

## PART 1 - DIALOGUE ON SELF ESTEEM AND LEARNING

What is self-esteem? Is it a self-concept, a self-image, a set of self-affirmations? Is self-esteem learned? Can self-esteem be 'pumped up' or must it grow through achievement? What is the role of learning in the development of emotional and intellectual well being? This is a dialogue and exploration about the relationship between learning and self-esteem that includes a number of leaders from the national self-esteem movement.

**If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning.**

- Carl Rogers

**We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us from.**

—Marcel Proust

\*\* Indicates the messages that best convey our orientation and thought about self-esteem.

**Page 3 — #1 - John Vasconcellos** (California Senator/National Self-Esteem Champion) raises the alarm - in the wake of a report claiming self esteem is not a correlate for many of the social ills its proponents claim, John asks the self esteem community to rally.

**Page 4 — #2 - David Boulton articulates his view of self-esteem\*\*** - in response to the above David describes **self esteem as: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts.**

**Page 5 — #3 - John agrees with David's descriptions** and asks " HOW DO WE ASSURE EACH CHILD A SET AND SERIES OF RELATIONSHIPS WHICH ACCEPT AND ENCOURAGE HER/HIM TO APPRECIATE AND TRUST THEMSELVES, IN THEIR ENTIRETY? David responds: **We can't control the relationship they are in - we can help them develop the inner-life skills to process their experiences so as to immunize them (just like a vaccine works from the inside -out) to be able to grow through the shame rather than avoid it or displace it in ways that result in the kinds of self-assumptions that accumulate into self-disesteem.**

**Page 6 — #4 - Elaine King (retired California Master Teacher) + David\*\*** We can't make a child's environment free from the risk of injury and we certainly can't create environments free from the risk of negative-to-self experiences. What we can do is: **1) help people become aware of how critical this kind of learning is and how they could be more alert and conscious in their relating to children when they are going through negative-self terrain 2) we must help children grow through this great barrier reef by supporting their inside-out learning within the actual happening of negative to self feelings and thoughts.**

**Page 8 — #5 - John to David \*\***- Acknowledging the learning opportunity to redefine self-esteem rather than attack the opponents of its current definition.

**Page 9 — #6 Elaine King + David\*\*** - Self esteem is not as deep a fulcrum as learning is: **the best and most cost-efficient /optimal way to facilitate the learning of: X (whatever 'X' is) is to resource 'students' in their inside-out participating in learning about 'X'**

**Page 12 — #7 - Kirk VandenBerghe ('Trust Your Heart' Master Therapist) to David\*\*** - The misdirection of our attention into **nominalizations** and the **importance of becoming inside-out oriented.**

**Page 13 — #8 - David to Kirk** - Lets explore the role of nominalizations in inner well beingness.

**Page 14 — #9 Gary David (Philosopher, Theorist, Epistemologist, Affect Therapist, Life coach) to David and Elaine\*\*** - **it is not the shame-affect, but the shame of shame that is involved with self-dis-esteem.**

**Page 16** — #10 David to Gary re Jack Canfield (author: chicken soup for the soul books) to Vasconcellos comments - reveals the communication gap within the unfolding conversation.

**Page 17** — #11 Elaine + David Thread\*\* : we learn to learn in similar ways - we develop unconscious reflexes that guide the process - the question then becomes **what modes of conscious participation will develop these faster than consciousness reflexes in ways that are intrinsically learning-oriented rather than mechanical?**

**Page 20** — #12 Elaine to Gary and David: Nathaniel Branden's definition of self esteem the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living.

**Page 21** — #13 Gary's response to Elaine and Branden's definition: I try to reach the actual impediments to the inner flow **without a goal-image of self-esteem as defined by those such as Branden.**

**Page 23** — #14 Elaine's response to Gary: I am also more generally (and passionately) involved with our interrelationships and our modes of communicating, connecting and understanding one another. **Maybe you "guys" and your intellects need a little female fumbling here too.**

**Page 25** — #15 The Rebuttal Article by Josh Holcomb: **Defending the Efficacy of Healthy Self-Esteem, Vasconcellos et al**

**Page 29** — #16 Elaine's critique of the Article: Did I miss something? I really didn't know what to expect of the article; I take it your "inside-out" view hasn't been assimilated into this ongoing work.

**Page 30** — #17 John Vasconcellos + David thread: revisiting David's definition letter

.... One year later....

**Page 32** — #18 Sharon Begley's Wall Street Journal Article on Self-Esteem - "an intervention that encourages them to feel good about themselves regardless of work may remove the reason to work hard -- resulting in poorer performance,"

**Page 34** — #19 David's response to the WSJ Article -\*\* "What the self-esteem movement did was direct our attention to what is developing on the inside of our children.**How a child learns to be her or his self, shapes their ability to be effective participants in everything they do in school and later in life.** I think we went wrong when we formulated self-esteem as something to build up. I think what we have learned is that, quite the contrary, **self-esteem is a lack of building up. It is not about the boosting the accumulation of positive feelings, self-imagery or self-concepts, its about the minimizing the accumulation of negative feelings, self-imagery and self-concepts.** More and more we are coming to see that we human beings would naturally gravitate to healthy psychological well being if we didn't learn otherwise.

