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Self-Image Key to Student Achievement, Says UD Education Professor

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SELF-IMAGE KEY TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT,  
SAYS UD EDUCATION PROFESSOR  

DAYTON, Ohio -- A return to "the basics" in elementary and secondary classrooms may be exactly the wrong approach for teachers to take, according to an education professor at the University of Dayton who presents workshops for teachers on how to improve their students' self-esteem.

"I believe in competency, but at what price?" asks Roger D. McCormick, associate professor of counselor education. "If it means that, in the interest of being hell-bent for creating competency, you further diminish a child's feeling of stature--of being human--that's too high a price."

McCormick, a former public school teacher, says he became interested in student self-concept about 10 years ago, when he discovered that achievers "feel pretty good about themselves." Many factors place young people at risk, he says, but "there is a single common denominator that runs across the board, and that is at-risk students do not feel very good about themselves. They have poor self-concept and consequently have a low level of self-esteem."
McCormick has identified six qualities needed in a classroom to nurture a student's self-image. They are challenge, freedom, respect, warmth, control and success.

The key in instilling these factors in the classroom, McCormick tells teachers, rests largely in what they believe about themselves and their students. Would they, for example, let a student know they are aware of and interested in that student as a unique person? And, do they convey expectations and confidence that a student can accomplish work, can learn and is competent?

Among the things teachers can do to make students feel adequate, says McCormick, are making a special effort to show students patience, understanding and acceptance; setting standards and levels of attainment; encouraging and praising freely but fairly and, if students make mistakes, helping them find correct answers and rewarding them; and, when answers are solicited orally, asking a question the student can answer—even if that student never volunteers.

"We ought to include with other curricular concerns a curriculum of affect," says McCormick. "We ought to talk about feelings and the kinds of things our young people are faced with today and how they feel about them. No one ever gets around to those things."

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