

SELF-ESTEEM

Wiesław Poleszak

I. DEFINITION ASPECTS

To begin with, let us have a short trip inside ourselves. Answer the following question, please.

What makes up one's self-esteem?

- a. Past experience.
- b. Current knowledge about oneself.
- c. Self-esteem is made up of our past experiences and self-knowledge.

Answer **c** is correct because what we think of ourselves is a product of our relationships with significant others and of the knowledge we currently possess. Further in the text we will demonstrate how past experiences are sometimes key for how we perceive ourselves at present.

Self-esteem is among the three most researched issues in social psychology literature and one of the most important notions in psychology overall (Leary, MacDonald 2003; Bushman, Moeller, Crocker 2011; Szpitalak, Polczyk 2015). The popularity of the subject, however, does not mean that it is easy to capture and define (as you may have experienced as you sought an answer to the question above). One of the reasons for this difficulty is due to the fact that self-esteem can be described using many related terms, such as self-knowledge, self-assessment, self-perception, self-acceptance. All these terms, while having slightly different connotations, pertain to the same phenomenon. For the purpose of our texts, we will use the notion of self-esteem, as it seems to be the most encompassing one, while it accentuates the final moment of the process of gathering information about oneself and assigning meaning to it. On the one hand, this term points to the global nature of the self-assessment process, and on the other to the subjective (emotional) experience. The latter is particularly important in upbringing and supporting activities (in accordance with the principle: as you see the world, so you navigate it).

Self-esteem (self-assessment) is the measure of how positive or negative is our attitude towards ourselves (Pyszczynski et al. 2004; Fecenec 2008). Each one of us collects this knowledge over

the course of our lives. We obtain information about ourselves from two main sources – from others and from observing ourselves and reflecting upon this.

Researchers dealing with these issues have not yet come up with a common point of view, or even a list of key components building one's self-esteem. They have, however, split the definitions into two groups (Szpitalak, Polczyk 2015). The first of those emphasises evaluation. It encompasses all definitions which emphasize knowledge, judgments, opinions and information collected about oneself. The definition coined by Niebrzydowski (1976, p. 52) fits this line of thought quite well. In his opinion, self-esteem is a "collection of views and opinions which an individual applies to oneself". The second group focuses on our emotional attitude towards ourselves – what emotions and feelings does our own self evoke in ourselves. This line of thought will comprise: self-confidence, self-acceptance or self-love (liking oneself).

If we are considering using the knowledge about self-esteem in a school environment, we should reach for yet another way to understand this notion: it is the image of ourselves, which consists of two aspects - how we perceive ourselves (the real image) and what we want to be like (the ideal image). These two takes on the issue go together to form a dynamic arrangement determining one's satisfaction with oneself. The relationship between what we achieve (what successes we attain) in the main areas of functioning, and what we expect (what we pretend to be) translates into feelings about oneself. The less difference there is about achievements and aspirations, the more positive the emotions related to one's own self (self-satisfaction). We should be aware here that the arrangement has a major role in motivation towards development. Hence, strong coincidence of the real and ideal images leads to stagnation in working on oneself. The optimum way is when we put the bar of our ideal above the real image, but within our reach.

It is fair to say that self-esteem is the end product of many pieces of information, experiences and reflections about our own selves. At the initial stage of life, the key persons providing the information are close, important persons – primarily parents, caretakers, family members. What matters here are the reactions to errors and failures, the way we provide feedback, but most of all how we treat the young people – with dignity and respect.

The next important time for building self-esteem is the early school education period. Here, both the contacts with the teacher, and peer relationships geared towards building relationships are of key importance, as are experiences related to new duties (the task area). It is at this age that first demonstrations of peer rejection happen, with the resulting psychological injuries, whose traces are significant for the subsequent stages of development. This is also the first encounter with the school duties, and thereby learning work and responsibility. During this period of education, the foundations of attitudes towards school are established. That is why, apparently, work organisation is apparently extremely important here, as is the way in which teachers and home room tutors provide feedback on the tasks completed.

Peer relationships are crucial for building self-esteem – in particular those which constitute a part of developmental tasks. The last years of primary schools are the critical period. It is then that the young people build their position in a group, and at the same time developmental egocentrism appears, which may lead to trauma in peer relationships. That is why we have to take

care of integration in the class (preferably before these developmental tasks appear) and build a positive emotional climate.

Later in the process of development, especially when the young person is capable of self-reflection, the experiences gathered and information about themselves gain importance. This is a key period for building self-esteem. It is often accompanied by focusing on school successes. Failure to achieve them causes strong negative emotions, and consequently a drop in motivation for learning – that in turn results in diminished self-esteem. That way, a vicious circle is made complete.

Kozielecki (1986, 1998) posits that in adolescence, a young person's self-esteem should reach the form of mature self-knowledge. Such knowledge is important for developing a self-image, which may include things like descriptive judgments, self-assessment, personal standards and communication rules. According to Kozielecki (1986), self-knowledge has a major role in self-regulation. The process of forming mature assessment takes place around 14-15 years of age. The key roles here are played by: realization and experiencing one's separateness, independence of assessments regarding oneself, and the ability of critical judgment about oneself. A person learns themselves by observing one's own behaviour (including that of one's body) in different life situations. She or he also stores messages coming from the surroundings, predominantly feedback (verbal and non-verbal) from others. Individual behaviours of a person are grouped in larger categories in terms of which the person evaluates herself or himself (e.g. self-assurance in contacts with others, ability to express oneself, the ability to adapt to new situations etc. constitute the self-assessment in terms of interpersonal relationships).

The impact of self-esteem on the development of a person cannot be overrated. Perhaps that is why this issue is so ubiquitous in research work, but also in psychology handbooks and guides. Psychology and pedagogics experts agree that self-esteem is important, which is reflected in the three main lines of research on the importance of self-esteem for human development and life (Fecenec 2008):

- According to the buffer theory, high self-esteem protects a person against harmful factors of all kinds of threatening and stressful events. It positively affects an individual's adaptation and targets the person on seeking events and emotions which contribute to further improvement of self-esteem.
- In the view of social theories, high self-esteem enables a person to effectively cope with anxiety and feeling of threat, and consequently also education-related stress.
- O'Brien and Epstein (2003), on the other hand, believe that self-assessment affects the degree of integration of information about the Self. The greater the cohesiveness of the image, the more effective a person is in gathering and acquiring new information about herself or himself.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

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The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

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II. EPIDEMIOLOGY

Which of the following aspects of life is the source of greatest dissatisfaction among young people in primary and secondary schools?

- a. Appearance.
- b. Relationships with the family.
- c. Financial status.
- d. Relationships with teachers.

In theory, all these aspects may be sources of dissatisfaction. And of course, difficult situations happen in each of these areas. For us, however, what matters is the global assessment, and studies indicate that what young people are most dissatisfied with is their own appearance (Poleszak, Kata 2022).

In this part of the unit devoted to the self-esteem of young people, we focus on diagnosing the phenomenon. In order to realise the importance of self-esteem for different areas of functioning of a young person, we will make references to a paper by Maria Ryś. The author believes that high self-esteem ensures:

- “the ability to notice and appreciate one’s traits, trusting one’s potential, thinking about oneself in a friendly way, being oneself, rejecting false, negative judgments about oneself, knowing one’s strengths and weakness;
- healthy self-assurance, effectiveness in realisation of plans made and life priorities;
- respecting oneself and others, forgivingness and ability to look at one’s life from a proper perspective;
- appropriate communication, ability to engage in authentic interpersonal relationships, without playing games or manipulation, ability to resolve conflicts;
- seeking mostly a positive side in others;

- aiming for success, but not at any price, especially not at the expense of others;
- not giving up in struggling with failures, accompanied by the ability to lose honourably;
- ability to admit the mistakes made, learn from them and draw the right conclusions for the future and understanding errors of other without conceding to them;
- not breaking down under the influence of failures and mistakes made, learning from them; perseverance in pursuing goals, faith in achievements of one's plans;
- an ability to take reasonable risk, to correctly define and solve problems, and to take difficult decisions;
- openness to positive influences and taking advantage of opportunities arising from new realities;
- readiness to provide support people in need and to accept good advice, guidance and help from others;
- assertive attitude (ability to refuse, defend one's rights, openly express one's feelings and own opinions, criticising others without damaging their sense of dignity and accepting rightful criticism of oneself, keeping obligations, coping with stress);
- enterprise, creativity, courage in taking initiative, showing interest, engagement, true motivation – striving with energy to achieve set goals, ability to manage change, flexibility, ability to take decisions and risk, calmness even in the face of difficulty;
- seeing problems as inspiring challenges, opportunities to prove oneself in practice;
- appreciating one's own effort and that of others, developing the potential for cooperation, integration activities and seeking solutions beneficial for all parties;
- having control over one's own undertakings and taking responsibility for one's life and that of others, also for results and consequences of actions both taken and abandoned;
- ability to accept criticism and draw positive conclusions from it;
- adaptability to new conditions and tasks, resourcefulness in life and in work;
- understanding the need of change, acceptance and creation of desirable changes;
- seeking new tasks, challenges, solutions;
- working out and implementing one's own concept of the meaning of life" (Ryś 2011, pp. 77–78).

Anyone interested in the relationship between low self-esteem and the behaviours of students is encouraged to read the source text.

Further in this text we will focus on behaviours by which one can recognise high or low self-esteem of a young person (table 1). Biernat (2016) breaks down the indicators of self-assessment into three groups – in accordance with its level.

Low self-assessment

Mental indicators	Social indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negation, non-acceptance of oneself• Hypersensitivity• Incredulousness• Anxiousness, emotional tension• Sense of hopelessness• Feeling unhappy• Dreaminess• Feeling worthless/substandard• Lack of decisiveness• Excessive self-analysis• Fear of failure; in case of failure – feeling down and embarrassed• Lack of self-assurance, lack of faith in one's power, low motivation for action• Failure to notice the value of one's own work, lack of appreciation for it• Desiring a peaceful life (without emotion, unrest or risk)• Little interest in the world out there• Need to incessantly pursue perfection• Permanent dissatisfaction with oneself• Sense of helplessness• Conviction that one is worse than others• Introversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low social status in a group• Being distanced from others• Difficulty in interpersonal relationships• Relatively frequent conflicts with others• Criticising others• Tendency to submissiveness• Social inhibition (avoiding and withdrawing)• Mistrust towards people, suspiciousness• Intimidation instead of interest in what the teacher says• In case of failure and criticism from adults – tendency to isolation and withdrawal, as negative feedback confirms the sense of inferiority

Moderately high self-assessment (also referred to as adequate self-assessment)

Mental indicators	Social indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-acceptance• Trust in one's ability• Treating oneself as a worthy person• Emotional balance• Taking responsibility for one's action• Kindness and trusting others• Strong motivation for action• Intuition• Independence• Rationalism• Realism• Ability to manage change• Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses• Experiencing positive emotions while working and when assessing the results of work• Having one's own hierarchy of value• Emotional resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate relationships with others• Readiness to cooperate• Not trying to dominate over others• In school – interest in the things the teacher says• Being interested in other people• Curiosity of the world around• After failure – accepting criticism from adults and willingly making use of feedback they provide• Usually well liked persons

Very high self-assessment

Mental indicators	Social indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conviction that one is the best always and among everyone• Frequent frustration• Giving up on activities taken up• Quickly getting bored and moving on to next activities• Frequently putting everything off until the last moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent conflicts with others• Ignoring criticism from adults; continuing acting the same way (best in one's own opinion)• Not popular in the group

Very high self-assessment (cont.)