**Page 35** — #20 Response to David's Response to WSJ - "I think what we have learned is that, quite the contrary, self-esteem is a lack of building up. It is not about boosting the accumulation of positive feelings, self-imagery or self-concepts, it's about minimizing the accumulation of negative feelings, self-imagery and self-concepts. SADLY, DAVID, TRAGICALLY, ONLY SOME OF US - SO FAR - - - AMEN!"

...2 years later...

**Page 37** — #21 David's response to January 2005 Scientific American Article: Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth\*\* **"Who doesn't want 'inner-health' and 'outer success' for themselves and their children? Clearly, they are related and the potential benefit of deepening our understanding of how they're related warrants serious scientific inquiry.** The question here is whether the 'self-esteem' discussion is taking us there. Unfortunately, both sides appear lost in the mythic assumptions that A) 'self-esteem' is a good 'domain-name' for a serious scientific inquiry into 'inner/subjective health' and B) that whatever we mean by it, it's something that is accumulated and built up into an edifice."

## 1- Letter to Self Esteem Team from John Vasconcellos in response to 'alarm' raised in the appended email

I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE YOUR CALL TO ACTION IN THIS ([below](#)) EMAIL -

ONLY EXACERBATED BY LAST SUNDAY'S NEW YORK TIMES SUNDAY MAGAZINE SECTION DIATRIBE AGAINST OUR SELF ESTEEM WORK. I'M HOPING YOU + MICHELE BORBA + JACK CANFIELD + I (WITH ALL HELP WE CAN GET FROM OUR ENTIRE SELF ESTEEM ROSTER) WILL RIGHT AWAY COMMIT OURSELVES TO PREPARING A MAJOR REBUTTAL (ESPECIALLY 2 THE NEW YORK TIMES PIECE - EVEN IN HOPES OF GETTING THEM TO PRINT IT). SHALL WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO DONG THIS TOGETHER?

- IF SO, WHEN? (RIGHT NOW!)

- IF SO, HOW?

- IF SO, BY WHOM?

- IS THERE SOME ONE OF US (I EXPECT IT'S YOU, BOB) WHO CAN RIGHT AWAY COMPOSE

A THOROUGH-GOING POINT-BY-POINT REBUTTAL OF THE NEW YORK TIMES PIECE (INCLUDING ANY POINTS RAISED BY THE OTHER ARTICLES YOU CITE - WHICH OUGHT BE REFUTED)?

- THAT ESPECIALLY JACK & MICHELE & I COULD THEN IMMEDIATELY CRITIQUE TOWARD MORE FULL RE-FINEMENT, ADOPTION?

- THAT ANY OTHER MEMBER OF OUR TEAM COULD AS WELL CRITIQUE?

- LET'S ALTOGETHER ENGAGE OURSELVES IN A DIALOGUE THAT HAS US BY MONDAY AT LEAST DECIDING WHETHER - AND IF SO, HOW - WE'RE GOING TO TAKE ON THIS ENORMOUS - HISTORIC - LIFE-SAVING - TASK.

JOHN (VASCONCELLOS)

### **In a message dated 1/14/02 2:46:14 PM, Esteem 1 writes:**

<< Dear Friends,

Self-esteem is again under sustained attack following a research assessment for the Rowntree Foundation in the UK by Professor Emler. It claims to show that low self-esteem is not a risk factor for delinquency, violence, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, educational under-attainment or racism.(For the original report see <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/n71.asp>) However, several journalists and academics are abusing this research to condemn all efforts to raise self-esteem, the most recent being Polly Toynbee in the Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,5673,625237,00.html>

Titus Alexander, a member of our International Council for Self-Esteem and organizer of the Self-Esteem Network in the U.K. sent out a plea for individuals in the field to respond. In his memo he states, "I think these kinds of critiques are also a real "heads up" for people in the field. We need to more rigorously understand and do better ourselves in describing what we mean by self esteem, and what learned ways of thinking people pick up that can easily be confused with self esteem, and certainly have been confused with self esteem in the literature and the research cited by Polly." I agree with Titus and felt that I would take this opportunity to see to what degree we can agree on what self-esteem is and how we should define it. Hence I am writing to you to ask about your perception and your response as to what self-esteem is.

## 2 — David Boulton to California Senator John Vasconcellos - Self Esteem 2

-----Original Message-----

**Sent:** Sunday, February 10, 2002 11:40 PM

**Subject:** Self-esteem - how I think about it

John,

This is a more up to date version of what I shared with you in our early conversations about 15+ years ago.

I think...

Self esteem is the buoyant absence of negative-to-self, emotional and intellectual, self-assumptions. A flowing from within channeled and focused by learning and not automated by the reflexes of wounded self-imagery.

