growth (Bang-Jensen, 169). Social relationships are influential to personal reading choices because peers know each other’s interests and can recommend books to each other. Bang-Jensen explored how relationships between friendship and book selection might be beneficial to reading instruction as well. “Students who share deep knowledge of a book or seek recommendations of titles contribute to the development of themselves as readers and to their classroom reading community” (172). By talking about the books with each other and why they would recommend them, students are engaging in reading comprehension and discussion skills that are valuable in other subject areas and classroom activities. In a study with younger students, researchers “learned how much of reading, particularly the decision about what to read, is social. Some children carefully observed the reading habits of their friends or their classroom idols and began reading similar books in order to strengthen their relationship with these friends” (Pierce qtd. in Bang-Jensen, 172). It is found that as students talk about books they are reading, the
descriptions often shed light on themselves, their fondness of a certain genre and the ability to choose their own books. When students are aware of these things about themselves they begin developing strategies that help them choose books (Bang-Jensen, 172).

Hopper executed a study on the personal reading choices of students and found that young people read for two reasons: to meet emotional needs and to meet academic needs. Reading allows students to escape to another place and forget what they are going through emotionally or it can help them explore another place as they learn. Books that help students deal with issues in their lives are becoming a larger part of the teenage book market; books dealing with matters of prejudice, bullying, racism, lives of refugees, sex, and appearance are all becoming popular (Hopper, 116). Social relationships are created between students to help meet emotional needs; when reading and books become a part of these relationships, the students are affected on a deeper level (Bang-Jensen, 172).

**Book Selection and Self-Esteem.**

Psychologists have suggested that a high level of self-esteem can fix many psychological and social problems (Leary, 32-33). Self-esteem is one reality that affects decisions girls, in particular, make throughout their lives (Dedmond, 1). A high level of self-esteem seems to be more essential for girls than boys, because girls rely on it more for making judgments in their personal, social, and educational settings (Dedmond, 2). Haupt is convinced that “our ability to promote reading can be greatly enhanced by recognizing biological and developmental differences between guys and gals” (20).
The activity of reading has been seen as a more female activity rather than male (Hopper, 114). When boys view reading as an overly feminine activity it tends to harm rather than help their sense of self-esteem and level of masculinity (Haupt, 21). When boys view reading this way they may only select books that have a masculine feel to them or are about masculine topics. Their book selections will not be very diverse, and this can affect their reading success and self-esteem. This partially explains why boys have a more negative attitude toward reading than girls and why boys also read less fiction than girls (Haupt, 19). Once the differences are recognized it is easier for teachers and librarians to select books to fit and to help boys and girls in the best way possible.

As boys grow older their learning differences can become more pronounced, and it will take stronger interventions to help boys become active readers once they become older (21). When helping students, especially boys, remedial reading activities tend to further their self-perception that they are poor readers, particularly if they are given almost no choice or control over what they are reading (Haupt, 24). Making their own personal reading choices is essential for poor readers to truly improve their reading abilities (Haupt, 24). By making their own reading choices, poor readers will begin to see more success while reading, which can lead to improving their levels of self-esteem. Book selections that students are interested in help them feel more in control of their success and reading skills.

**Programs that Improve Reading**

Participating in reading programs produces improvement in students’ reading skills and a rise in the level of self-esteem from their new reading abilities (Newlin, 43).
There are lots of programs available to improve the reading skills of students, and some have been shown to have a significant impact on students and their literacy skills. In this section, three examples of successful programs are presented; Paws for Reading, mentoring programs, and birthday book talks. These three programs illustrate the range and variety of programs that can improve reading skills by building self-esteem.

Paws for Reading is a program that has been successful in communities in North Carolina; and though it takes planning, time, and resources, it is valuable for some students. This program involves a partnership between a school library and a local dog training service. Dogs that are being trained or have been trained for use with people with disabilities are paired with struggling readers in a local school. Once a week the dogs visit and each student reads out loud to their dog for 20 minutes (Newlin, 43). This provides the students with a nonjudgmental environment, and students can be more willing to read aloud and practice reading skills in these types of situations (43). The dog handlers are trained to talk with students once they are finished reading to help foster discussion and understanding of the books that are read. Numerous students showed improvement in reading skills and gains in self-confidence after participating in the Paws for Reading program (43).

Mentoring programs can also be of great importance to students who have low academic achievement and self-esteem. A multidimensional program that includes relationship building, purposeful self-esteem enhancement, goal setting, and academic assistance provides the most well rounded experience for the students (King, 299). Each aspect of this type of program builds on the others and can boost self-esteem by
concentrating on multiple areas, from academic achievement to family connectedness (298). In the study done by King, Vidourek, Davis, and McClellan, the researchers found that by offering mentoring sessions at a school, the students were able to improve their school attitude, because they saw the help the program was giving them as being school related (King, 298).

Paired reading is a type of mentoring program that does not involve a lot of planning or materials. The benefits include improvement in reading, learning, and self-esteem (Miller, 417). Paired reading consists of two students, the tutee and a tutor that is of a higher reading level and age than the tutee working together to choose books of high interest and sitting side-by-side, reading together and working through difficulties in the text. Various scaffolding skills are involved on the part of the tutor. Praise is one of the more important elements of the process (Miller, 423), contributing to improving the self-esteem of the readers. When working one on one in a mentoring situation it is possible for the tutor to give the tutee lots of praise and encouragement. This praise and encouragement can help boost levels of self-esteem and the tutee can begin to feel more confident in their reading ability.