Mental indicators	Social indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced resilience in a situation of threat • Excessive self-control and lack of honesty • Using defence mechanisms • Putting excessively high requirements of oneself • Blaming oneself • Exposing oneself to frustration on purpose • Self-destructive behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent conflicts with others • Ignoring criticism from adults; continuing acting the same way (best in one's own opinion) • Not popular in the group

Source: Biernat (2016).

To end with, let us have a look at some studies and get a bird's eye view on different areas of life of young people. This will allow us to focus on activities that are most needed or even crucial for the development of young people. Further in this text, we will present three perspectives on satisfaction of students with different aspects of life: quality (which areas are the most frustrating ones), quantity (what is the severity of this phenomenon and what are the trends over the years), and a global one, presenting a generalised sense of satisfaction.

The reasons of satisfaction and dissatisfaction change over time. Even a dozen or so years ago, young persons were dissatisfied mostly with their financial status. Nowadays, they mention three other areas: intelligence and talents, appearance and character (Poleszak, Kata 2022). In a secondary school they also add health (more than 10% of dissatisfied students). We need to note that all the areas listed depend on us to a small extent only, therefore they are the most difficult to change. Thus, they are the most frustrating aspects of life.

More than 20% of young people are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they look (table 2). We must add that one in four persons surveyed is uncertain about this aspect of life (25% chose "yes and no"). We are dealing here with a low detailed self-assessment, which is further generalised into the global self-esteem. This result is worrying, as it may lead to controlling nutrition, and consequently to eating disorders. This is also information for us educators that we are losing against values promoted by the media culture, which favours appearance as a ticket to success.

Other aspects of life which receive relatively negative assessment are: character and intelligence/talents. In this case, one person in ten indicates dissatisfaction or severe dissatisfaction.

If in doubt as to whether or not these results are worrying, one should note the trend visible over the last year. As the table below shows, the number of young people dissatisfied with these areas is on the rise.

If we treat dissatisfaction with individual aspects of life as detailed self-assessments, the average of those can be adopted as the global self-assessment. The results indicate that the overall sense of self-satisfaction is also decreasing (table 3).

table 2		Year of study					
		2017		2018		2021	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Safety	Very dissatisfied	4	0,6	5	0,7	8	1,5
	Rather dissatisfied	11	1,5	13	1,8	28	5,2
	Yes and no	60	8,3	61	8,4	89	16,7
	Rather satisfied	344	47,3	332	45,7	229	42,9
	Very satisfied	308	42,4	316	43,5	180	33,7
Financial status	Very dissatisfied	2	0,3	11	1,5	7	1,3
	Rather dissatisfied	8	1,1	14	1,9	17	3,2
	Yes and no	64	8,8	84	11,6	58	10,9
	Rather satisfied	305	42,0	298	41,0	218	40,8
	Very satisfied	348	47,9	320	44,0	234	43,8
Group position	Very dissatisfied	9	1,2	15	2,1	16	3,0
	Rather dissatisfied	25	3,4	33	4,5	30	5,6
	Yes and no	108	14,9	127	17,5	113	21,2
	Rather satisfied	342	47,0	351	48,3	237	44,4
	Very satisfied	243	33,4	201	27,6	138	25,8
Relationships with acquaintances	Very dissatisfied	5	0,7	14	1,9	14	2,6
	Rather dissatisfied	14	1,9	22	3,0	38	7,1
	Yes and no	86	11,8	93	12,8	87	16,3
	Rather satisfied	267	36,7	286	39,3	181	33,9
	Very satisfied	355	48,8	312	42,9	214	40,1
Relationships with parents	Very dissatisfied	8	1,1	10	1,4	15	2,8
	Rather dissatisfied	20	2,8	24	3,3	26	4,9
	Yes and no	73	10,0	89	12,2	62	11,6
	Rather satisfied	201	27,6	247	34,0	163	30,5
	Very satisfied	425	58,5	357	49,1	268	50,2
Relationships with teachers	Very dissatisfied	14	1,9	21	2,9	17	3,2
	Rather dissatisfied	35	4,8	43	5,9	33	6,2
	Yes and no	150	20,6	168	23,1	138	25,8
	Rather satisfied	353	48,6	326	44,8	235	44,0
	Very satisfied	175	24,1	169	23,2	111	20,8

table 2 (cont.)		Year of study					
		2017		2018		2021	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Intelligence and talents	Very dissatisfied	11	1,5	22	3,0	13	2,4
	Rather dissatisfied	27	3,7	32	4,4	41	7,7
	Yes and no	142	19,5	134	18,4	123	23,0
	Rather satisfied	313	43,1	317	43,6	205	38,4
	Very satisfied	234	32,2	222	30,5	152	28,5
Appearance	Very dissatisfied	28	3,9	43	5,9	45	8,4
	Rather dissatisfied	53	7,3	63	8,7	63	11,8
	Yes and no	146	20,1	170	23,4	131	24,5
	Rather satisfied	282	38,8	254	34,9	183	34,3
	Very satisfied	218	30,0	197	27,1	112	21,0
Health	Very dissatisfied	10	1,4	10	1,4	16	3,0
	Rather dissatisfied	29	4,0	48	6,6	30	5,6
	Yes and no	98	13,5	116	16,0	78	14,6
	Rather satisfied	253	34,8	269	37,0	204	38,2
	Very satisfied	337	46,4	284	39,1	206	38,6
Character	Very dissatisfied	12	1,7	24	3,3	21	3,9
	Rather dissatisfied	32	4,4	49	6,7	36	6,7
	Yes and no	117	16,1	130	17,9	108	20,2
	Rather satisfied	299	41,1	272	37,4	198	37,1
	Very satisfied	267	36,7	252	34,7	171	32,0
Spending free time	Very dissatisfied	7	1,0	15	2,1	9	1,7
	Rather dissatisfied	22	3,0	36	5,0	26	4,9
	Yes and no	112	15,4	119	16,4	96	18,0
	Rather satisfied	246	33,8	280	38,5	180	33,7
	Very satisfied	340	46,8	277	38,1	223	41,8
Ability to decide	Very dissatisfied	10	1,4	19	2,6	12	2,2
	Rather dissatisfied	17	2,3	33	4,5	33	6,2
	Yes and no	115	15,8	96	13,2	87	16,3
	Rather satisfied	294	40,4	303	41,7	212	39,7
	Very satisfied	291	40,0	276	38,0	190	35,6
Development potential	Very dissatisfied	6	0,8	10	1,4	8	1,5
	Rather dissatisfied	23	3,2	26	3,6	34	6,4
	Yes and no	88	12,1	91	12,5	74	13,9
	Rather satisfied	226	31,1	274	37,7	181	33,9
	Very satisfied	384	52,8	326	44,8	237	44,4
Ideas about the future	Very dissatisfied	12	1,7	18	2,5	14	2,6
	Rather dissatisfied	28	3,9	31	4,3	29	5,4
	Yes and no	92	12,7	106	14,6	84	15,7
	Rather satisfied	280	38,5	282	38,8	187	35,0
	Very satisfied	315	43,3	290	39,9	220	41,2

Source: Poleszak, Kata (2022).

Global sense of satisfaction						
table 3	Year of study					
	2017		2018		2021	
	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation
Global sense of satisfaction	3,17	0,54	3,06	0,63	2,96	0,67

* Average result from the 0–4 range (dissatisfied-satisfied)

Source: Poleszak, Kata (2022).

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

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III. A COMMON MYTH

Good learning performance:

- a. ensures high self-assessment,
 - b. is related to low self-assessment,
 - c. does not determine high or low self-esteem.
-

The correct answer in our quiz is **c**. It is worthwhile to know why great learning results do not guarantee (or preclude) a high sense of one's worth (self-esteem). To explain this, we may assume that school-related self-assessment is not the sole indication of self-esteem. Such interpretation suggests a complex model (rather than a single characteristic) and the existence of other components building the self-esteem of each person. Furthermore, thanks to the knowledge we already have on this subject, we may guess that components of self-assessment form a structure, with some components less and some more prominent, but all of them important. Eventually, our self-esteem is determined by our assessment of information gathered about what we are like.

