

Self-Estimates and Social Acceptability of Fifth Graders

WRITING in this column in February 1957, Soper and Combs pointed up the need for research to give educators information about students' perceptions (4). According to Combs, when people see themselves as adequate, they are characterized by several qualities (2). They see themselves in positive ways, view themselves accurately and realistically, are capable of accepting themselves and others, and identify with others to a high degree. These qualities of adequate personalities indicate that a pupil who is overly aggressive probably would see himself as something less than adequate. Likewise, ones who see themselves as not adequate might be seen by others as withdrawn, having little practical intelligence, not desired as a friend, and not a leader. To assess these hypotheses with one class, the study described below was designed.

The 29 members of a fifth grade class served as the subjects of this study. Seventeen boys and 12 girls comprised the group. The school of which this class was a part serves a neighborhood of predominantly middle-class families. The study was conducted in the Spring semester, 1959.

Instruments used to gather data were

the Who Are They test (1), an inventory of social acceptance, and a self-estimate scale developed by Lipsitt (3). Both instruments were administered within a two week interval and demonstrated satisfactory test-retest reliability. Several researchers have pointed out the limitations of self-rating instruments, like the self-estimate scale employed in this study, to accurately assess the self-concept. Yet, realizing the limitations of such instruments, one may use them to gain useful information.

Findings

Scores of the boys and girls were tabulated and analyzed separately. Means on the self-report were somewhat lower than those reported by Lipsitt (3) and girls' scores were generally higher than boys'. Raw scores rather than discrepancy scores were used in that Lipsitt reported their higher reliability. Spearman rank-order correlations were computed between the self-report score and the five measures of the Who Are They test: friendship, practical intelligence, leadership, withdrawal, and aggression.

For the girls, all the correlations were low, ranging from -.08 to .38 and non-

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significant. Positive correlations were obtained with the exception of the one for self-estimate and practical intelligence.

The correlations obtained using the boys' scores ranged from $-.52$ to $.28$. Correlations of the three positive acceptance measures (leadership, practical intelligence, and friendship) with the self-report were low, positive, and non-significant. The two negative acceptance measures, withdrawal and aggression, were negatively correlated with the self-estimate, $-.36$ and $-.52$ respectively. The correlation between self-estimate and aggression was significant beyond the 5 percent level of significance.

This study indicates that there was little (no significant) relationship between the girls' self-estimates of themselves and the extent to which they were seen by their classmates as possessing the social characteristics measured. Likewise, the boys' self-estimates of themselves related little (non-significantly) to the ways they were seen by their peers as possessing four of the five social characteristics measured. In this group studied, boys with lower self-estimate scores were seen by their classmates as being significantly the more aggressive ones in the class.

This finding may indicate that the low self-estimate score (indicating high self-disparagement) revealed an inadequacy of the boys' concepts of self and their aggressive behavior, as noted by classmates, resulted from this lack of self-adequacy. Boys of this age are typically aggressive and this behavior may be related to their sex role. Too, their low self-estimates (in relation to aggression) may indicate adequacy in that they were able to accept, in a lower degree, statements that were not complimentary of themselves. Such an explanation seems

consistent with a study by Taylor and Combs (5).

This study of the individuals in one class was profitable. It provided new information about the class for the teacher and experience in using new instruments and in analyzing the data obtained. It stimulated the design of a more extensive study of children's self-estimates, social acceptability, and anxiety, to be conducted during the current year. Additional research of a fundamental nature should be undertaken to document the relationship in a more general population of children's estimates of their own worth and the ways they are accepted by their peers.

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