A birthday book talk is another program that can improve the reading achievement of children by exposing them to a wide variety of literature that they can apply to other areas of reading (Norton, 204). Feelings of positive self-worth, or self-esteem, are critical to success in school so Norton recommends that teachers find ways to create environments that promote self-esteem in their students (204). Birthday talks consist of teachers choosing books and creating a “commercial” about them and then
presenting the “commercial” to the class on a specific child’s birthday. The reason they are birthday book talks is because teachers are encouraged to find books that are related to birthdays and celebrate positive aspects of a child on his or her birthday. Connecting book talks with birthday celebrations can encourage the lifelong habit of reading for pleasure, since students are honored and recognized by the reading selection. This nurtures feelings of positive self-esteem connected with books and reading (Norton, 204). The key idea of birthday book talks is to give enough information and interesting tidbits (without giving away the ending) about the book that students will want to get it and read it (Norton, 205).

Learning to cultivate a high level of self-esteem in ourselves can take a lifetime. By making sure that during the school years students are provided with positive role models and taught skills to be successful in their learning, nurtures self-esteem. This review has shown that the reading level of students can have a direct affect on their level of self-esteem and vice-versa, and this can impact student achievement. Having successful reading experiences, learning to choose enjoyable reading books, and reading for enjoyment is how reading ability is grown. By becoming a better reader it was shown that students would eventually gain a higher level of self-esteem, which will help them be successful in all areas of their life.
CHAPTER 3:  
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many issues that revolve around reading during students’ school years. This chapter will reflect on a few areas that can be apparent for some students. Is there any correlation between self-esteem and the reading ability of students? What factors affect book selection of students? What library programs improve reading? Struggling readers can be affected by social relationships, their level of self-esteem, and reading programs in positive and negative ways. There is a correlation between the self-esteem of students and their reading ability, reading level, and academic achievement. These three questions can help determine if the reading ability of students is a direct indication of their level of self-esteem.

The Correlation between Self-Esteem and Reading Ability

A healthy level of self-esteem comes from many things, but one of them is academic achievement, and more specifically, reading ability. Students with low self-esteem deal with anxiety and pessimism related to academics. Low self-esteem may prevent students from tackling difficult situations or feel satisfaction from their progress and success. School situations are where students build much of their self-esteem. This is because so much time is spent with their peers and those relationships have an increasingly strong effect in teens. Positive school climates where students feel connected with their peers helps lead to self-confident students.

Reading ability is so important in a student’s life that having a low reading ability can lead to low self-esteem. Students with low self-esteem are not always diligent enough to overcome challenges when reading and may lack the proper strategies. These
two issues contribute to the cycle of low reading skills, and students can begin avoiding reading situations where they feel they may become embarrassed. The complicated texts that students are expected to read today become stressful for students who do not know the proper strategies to understand them. However, having the proper strategies and reading skills can turn those situations into positive, self-esteem building experiences.

Studies have shown that self-esteem can directly affect the reading levels of students, especially reading comprehension. Students who show a positive attitude toward reading and confidence in reading have higher levels of academic success. A high level of self-esteem acts as a buffer against anxiety so students with high self-esteem are not as likely to struggle with reading challenges.

**Factors Affecting Book Selection**

Factors affecting book selection can stem from a variety of things, and all of them can determine whether a student is going to become a successful reader or not. The books that students choose for personal reading can affect their reading success in a positive or negative way. If their selections have a negative affect, students can feel discouraged about their reading ability, which may cause lower levels of self-esteem.

Some of the factors affecting book selection are social relationships, personal interests, and self-esteem. Students’ social relationships have a big impact on students’ daily lives and can affect their success in school. Social relationships have an affect on book selections because students look to their peers for guidance in many areas. Close friends recommend books to each other and also tend to read the same things to continue their level of friendship. When friends discuss books outside of the classroom or engage
in reading with each other, they are helping build their level of self-esteem about reading. Discussing books outside of the classroom also helps with reading comprehension and discussion skills in a comfortable environment. Having strong reading skills helps students feel successful in school and promotes a higher level of self-esteem. Students usually enjoy reading when they are able to view it as an activity to discuss with friends.

Learning to choose books of the appropriate level and topic is part of the process of becoming a reader. Students can explore their personal interests and begin to define who they are when they make their own book selections. Talking with friends about books helps students find genres and topics that they are interested in as well. Realizing what they are interested in helps build strategies for choosing books and leads to higher levels of self-esteem.

Self-esteem can also influence book choices because students read for two reasons: to meet emotional needs or academic needs. Books read for emotional need are chosen by students to help them escape to another place and forget what they may be experiencing in real life. With a strong sense of self-esteem students may choose a wider variety of books and not see them as a place to escape, but rather an enjoyable pastime.

Reading Programs

Reading programs are widely used in schools, and teachers and staff are working hard to help improve students’ reading abilities. Various reading programs are successful in improving reading levels of students. Improved reading levels of students can improve levels of self-esteem. Three successful programs are; Paws for Reading, mentoring programs, and birthday book talks. Paws for Reading helps with students who are very
shy and struggle as readers. The student reads to a trained service dog and its trainer for a few minutes each week in a non-threatening environment. This program is successful because students don’t seem to get as embarrassed or as self-conscious when reading to the dogs. The dogs also make the students feel more comfortable and more at ease while reading, which allows them to focus on their comprehension and reading rather than wondering what their peers are thinking.

Mentoring programs can include programs that pair up an adult and a student at school for one on one time, and they can also include programs like paired reading between students. Paired reading joins up two students who work together and learn from each other while reading. If struggling readers are given lots of praise by their peer, this helps improve their self-esteem.

Birthday book talks help improve self-esteem and show improvements in reading because students are celebrated on their birthday with a book that somehow relates to their personality. The book talks encourage lifelong reading habits since they are used to honored and recognized students on their birthdays. Viewing reading as a positive activity leads to increases in reading ability and higher self-esteem.
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