THE STRUCTURE OF SELF-ESTEEM

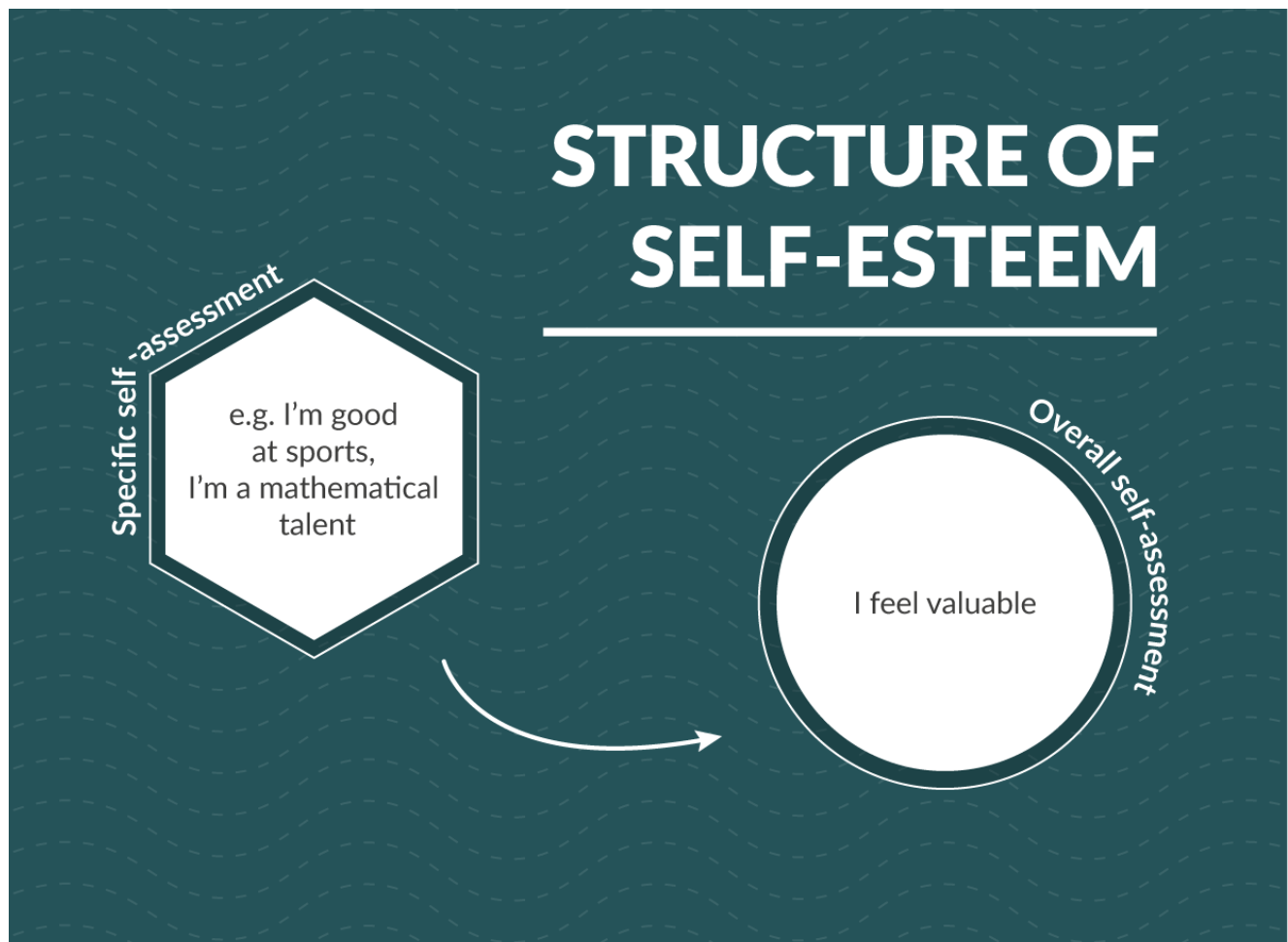
Researchers dealing with the issue of self-esteem agree that it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Its structure can be described in two dimensions – in terms of complexity and availability of information or in terms of whether self-assessment is conscious.

Studies indicate that the final form of the sense of value is made up of global self-assessment and a range of specific self-assessments (Brown, Marshall 2001; Szpitalak, Polczyk 2015). Let us begin with **specific self-assessments** – they are own opinions about the quality of our functioning in different areas of activity (e.g. singing, sports, cooking) and the characteristics or properties which we attribute to ourselves (e.g. wisdom, intelligence or personal charm).

Specific self-assessments may differ from one another, as we may be great in sports but much worse in public speaking etc. The self-assessments we make in different areas of our activity and our own perceived properties make up the global self-assessment.

Global self-assessment is the general attitude towards our evaluations regarding different areas of life. As the name suggests, we are making a generalisation in the form of an overall assessment of oneself. Thus, the global self-assessment is averaged on the basis of our specific assessments.

The result of the above process (averaging) significantly affects **self-esteem** defined in terms of emotions (satisfaction, joy, pride) and states (self-love, self-acceptance, disdain of oneself) which we experience in the context of self-assessment. That is why self-assessment can be considered as the overarching (although not all researchers agree), final step of valuation of oneself.



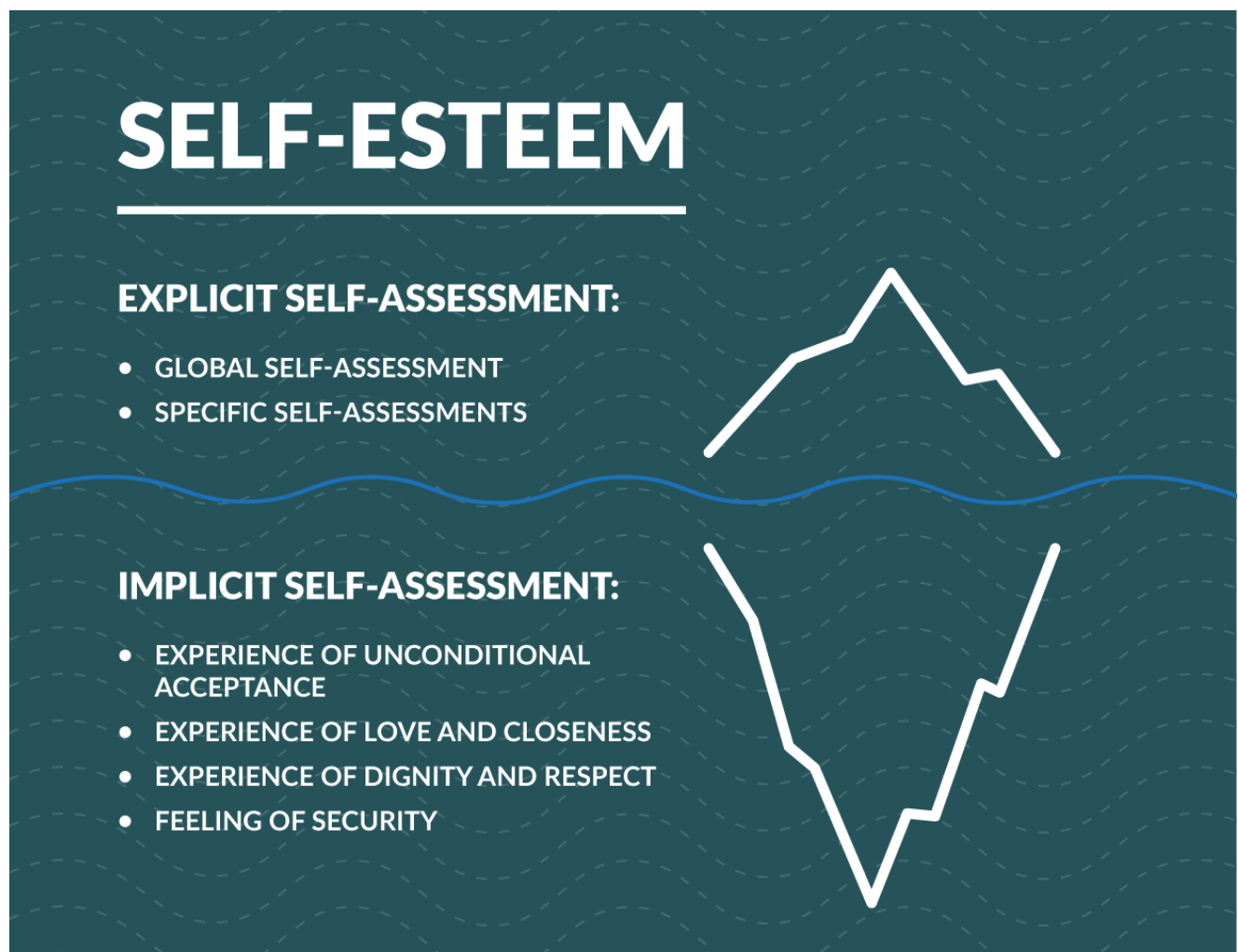
Source: Own work.

Another aspect of self-esteem is the availability of information about oneself, mentioned before. Researchers dealing with this subject describe two types of self-assessment, defined based on this criterion: explicit and implicit self-assessment (Greenwald et al. 2002).

Implicit self-assessment is the kind which we cannot access using our consciousness. It does, however, play an important role in our self-esteem, as it affects our thoughts, emotions and behaviour. To a large extent, this is related to our experiences from previous stages of our lives. That is why it should be considered as automatic and not accessible to introspection (it is beyond our insight, outside our conscious processes). It is a kind of base attitude towards oneself, which is difficult to explain or change, because it is not accessible to us. It is shaped by relationships with parents in early childhood (basic relationship models), key relationships with peers and earlier events of significance to building our own Self.

Explicit self-assessment, on the other hand, is all the assessments, attitudes and valuations we make in a conscious, rational manner. Hence, it is easier to change and correct.

The above division explains why sometimes the awareness of one's own strengths does not translate into a change in self-esteem. We may highlight strengths of a student, the student agrees, says we are right, but it changes nothing in his or her self-esteem. He or she behaves as if the information has not reached them. It is not because of their ill will, but because of the difficulty changing convictions about oneself due to lack of access to unconscious content which determines self-esteem.



Types of self-assessment (characteristics and attributes)

As we work with the students, we need terms which will allow describing the self-assessment of the young people. Such description will allow us to identify both the persons who need our support and directions of working with them.

When trying describe self-assessment, probably the first thing on our minds is the question about whether the assessment is **high or low**. This dimension is the property of self-esteem that is discussed in literature most often. Apart from that, we can estimate its stability/instability and adequacy/inadequacy. **Stability of self-assessment** is a function of its permanence (independence from changing conditions) and of the cohesiveness of its component parts (both the explicit and implicit ones). **Adequacy of self-assessment** is the dimension describing the consistency of personal assessments and experiences with feedback from significant others, facts which reach us and analyses of events which affect us. If there is a lot of consistency between what we think of ourselves and what others tell us about ourselves and what we experience, we are dealing with adequate self-assessment.

Persons with high self-esteem are characterised by self-acceptance and a conviction that they are exceptional and deserve sympathy of others (Szpitalak, Polczyk 2015). Moreover, this positive attitude is unconditional. Self-esteem, therefore, is not prone to negative information from the outside in this case.

In some people, the sense of value is high but fragile (Kernis 2003). This means that they have an **unstable self-assessment**, which is susceptible to change due to critical remarks and information or overload. To maintain stability of self-esteem, they resort to defence mechanisms: self-deception, self-promotion or depreciation of others (Poleszak 2002). Depreciation may be manifested, for example, in thinking that the average Pole is a primitive person, unlike myself, because among all the poorness I am an exceptional person. Lack of stability may result from inconsistency between information from explicit and implicit self-assessment – e.g. we have reasons to think of ourselves as valuable, but deep inside we feel that we do not deserve it. Another reason of instability of high self-assessment is conditioning it upon current achievements – I am worth as much as my achievements. A lot of the time, this is true for students who condition their self-esteem upon their learning performance.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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SELF-ESTEEM

Wiesław Poleszak

IV. TYPICALLY AT SCHOOL...

Building a high self-esteem in a school environment is highly influenced by:

- a. requirements of the parents,
 - b. relationships with teachers,
 - c. peer relations,
 - d. all of the above.
-

Answer **c** is correct. As we already know, building self-esteem is a complex phenomenon, one that is spread over time. Before we form our own self-assessment, we use information obtained from significant others, we even use their ways of interpreting our behaviours. Sometimes, these interpretations may even become the ways we evaluate ourselves.

