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UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT
OF
STUDENTS

AN ABSTRACT OF
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In this paper the problem of underachievement is studied. There is a need to look for causes of underachievement and also a need for new approaches in teaching that will help underachievers. The author of this paper, as well as many prominent psychologists, feels that the self-image of a person correlates with that person's underachievement. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the evidence that the self-image does correlate with underachievement and also to make recommendations for teachers to help them deal with the problem of underachievement.

In this paper a number of research studies are used to examine the factors involved in underachievement and their relation to a "poor" self-image. Each study approaches the problem from a different frame of reference. Three studies include children who were in grades two through seven. Five studies made use of students who were in grades eight through high school, and one study deals with students who were in college.

To determine the self-concepts of the students, the case studies made use of psychiatric interviews, teacher reports, adjective checklists, projective doll-play, and standard psychological testing devices.

In each study different aspects of the self-concept

were examined. These aspects included the way in which the student sees himself in relation to his family and friends, his feelings of worth, and his feelings about his emotional freedom.

This paper points out that there is a strong correlation between underachievement and a person's self-concept. Authorities such as Lecky, Jersild, and Sullivan feel that the self-concept is the prime motivating factor for all behavior. The individual's behavior is consistent with his self-concept. Behavior which is not consistent with his self-concept is rejected. In this paper it is pointed out that if a person feels he is a failure in a particular area, very often he will not try and risk failure. He would rather fail because of lack of effort and then say, "I didn't even try." (This is called using a defensive mechanism.)

In this paper seven recommendations are made for teachers to use to help students improve their self-concept and achievement. The recommendations made are:

1. Teachers should help students to understand why they have negative feelings toward themselves (especially negative feelings which relate to school work).

2. Teachers should allow students opportunities to express themselves.

3. Teachers should give students praise, especially when they do an exceptional job or show improvement.

4. Teachers should allow all students opportunities

for success.

5. Teachers should discuss with students the importance of positive attitudes.

6. Teachers could discuss with students ways to acquire enthusiasm.

7. Teachers should themselves acquire enthusiasm for their own benefit and for the benefit of those they teach.

These techniques are designed to help students improve their self-image.

It is hoped that this paper has clarified the meaning of the terms "self-image" and "underachievement" and has identified some of the specific factors involved in what are considered to be the negative self-concepts of underachievers and the ways these factors reveal themselves. It is hoped that the recommendations suggested for improving the self-image will be beneficial to teachers and students.