THE SCHOOL FUNNEL

School is an educational environment, so it naturally gravitates toward teaching and evaluation (albeit to a different extent in different institutions). Success is often defined here in terms of good grades and results achieved. Interestingly, the ranking of schools is also determined this way. And in the society at large, there is a tendency to equate success with the value of a person. These two processes strongly exacerbate the pressure on school success. Consequently, students focus on the importance of grades – they are very important for the self-esteem of young people. Such mechanism is an educational error. It leads to the development of a specific self-assessment only based on success in learning (assuming that the person actually achieves any). This restricts building a sense of value resulting from global self-assessment, i.e. the kind of assessment which takes into account other aspects of our functioning (other specific self-assessments). Moreover, this mechanism puts the young people under immense emotional pressure, which leads to a disorganising stress, causing the learning performance to drop.

This process takes place in a classroom group, thus a popular way to verify the value of a grade is comparing it to the results of other students. It is one of the more frequent methods of motivating young people to learn (both by parents and by teachers). Interestingly, it also is one of the most widespread reasons for negative peer pressure. It is not good to be the “nerd” in the form – others get together against their “enemy” that is the peer who values good learning results. This demonstrates the social mechanism of lowering the requirements by eliminating the standout.

Nor is building self-esteem in school fostered by the fact that a lot of emphasis is put on a very narrow scope of competency. According to Convington and Teel (2004), success in school depends on a narrow set of specific talents and skills (subject knowledge and the ability to memorise, analyse and synthesize information). Non-school competencies remain in shadows or evaporate from the consciousness of students, because they are considered insignificant. Consequently, self-esteem is built on the basis of a very small range of specific self-assessments (additionally related to requirements that are difficult to achieve). Such a system is conducive to a rather low self-assessment. Even if a young person achieved educational success, which translates into a high global self-assessment, it is unstable, as she or he feels insecure in other life situations.

Another risk factor (related to the above) in building a high self-esteem is competition. As such, it does not seem bad – after all, the whole world of sport is based on it. It is one thing, however, to have competition as a mature, intrinsic motive for action, and another to evaluate oneself against the surroundings. The key problem in competition is the limited number of places for the best (usually there are 3 of those on the podium). What about the other students in class in that case? This is why the coincidence of these two factors – a narrow range of competency and competition – is not a great portent to a high, stable and adequate self-assessment. In fact, it contravenes each of these dimensions.

Another mistake often present in school (but not only school) education is excessive focus on the result in the goal we aim at. Again, it is the right way to go from the point of view of motivation, but not so much for building stable self-esteem. Many of us focus on an ideal (goal) we strive to achieve and believe that reaching it will make us happy. The problem is that, as soon as we come close to it, it immediately moves away. Otherwise, it would no longer have motivational value. In building a sense of value, what matters is not just to have a goal, but also to see the path we have walked, as it is the measure of our effort, the work we have put into it. If we apply this to the school situation, we may see how important it is to appreciate the effort which the person has made to complete the task. Writing a short text for the English lesson is much more work for a dyslexic than for many other students. If strenuous effort results in a bad grade, we lose motivation for effort or, if we keep it up, we bring about a lowered school self-assessment. That is why, while it is not easy to do, it is worthwhile to appreciate the effort and work which a person puts into a task. Especially so if we are aiming for building the person's self-esteem.

In school, young people also learn many paradidactic skills – how to motivate oneself, how to organise one's work, how to be responsible etc. As a result, school is a firing ground for proving the competencies they acquire. This is why feedback about the tasks completed is of utmost importance. There are, however, several questions one needs to ask oneself. First: is it assessment of a task or of the person, second – is it evaluation or is it feedback. If the latter is the case, do we focus on what the students have achieved or on the things they have failed to do.

The way we provide feedback is particularly important. It is one of the most difficult experiences in the life of a student (especially for highly sensitive persons). Errors usually stem from different levels of sensitivity of the teachers (as well as learners), lack of knowledge or empathy. Imagine a typical situation: a student is called to the blackboard to answer questions. Even getting out from behind the desk with the whole class looking is extremely stressful for many young people (which is one reason why some praise remote learning). If we add failure in the view of the whole class, a raised voice of the teacher or the teacher's mocking (sometimes related to intelligence), no wonder the young person (a highly sensitive one in particular) feels like a nobody after such experience. His or her thoughts and emotions revolve around how to escape another experience like this. We may ask here: does this really improve motivation for learning?

The above discussion brings us to another question: who is the teacher? A master, from whom the young person learns, whom she or he admires and with whom she or he pursues goals together, or a judge who will punish them for every mistake? This is also an area of importance for formation of self-esteem – the relationships and roles in which we function in a community. Do they engender respect and caring for the sense of dignity of another person and, consequently, do the students feel important and worthy of respect?

The last issue in this section is the reflection on the conditions we provide for the development of the children and young people (the emotional climate of the classroom and school, their community etc.). The school is a space in which the students perform developmental tasks of key importance for their lives. Whether we want it or not, this is where they learn how to function among peers, how to find their place in a group, how to get friends, how to establish friendships... Any failures are stored in the experiences as items bringing down the self-assessment, and successes as ones which build inner strength. This was accurately shown by the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ptaszek et al. 2020; Poleszak, Kata 2021). Lowered moods and mental problems mostly stem from difficulty in performing developmental tasks.

HOW DOES A PARENT MESS WITH THE SELF-ESTEEM OF HIS OR HER CHILD? UNINTENDED PARENTAL MISTAKES

We have mentioned in previous texts that the key (because of their implicitness) components of the sense of value are shaped in early childhood. They are related to the position of the child in the family, the essential relationships which will remain as the model for relationships later in life (all the way to the developmental ability to reflect) and with the ways to fulfil

needs. Of course, teachers have no way of directly affecting the developmental conditions someone creates for their children, but they may be a source of reliable knowledge and skills for the parents to use (e.g. in an upbringing/educational programme, at a parents' meeting or during individual consultation or when receiving advice).

The parents' mistaken attitudes result from improper use of motivation techniques (like in the case of teachers) – mostly focused on the here and now, without reflecting upon their future consequences. This stems mostly from overestimating the importance of the educational dimension at the expense of other areas of development, which are of key importance for building self-esteem (more about those in the next section). And it is the attitudes of the parents and teachers of importance for the young person that will later be transformed into his or her attitudes towards himself or herself. He or she will motivate himself or herself in such way as they modelled him or her (modelling is a basic form of learning).

The first attitude, fairly popular among parents, is focusing on their own expectations rather than on reasons and course of events. This is best presented in the following dialogue between a parent and their child.

After the child returns from school, the parent asks:

Parent: *What did you get?* (With some more subtle persons, the first question may be about having eaten lunch).

Child: *C from English.*

Parent: *Why not a B?*

The next day, the situation repeats:

Parent: *What did you get?*

Child: (proudly): *B from English.*

Parent: *Why not an A?*

The same happens on the third day:

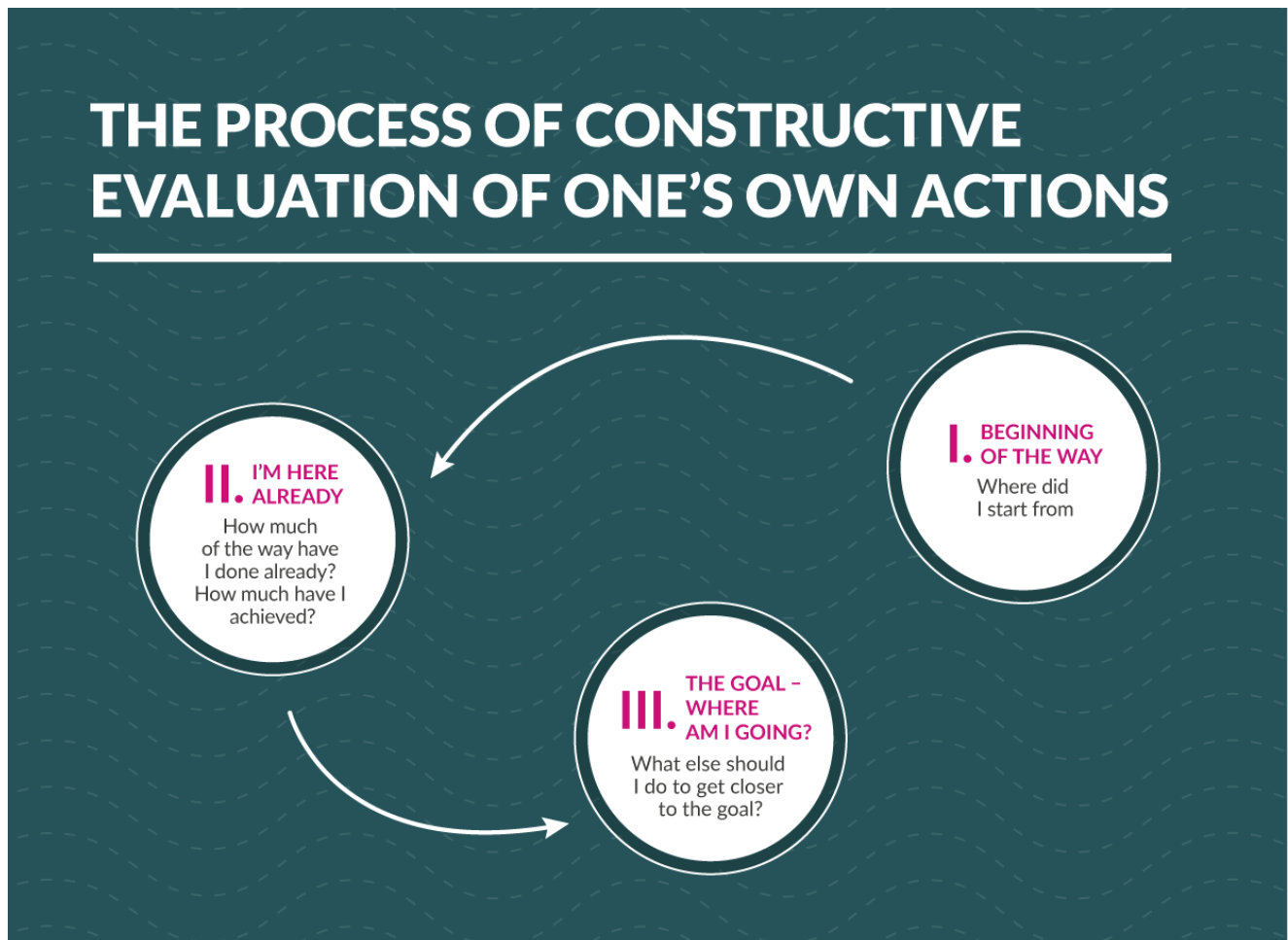
Parent: *What did you get?*

Child: (even happier about itself): *I've got an A from English.*

Parent: *What did others get?*

Of course, we realise that the parent is trying to motivate the child to effort. There is nothing wrong in the intention as such, but, along the way, the parent nullifies the child's striving, effort and achievements. Such process results in focusing on an unfulfilled goal instead of what the young person has already achieved. The methodology for building self-esteem works the other way round: first realise what you have achieved (where did you come from and where you already are), then see where your goal (to which you aspired) was, and finally see what

you can improve in your action (see fig. 1). Another mistake in the example described is comparing with others (but this has already been discussed earlier in this text).



Source: Own work.

Another attitude the consequences of which bring young people to the offices of psychologists and psychotherapists is the focus on failures and negatives. This probably also has a source in good intentions (but we must bear in mind what the road to hell is paved with!). What we mean here is an attitude of the parents when they do not react to the success or positive behaviour of the child because they do not want it to fall into complacency (or, as some say, they don't want success to go into their head). We should note that no studies confirm that appreciation of a child for work done can lead to any negative results. The opposite is true. Interestingly, parents are not consistent about this: when a child makes a mistake or misbehaves, they feel obliged to point it out (otherwise they would feel they are bad educators). The attitude described leads to asymmetry in the child's evaluation and may become a self-assessment mechanism he or she will adopt for the rest of his or her life.

The last misguided attitude we describe here (although there are more) is the parents' desire for the child to fulfil their aspirations, dreams or educational goals. Such compensatory model of upbringing contains two major errors in assumptions. Firstly, the life of the parent and

that of the child are two different existences. The parents' assumptions and experiences do not fit the world of the child's experiences. The second error is boiling down self-esteem to success in learning. Such way of motivating leads to an unstable and inadequate self-assessment, regardless of whether it is high or low. This is a wrong attitude, even if we assume that the parent has the right to educate the child the way he or she sees fit. The reason is that it generates enormous school stress, which, in turn, brings down learning performance (the vicious circle closes).

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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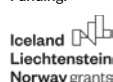
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SELF-ESTEEM

Wiesław Poleszak

V. HOW CAN ONE INFLUENCE IT?

Self-esteem is not a goal – it is means to the goal in the form of an autonomous, strong Self and a sense of own identity.

Achievement of a stable self-assessment is a developmental task taking place in the period of:

- a. 6–13 years of age;
 - b. 13–15 years of age;
 - c. 16–18 years of age;
-

We build our self-assessment from our early years, but the time when it should be formed is 16–18 years of age (**c** is correct). Stability of self-esteem allows us to face major burdens (life trials), such as the maturity exam or vocational exam in specialist schools. We must bear in mind, however, that we are dealing with an individualised process (which is why we provided a period, rather than a specific age). The young people realise the developmental task of forming their self-assessment through personal experiences – stimuli coming from the body, psyche and society, and bodily responses (Brzezińska 2000).

In this part of our discussion on the subject of self-esteem we will consider how to effectively develop it in the school environment. Sometimes it seems to us that there is not much we can do, because it is the domain of the parents, possibly also psychologists. However, this is not true, as school is the place of performing important developmental tasks and building peer relationships. It is also an environment in which students try their hand at task-oriented functioning: they learn to take responsibility for tasks, plan and organise work. We must not forget about providing conditions for identifying talents and developing passions and supporting in building a constructive system of values (in this context, teachers face a strong competition from celebrities and pseudo-authorities). There is probably not a single school

which does not work with students in each of the areas mentioned above. Often, however, these are selective, unrelated activities, and above activities with no connection to the young person's overall self-esteem. This is why in this section we offer an overview of proposed activities to strengthen self-esteem in the school environment.

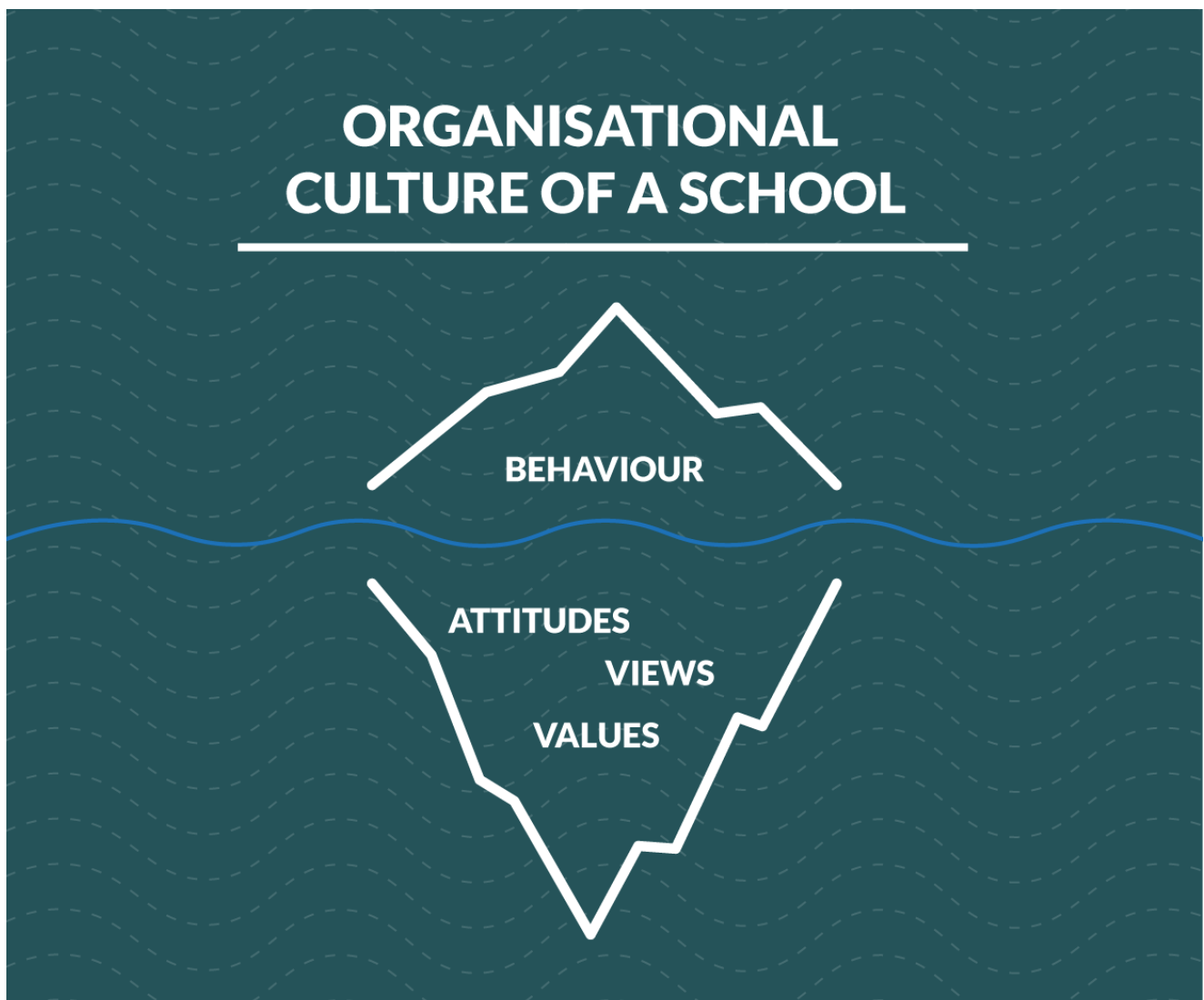


Source: Own work.

Let us think about school as a system in which every component part affects the other ones. To achieve the goal of developing a young person's self-esteem, we must act on all levels of school life. Hence, our activities should apply to:

1. the school's organizational culture,
2. the emotional climate of the classroom,
3. cooperation with the parents in building self-esteem,
4. relationships with the young person,
5. direct support to students in terms of self-assessment.

Let us now go over the levels listed above in a top-down order. The school's organisational culture is a specific collection of values and standards shared by people and groups which operate within it. The norms affect the way people collaborate at the school level and with those outside of it (Goffee, Jones 1996). The values we have mentioned are beliefs concerning goals towards which each person in the school should strive and behaviours and actions which should be implemented in order to achieve those goals. In other words, organisational culture is the commonality of thinking and acting within the scope of achieving the goals for which the school exists. From the values, norms and guidelines stem, which recommend or even prescribe appropriate behaviour in certain situations.



Source: Own work.

Among the values building the school's organisational culture, particular importance is given to **dignity and respect in mutual relationships** (teacher - pupil, teacher - parent, student - parent). Of course, we are talking about living the ideas, not just pretty words themselves. To see how things are in our school, one can look up its upbringing and prevention programme and seek provisions regarding implementation of values. Next, we should look into how implementation of plans looks and how many people are involved in the process. Let us bear in mind

that, as we familiarise the young people with values, we should take into account the four key elements of working on those: recognition, understanding, acceptance and respecting values.

In a similar way, we can inspect how important is the development of self-assessment of the young people in our community: this will be indicated by the amount of content aimed at building and correcting this area in the school's upbringing and prevention programme.

Another important indicator of the institution's organisational culture is the status of the student council. If we care about building self-esteem among youth in the school system, we must make sure that persons representing the students have a real influence on the decisions made. In many schools, the student council only has a decorative role or is even a third wheel (Poleszak 2018).

Another important area for working with self-assessment in the school environment is the emotional climate of the classroom. For most students, the class is the main group of reference. It is here that essential peer relationships form. It is also the environment in which the young people realise the vital developmental tasks and fulfil their needs in the period in which they loosen their bonds with the parents. Difficulties in establishing peer relationships, accompanied by developmental egocentrism (the developmental task occurring near the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school) may lead to injured self-esteem of the young persons. We must bear in mind that building a status in a group is the key developmental need for students at this age. If the class is not integrated and filled with a negative emotional climate, the young people fulfil this need based on coalitions. The easiest way to do this is by finding an enemy in common or a scapegoat to mock. For many students (especially the highly sensitive ones), the experience of being in a form like this is an ordeal. It may result in a sense of one's own worthlessness. In most such situations, the young people are unaware of the injury inflicted on their peers.

The values which we must necessarily take care of in the classroom are, on hand, the affinity of experiences and closeness of relationships and, on the other hand, acceptance of individual differences and uniqueness of each young person in the group.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, it is difficult to build a strong and adequate self-esteem of the young person without working with the parents. That is why it makes sense to share skills and information in this area with them. We also encourage showing how the school works in the area of self-esteem (organisational culture, upbringing and prevention programme) and to determine the key measures to be implemented together for the benefit of the students. This is a valuable idea for working with the parents, because what parents would not like a high self-esteem for their child? Joint workshops for the parents and teachers on this subject are an interesting proposal.

Teacher-student relationships are an area of equal importance for building the self-esteem of the young people. In this relationship, evaluation is one of the most sensitive aspects. We

should bear in mind that it is supposed to be about the work of the person, not about the person themselves. We should make sure that the process follows some fixed rules. To begin with, we should notice what positive things the young person has done, and appreciate that (sometimes it may even be the attempt to solve a task). Next, let us show what they should do to get a higher grade. This way, we will take care not only of self-esteem, but also of motivation to improve or continue work. If the person is stressed, we should avoid jokes (even those intended to relax the tension), because many students misread them – they think it is making fun of them. Let us also be careful about moderate evaluations: the sentence “What you have said was not very clever” can be understood as a derisive comment (regardless of our intentions).

Building relationships is helped by principles of good communication and avoiding communication barriers: judging (criticising, offending, ruling or even praise in connection with assessment), lecturing, judging in front of the class and moralising. If we want to point out an improper behaviour or work, we should ask the person to stay after class and talk to them face-to-face. With the fragile, developing self-esteem, even situations we consider trivial may hurt strongly.

The last important issue is the way we do oral testing. Many students (especially shy, highly sensitive ones) are very stressed by answering in front of the classroom. The stress affects the quality of remembering, learning, and it distracts. That is why we should propose a different way to verify knowledge to persons having major difficulty coping with answering in public.

We should also try to notice and communicate the strengths of students (also those unrelated to learning). Appreciating the handwriting, friendly help or other positive actions costs nothing, and it may be very important for a particular person.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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SELF-ESTEEM

Wiesław Poleszak

VI. THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER'S COMPETENCE

*Of all the judgments you make in life, none is as important
as the one you make about yourself.*

N. Branden

Which of the following representations of thinking about oneself is most desirable in building the self-esteem of a young person?

- a. I'm not OK, you are OK.
- b. I'm not OK, you are not OK.
- c. I'm OK, you are not OK.
- d. I'm OK, you're OK.

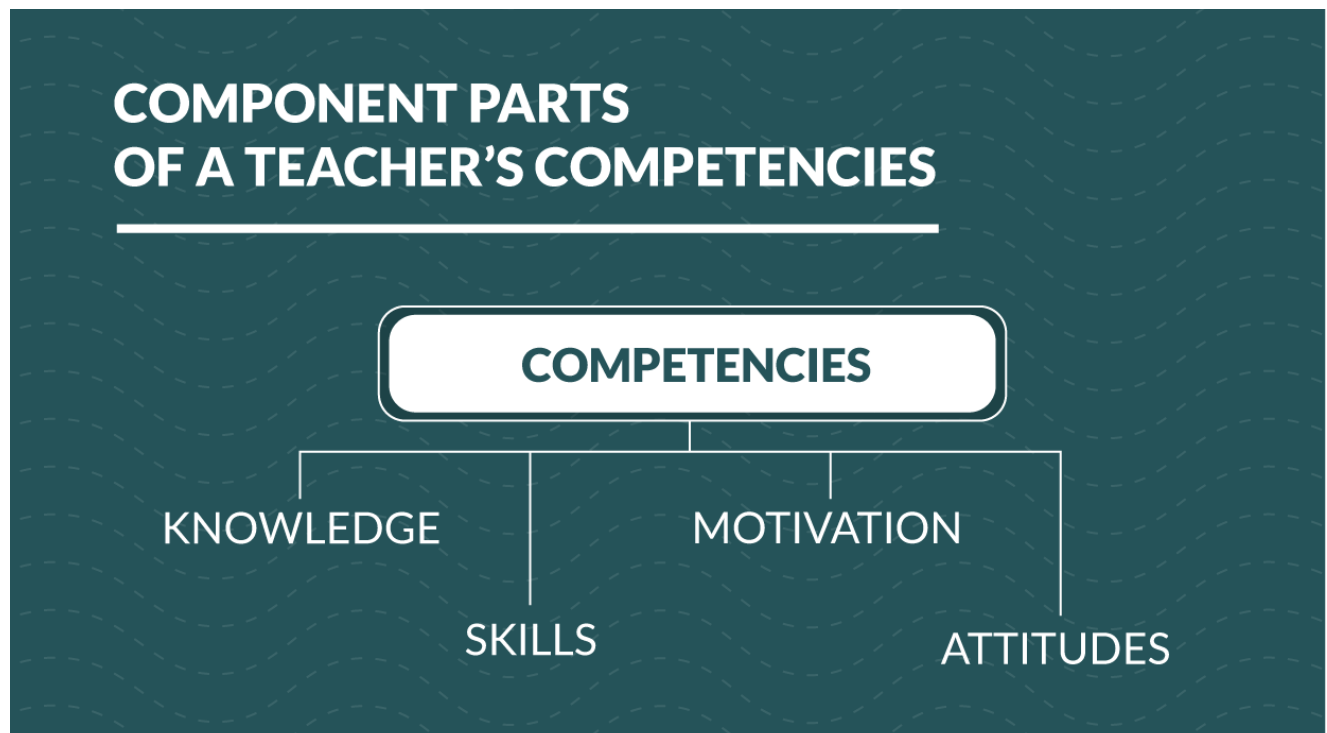
Each of the above arrangements leads to a different opinion about oneself and stems from the self-assessment of a young person (Harris 2018). Its adequate level is presented in answer **d**. Such statement suggests a strong, stable and appropriate self-assessment, without diminishing one's worth or blowing it out to compensate.

In this part of the paper we will discuss the teacher's competencies which may contribute to building the young people's self-esteem. Many definitions of competencies exist in literature. One of the most widely used was formulated by Boyatzis (1982). He defines them as the potential of a person which leads to a behaviour which contributes to fulfilment of requirements on the given job post and within the organisation, which in turn produces the desired outcomes.

The behavioural model of competencies emphasises employee/teacher behaviour. In this view, a person is competent if she or he knows how to behave in order to achieve a set goal (knowledge), is capable of taking appropriate action (skills) and wants to behave in a specific way (motivation) (Armstrong 2007; Jurek 2008; Talik, Poleszak 2017). According to this model, behaviour is a function of one's competencies.

Oleksyn (2006) enumerates the following components of competence: intrinsic motivation, talents and predispositions, experience and practical skills, health and physical shape, other psychophysical characteristics, attitudes and behaviours, formal authority to act.

Rakowska and Sitko-Lutek (2000) understand competencies as the totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Likewise, Filipowicz (2004) defines them as capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes which allow performing tasks to a required standard.



Source: Own work.

Further in this chapter, we will look at different component parts of teachers' competencies related to supporting young people in building their self-esteem. Perhaps the first component is the easiest, as all literature related to self-esteem tries to provide knowledge on the subject. One should bear in mind, however, that we are only talking about selected aspects of the subject. At the same time, we encourage you to expand your knowledge with additional content, which is included in this paper.

Before we reach for scientific knowledge and information from practitioners, let us focus on ourselves and think about the things that make up our self-esteem. What are we proud of and what do we like ourselves for? What are our strengths, talents and achievements? Let us also remember who has contributed the most to our self-esteem. It's a good idea to record our thoughts on a sheet of paper or in a notebook. This will be equivalent to building the first (of six) pillar of self-esteem according to Branden (2021) – i.e. the pillar of living consciously (see Fig. 2). Let us do similar work for the other pillars, because only a person with a high self-esteem can build a positive, high and adequate self-esteem of the students they work with. It is difficult to teach something we cannot do ourselves.

PILLARS OF SELF-ESTEEM ACCORDING TO BRANDEN (2021)

LIVING CONSCIOUSLY

Awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Perceiving one's thoughts, feelings and behaviour and realisation of the right to be one's own self

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility for oneself and one's attitude toward another person

LIVING PURPOSEFULLY

Conscious pursuit one's goals, in consistency with the system of values and thanks to the ability to achieve them

SELF-ASSERTIVENESS

Adequate, authentic expression of oneself, one's own desires, values, feelings, beliefs

PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Consistency of values, judgments and standards of behaviour

Source: Own work on the basis of Branden (2021).

Every student should be granted by us the possibility to answer similar questions about themselves. We can introduce this subject as part of a school task (on a foreign language lesson, when analysing a character etc.), but also in individual conversation or at the home room lesson (provided that positive emotional climate exists in the class). Of particular importance here are such teacher skills as informing (providing feedback), as well as listening and summarising.

The skill of informing is a way to share with the pupils some essential facts pertaining to their education, life and upbringing process.

The listening skill is an active activity including eye contact, posture, gestures and verbal reactions. Listening is aimed at helping another person to name what they feel, think and how they behave. It helps them better understand themselves. Its purpose is for the young person to discern and analyse the things which happens to him or her.

Summarising allows us to experience progress in understanding oneself, learning and solving problems. Thus, it may be helpful in pinpointing one's strengths and limitations.

Other skills helpful in achieving self-acceptance (apart from the competencies mentioned above) may include mirroring and guiding. Mirroring is a skill of expressing in one's own words understanding and acceptance of feelings and experiences of a student.

Mirroring can be exemplified by the statement: "From what I understand, you are not satisfied with your speech". Guiding, on the other hand, is the ability to encourage (directly or indirectly) open analysis and communicating one's own experiences, thoughts etc. These two skills are useful in teaching assertive attitudes.

Supporting young people in building a sense of responsibility requires the skill of contracting, i.e. concluding and abiding by a contract in which each of the parties undertakes to perform certain tasks. We must keep in mind that before we start taking responsibility for our behaviour, we must also experience failures. Therefore, we should not expect successes in the first contract. It is a learning process, and failures in it are a source of wisdom.

Also important in teaching responsibility are skills such as interpretation and confrontation. Interpretation is the active process of explaining the meaning of situations so that a person can look at their problems in a new way. The goal is to teach independent reflection about events and perceiving one's role in creating those. Confrontation, on the other hand, is about honestly and directly communicating to a student what happens in an educational relationship. That way, such a person may understand the consequences of their choices. The skill of interpretation may be expressed in the message: "When you speak about yourself, you focus on the negatives. What are some positive things you manage to do?" Confrontation can be represented by the statement: "You have mentioned that friends in the class don't like you. But, from my observation, you avoid contacts with them, even when they invite you to play".

Developing the capacity of conscious and purposeful life is greatly helped by the skill of focusing on what is most important (including the field forces analysis). It is simply about helping the pupil in analysing their own resources and experiences, so that, as a result, they can use them to cope with difficult situations. This repertoire of behaviours should also include clarifying values and identifying life goals. These skills can be used for building the internal integrity of the young people's world of experiences.

Competencies also comprise attitudes, i.e. our approach to students, expressed in emotions and behaviours. It would seem that it is best to treat children and young people the way we wish to be treated. This approach, however, entails a risk, as not all of us have the same sensitivity and experiences. It is better to stick to the core values, i.e. respect to another and caring for keeping their dignity.

The last component is motivation. It is rightly included among the component competencies – after all, what do knowledge, skills and attitudes mean if we do not make use of them in daily life? Hence, we will end this part of the work with some food for thought: is self-esteem

important for you, reader? If so, imagine what work would like in a class in which all persons have the appropriate self-esteem. If the picture is attractive, assume the following goal: pay more attention to creation of conditions in which the young people can build an adequate, high self-esteem.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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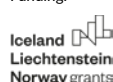
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SCHEME - PHILOSOPHY

Activities promoting student wellbeing (regardless of the area addressed in our project) should be implemented in a logical and coherent way involving the whole school community. What follows is a clear description of a strategic way of thinking about a specific area, important for young people's wellbeing and mental health. We show how it can be holistically addressed in the school. In order to make the strategy as practical as possible, its different stages are presented in blocks, together with questions that the school management and teaching staff need to answer at each respective stage.

Such an analysis should help the management to see whether the activities in a particular area carried out in the school follow a model that has a good chance of being effective. The analysis can provide basis for a decision about what to improve and how. Teachers can assess how appropriate in terms of the subject matter are the activities conducted in school and consider how to coordinate their individual work with them. Even the best teacher initiatives, in which a lot of time and energy is invested, are often not very effective if they are not coherent with the activities of others in the school and with a shared philosophy. Of course, it is clear that the quality of activities aimed at young people's wellbeing and the awareness of important issues in this area differ from one school to another. However, it is always worth starting where we are, with the potential we have at our disposal. It is useful to know the goal we are aiming for, namely system-wide action at a level of the school as a whole.

For each of the six thematic areas, we have prepared an extensive list of activities that can be carried out within it, with a brief description of each.

STRATEGIES

1. Is this area related to the wellbeing of pupils important in our school?

Baseline – the problem	Baseline – actions	Baseline – support and training
Have there been any major events that have made the given issue important in our school?	What activities in a particular area (effective and well-received by the community) are already being carried out by our school?	What is our knowledge of the issue in question? What training have we attended? What is our competence in the area concerned?
What data do we have from diagnostic studies (e.g. surveys of the problem at school)?	How are the activities in this area carried out by our school so far evaluated by: pupils, parents, teachers?	What knowledge and support do we lack?
Have learners, parents, teachers or anyone else reported that there are any problems/gaps in the area?	Which activities carried out by our school in this area are ineffective or have very little effect?	What support do we as a school use in a particular area? Which experts, professionals and institutions are helping us?
	Which activities carried out by our school have proven to be effective, producing good or very good results?	How do we evaluate the support we already use?
	Are the activities related to this area coordinated in our school?	Are there any establishments, professionals carrying out activities in this area that are worth following or implementing?
	What actions are missing in this area?	What are the costs of the measures we want to implement, and do we have or can we get the funds for them?
		Are there entities or institutions that can provide support to our school at no cost?

STRATEGIES

2. Are we acting in this area according to a common philosophy and together?

Philosophy of action	Joint actions
Do we all define an area in the school in a similar way? (This includes learners, teachers, parents as well as other school staff).	When planning activities, do we include everyone (learners and teachers, parents, other school employees) in the discussions and decision-making processes, and how?
Do we have a school-wide document that defines the area and describes what the school does within the area?	When implementing solutions in an area, do we listen to and take into account everyone's voices about the actions being implemented (both positive and critical)?
Do we define the area not only negatively (e.g. anti-violence), but also positively (e.g. fostering positive peer relationships)?	Do we constructively resolve conflicts at school when differences of opinion arise about what to do and how to run a particular programme?
What professional literature do we use to define an area?	How do we take into account the special needs of certain students (or groups of students), e.g. those with specific disabilities, in programmes in the area?

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
When planning activities, do we discuss the results of the diagnosis or carry out additional diagnostic activities?	Are the tasks in the area being implemented according to the agreed plan?	Do we continuously review the effects of the area's activities and the implementation process itself?
Are we using good quality methodological and scientific studies when planning solutions?	Do we document the introduction of activities in the area?	Are we using ongoing lessons learned to modify and improve operations?

STRATEGIES

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
Do we review and consult solutions with external experts before implementing them?	Does the team responsible for implementing the activities discuss implementation difficulties on an ongoing basis and seek ways to deal with those?	Is an evaluation conducted after each major (pre-defined) period of programme implementation?
Is there a clearly defined, leader-led team working on action planning in the area, in which – at least to some extent – all important groups in the school are represented?	Do we have good quality internal and external communication about what the school is doing in the area?	Are the results of the evaluation discussed and the conclusions used in further implementation of the solutions?
Does the team set for themselves tasks to be completed within a certain timeframe and check that they have been completed? na środku nic, a po prawej: Are the results of the evaluation communicated (at least to some extent) internally and externally? How? To whom are they communicated?		

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SELF-ESTEEM

Wiesław Poleszak

As we have highlighted in the presented model, activities related to building children's and young people's self-esteem should be implemented following a shared philosophy and understanding of the problem. They stipulate that:

- Working on building young people's self-esteem requires sound knowledge of the issue. Therefore, systematic education in this area should be ensured.
- The basis for building a sense of worth is mutual respect in relationship between teachers and between the teacher and student.
- Self-esteem is about the whole person, not just his or her selected qualities, and therefore cannot be reduced to individual successes or areas.
- Building a young person's self-esteem is the responsibility of all those involved in school life – parents, teachers and the peer group.
- Working on self-esteem is a systemic activity, so a problem with one element reduces the effectiveness of the whole system.
- In order to constructively build children and young people's self-esteem, there needs to be a common goal that the whole school community is working towards.
- Given the importance of self-esteem for development, motivation and engagement in learning, it is worth considering this area as a priority for school education and prevention activities.
- Self-esteem is most effectively fostered by focusing on children and young people's positives, their experiences and the tasks they have completed.
- Building a sense of self-worth cannot be reduced to a grading system alone.

STRATEGIES

- It is important to identify strengths and use them to provide feedback on school performance.
- Both too high and too low self-esteem are a threat to the proper development of the pupil or student.
- In building children and young people's self-esteem, it is worth tapping into their talents, interests, strengths and the values they live by.

The implementation of such a philosophy of action in the area of building children and young people's self-esteem includes the following list of solutions, which should be introduced as components of the coherent school strategy discussed above:

- Diagnosing the pupils' need for support in terms of self-esteem.
- Developing a programme of activities aimed at creating conditions for children and young people to develop a constructive sense of values.
- Synchronising these activities with the upbringing and preventive programme of the organisation.
- Outreach activities throughout the school community on the importance of self-esteem for young people's development and how to strengthen it (including a meeting of teaching staff, parents and the students' council).
- Building a coalition (made up of teaching staff, parents and the students' council) to foster the self-esteem of the students.
- Dividing tasks among all participants and stakeholders in school life (homeroom tutors, teachers, parents and the students' council).
- Modification of the grading system with a view to giving feedback ("feedback sandwich" – referring to what was successful, then what was lacking, e.g. in a test, and finally what needs to be done to receive a positive grade).

STRATEGIES

- Recognising the successes (including non-educational successes) of young people in order to teach them that self-esteem is made up of many dimensions of a person's actions.
- Improving the quality of the emotional climate by showing interest in those at risk of low self-esteem.
- Organising homeroom hours in which pupils present their interests in a professional way (e.g. by means of a presentation, tasting, workshop, etc.).
- Training in recognising symptoms of inadequate self-esteem in children and young people.
- The collaboration of the educational team in supporting male and female students with a self-esteem crisis.
- Conducting educational lessons on building self-esteem.
- In classes where the problem of inadequate self-esteem is exacerbated, incorporate psycho-preventive programmes aimed at raising self-esteem.
- Involving young people in pro-social activities (volunteering, peer education, social or scientific projects) and providing constructive feedback in the group and individually afterwards.
- Diagnosing talents (especially extracurricular ones) and displaying them in the classroom and school.
- Creating conditions for facing difficulties and problems so that young people can gain life experience (e.g. launching peer mediation).
- Promoting respect and human dignity in the school environment
 - a school campaign advocating these values (e.g. a week with respect
 - selecting people who live this value or have acted in accordance with this value).
- Emphasising the importance of dignity and respect in school subject content.
- Student council activities aimed at promoting positive relations between students.

STRATEGIES

- Psychological workshop on the problem of inadequate self-esteem and difficulties in self-acceptance.
- Educating parents on giving feedback and motivating young people to learn.
- Evaluation and screening activities for mental health problems.



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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

SCENARIOS AND SHORT ACTIVITIES

Monika Suchecka – Sasinowska

DIFFERENT ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

1. Completing sentences “I am a good friend/good colleague because...”, “I am important/important because...”.
2. Writing something nice, positive about each other.
3. Establishing class, group or subject rules together.
4. Working in groups or pairs – people in the class agree rules and roles in advance.
5. Greeting and addressing each other by name.
6. Meditation (e.g. using Headspace app), breathing exercises.
7. Outdoor activities.
8. Games and activities.

9. Coping with negative thoughts

One way is to try to find as many counter-arguments as possible against negative thoughts. For example:

Julia fails her biology exam. Julia’s negative thought might be: “I am stupid”. Possible other, fairer thoughts include:

- “The biology exam was very difficult”.
- “Many people in the class also failed”.
- “I didn’t study enough”.
- “My strengths are art and English, not biology”.
- “A test from one chapter says little about your overall academic performance”.

10. Authority figure

Looking at what we have in common with our authority figure can boost confidence.

Encourage students to try to answer the questions:

- Who is your role model?

- What qualities and strengths does this person have?
- What strengths do you have? Break these down into smaller elements.
- What qualities do you and your role model have in common?

11. My strengths

Ask individuals in the class to write down their 5-10 strengths.

With each one, pupils explain how this trait can manifest itself or how others can benefit from it.

For example: "I am a good listener. Friends and family often contact me when they need good advice".

12. Students try to complete the following sentences:

- "What I liked about today was..."
- "The five things that went well today were..."
- "I am happiest when..."
- "I am different from others because..."
- "My main strength is..."
- "I feel best when..."
- "The five things I am grateful for are..."
- "My main achievement today was..."
- "I feel strong when..."

dr Wiesław Poleszak

THE PYRAMID OF VALUES

Objective

The student can identify his or her value system and understands that living according to them can be a source of self-esteem.

The operational objective is to expand the list of dimensions that are a source of self-esteem (referring to problems related to the development of self-esteem: specific versus general self-esteem).

Materials

- Worksheet "A pyramid of values"
- Slips of paper
- Pens

Steps

1. Give the students in the class 15 square pieces of paper each and something to write with. Alternatively, hand out A4 sheets of paper, ask them to fold them 4 times in half and tear along the folds. As a result, each person gets 16 small rectangles, one of which they put aside as unnecessary).

2. On the cards, pupils write down one statement each about what is important and valuable for them in life (15 values). They have 10-15 minutes to do this (those who do not make it in time, leave the remaining cards blank).
3. Each person has to make a pyramid of all their squares (including the blank ones). They should arrange them from the most important (at the top) to those least important. The pyramid should have 5 cards at the base, 4 on top of them, then 3, 2 and 1 at the top (as in the graphic in Appendix 1).
4. When asked why it should be a pyramid, say that an order of values is important. It prevents internal conflict, especially in the area of core values. Such conflict can lead to a crisis of values or decision-making problems, e.g. whether to follow what parents say or what colleagues advise. Besides, it is worth remembering that the value at the top of the pyramid can determine the meaning of life, which defends against existential emptiness.
5. Once the class have arranged their pyramids, make sure that all the cards actually have values on them (it is important that destructive things such as alcohol or drugs must not be there).

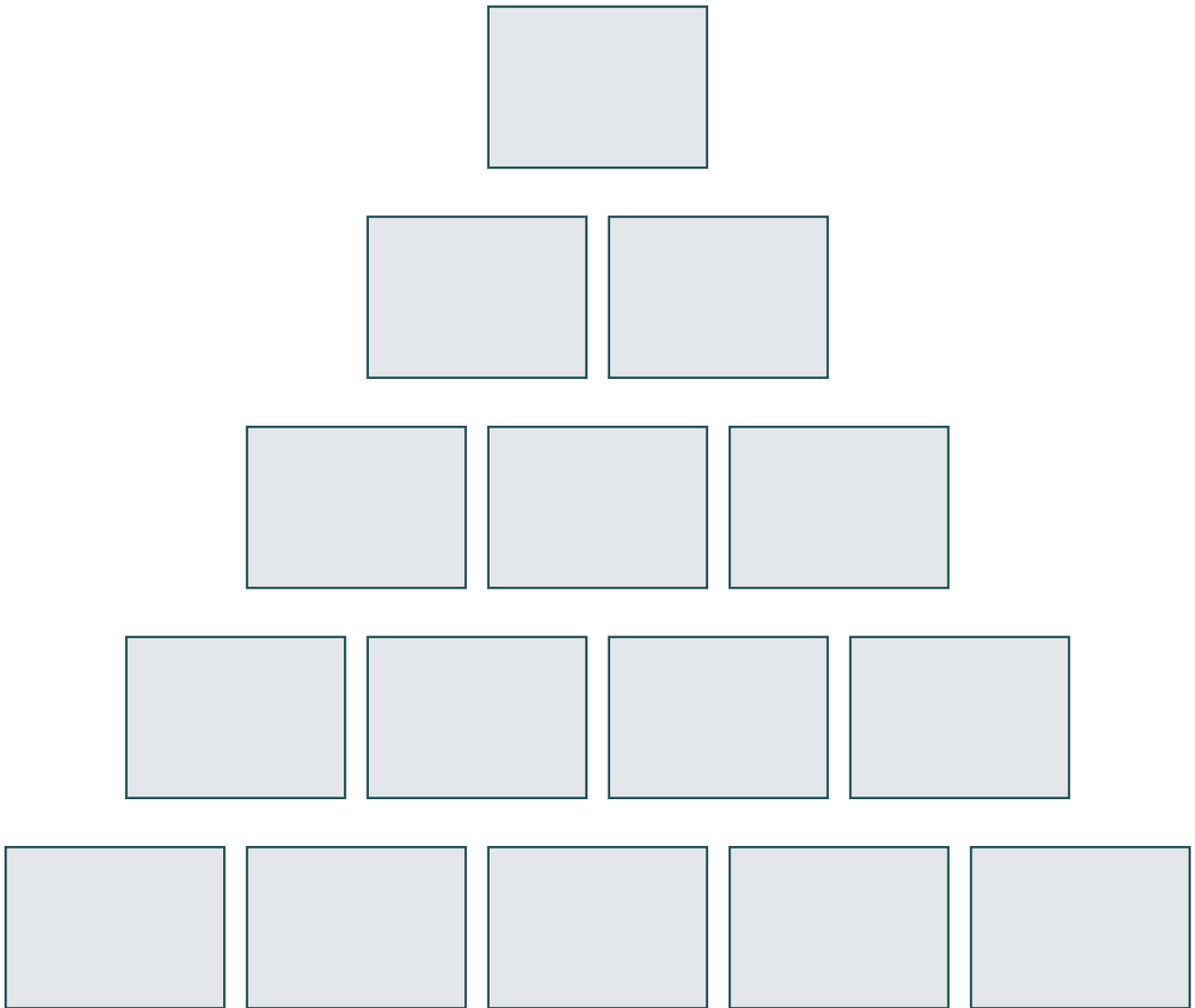
Moderator's commentary

You have built pyramids of your values. A value system is to our psyche what a spine is to the body. It gives us stability, but also allows us to reposition ourselves. Values are a good thing, therefore anyone who realises them in his or her life can feel like a valuable person. Especially since these are constructs that each person has adopted into his or her own life.

Steps (cont.)

6. Ask the students to reflect on how they can tell that they are guided by the chosen values in their everyday life.
7. Suggest a conversation about what values individual students see in the everyday behaviour of their classmates. Which values are their hallmarks? What good do these values bring to the class group and to other people's lives (family, friends, class or school people)?

A pyramid of values



MY STRENGTHS

Objective

The student can identify his or her strengths

Materials

- Sheets of paper
- Pens or pencils

Duration

10–15 minutes

Introduction

If needed, the activity can be done in pairs – especially if the class is integrated and a positive emotional climate prevails in it.

Steps

Give the following instructions to the students:

1. Write 5 of your strengths on a piece of paper. You have 3 minutes to do this.
2. How can you tell if these are your strengths? Recall situations in which you have used or benefited from your strengths.
3. If you haven't written down 5 strengths in the time provided, ask yourself if perhaps you are only focusing on your weaknesses in life and overlooking your strengths.

MY TALENTS

Objective

The student can identify his or her talents.

Materials

- Worksheet "My talents" or A4 sheets of paper
- Pens or pencils

Duration

15–20 minutes

Introduction

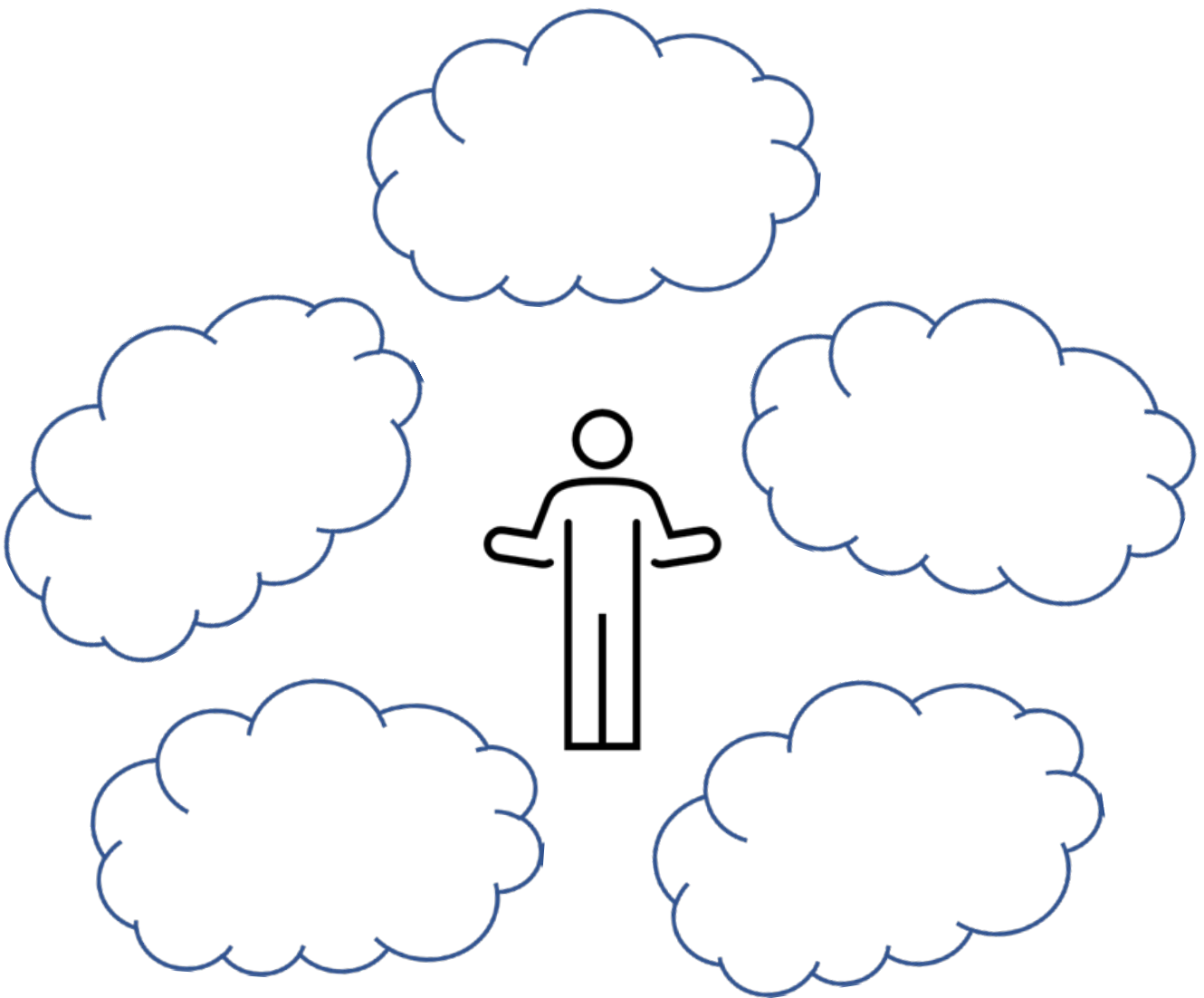
Talent is an exceptional ability or skill. Something we are very good at. Talents can vary. Someone can sing nicely, someone can run fast, another person learns maths easily or has a great memory. Talents are not learned at school, they are innate. But it is at school that we can develop them.

Steps

1. Print the worksheet "My talents" or hand out A4 sheets of paper and ask each person to draw 5 clouds all over the sheet – big enough to write something in.
2. Ask the young people to write in each cloud something they feel good at, competent at, something they find easy to do, etc. It is important that these are skills that go beyond the competences subject to assessment at school. These can be school skills, but encourage pupils to look specifically for those outside school.

3. For people who signal a lack of such skills, remind them that there are certainly activities that they excel at, that other people praise them for, or that they enjoy doing because it comes easily to them. Encourage the learners to think about what they really enjoyed doing before they went to school, or what they like to do after school.
4. Encourage other students to help find talents for those who can't see them by themselves.
5. Conclude by emphasising that every person has a talent, although not everyone recognises it easily. That is why it is worth opening ourselves up to the search for talents. They are what make us unique and we are responsible for their development. Talents should be found and developed, not buried.

My talents



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