Self-esteem is a term that describes the ground of our relationship with ourselves. Its not accumulative, it is the lack of a certain kind of accumulation.

John, I have long felt that people make a confusion by trying to define self-esteem in terms of its positive attributes. I am concerned with how it is our children learn negative to self assumptions. To use your vaccine metaphor, how do we 'vaccinate' the child against the in-form-ation of negative-to-self-assumptions.

By exposing our bodies to 'safe' doses of a pathogen, vaccines create learning environments for our immune systems. They function like 'simulators' - they give us a chance to work out a response without being in a life-threatening situation.

In order to develop a vaccine to the disease of self-disesteem, some appear to argue for accumulating self-positive knowledge and experience. This is then dismissed by the 'other side' as being over generalized and not specifically earned - there is a fear that it leads to self-inflation by principle rather than via healthy feedback. I think you would get more universal agreement if the thrust of self-esteem was more on reducing self-disesteem.

How do we immunize self learning from the ravages of self-disesteem? To do that I think that we have to get closer to how our learning nature, in the fields of our learning environment circumstances (home, school...) unconsciously learns strategies to avoid the shame and pain felt. "Oh, I am just no good at...." "I am not good looking" "I am not a loveable person" - "I am not smart" -

**I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts.** If so, the question becomes how do we create environments in which children have the opportunity to learn to participate rather than be passengers in their feelings and thoughts.

Getting self-esteem on the map was a huge step for all of us. I congratulate you again for driving that into happening and for being the champion and hub of this noble effort to defend the self-esteem movement.

David

### 3 — Threaded email John Vasconcellos & David Boulton - Self-Esteem 3

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**Thread Order - DB in regular, JV in ALL CAPS, DB again in BLUE CAPS**

-----Original Message-----

Sent: Saturday, March 16, 2002 5:17 AM

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Subject: Re: FW: Self-esteem - how I think about it

DEAR DAVID - GOOD HEARING FROM YOU -

HERE'S THE KEY OF WHAT YOU WROTE ME THEN: ([link to](#))

'I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts. AGREED.

If so, the question becomes how do we create environments in which children have the opportunity to learn to participate rather than be passengers in their feelings and thoughts.

- AND/OR HOW DO WE ASSURE EACH CHILD A SET AND SERIES OF RELATIONSHIPS WHICH ACCEPT AND ENCOURAGE HER/HIM TO APPRECIATE AND TRUST THEMSELVES, IN THEIR ENTIRETY?

WE CAN ASPIRE TO THIS BUT THE VACCINE HAS TO ASSUME THAT TRY AS WE MIGHT CHILDREN WILL STILL BE EXPOSED - WE CAN'T CONTROL THE RELATIONSHIPS THEY ARE IN - WE CAN HELP THEM DEVELOP THE INNER-LIFE SKILLS TO PROCESS THEIR EXPERIENCES SO AS TO IMMUNIZE THEM (JUST LIKE A VACCINE WORKS FROM THE INSIDE-OUT) TO BE ABLE TO GROW THROUGH THE SHAME RATHER THAN AVOID IT OR DISPLACE IT IN WAYS THAT RESULT IN THE SELF-ASSUMPTIONS THAT ACCUMULATE INTO SELF-DISESTEEM. I KNOW THE NORMAL WISDOM OF PREVENTION AND I THINK IN THIS CASE PREVENTION NEEDS TO BE 2ND ORDER TO LEARNING FROM WITHIN - THE VACCINE.

Getting self-esteem on the map was a huge step for all of us. I congratulate you again for driving that into happening and for being the champion and hub of this noble effort to defend the self-esteem movement.'

THANK YOU, DAVID - IT SEEMS TO BE ESCALATING INTO WHAT I HOPE COULD BECOME A RENEWED NATIONAL FOCUS AND DIALOGUE - - -

I HOPE SO TOO JOHN - THIS IS OUR MOST PRECIOUS CLOSEST OVERLAP AND I WOULD LOVE TO CONTRIBUTE MORE OF MYSELF (AND GARY IS A MASTER IN THIS SPACE) BUT WE HAVE TO GET THE CONVERSATION TO GROUND ITSELF DEEPER IN WHATS HAPPENING TO THE CHILDREN (INSIDE-OUT) RATHER THAN OUTSIDE-IN FROM THE STATS OR PLATITUDES.

**Elaine King & David Boulton - Self-Esteem 4**  
thread order - **DB in blue**, Elaine in black using **red** to refer to DB's earlier letter

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**Sent:** Saturday, March 16, 2002 6:02 PM  
Elaine  
**Cc:** Gary David; John Vasconcellos;  
**Subject:** Thanks Elaine!

Hello Elaine,

A great pleasure to read you again - I like how you have drawn us out - thank you Gary for passing her words along to me. I am in BLUE

----- you said -----

what particularly struck me was the following question in [David's letter](#):

--how do we create environments in which children have the opportunity to learn to participate rather than be passengers in their feelings and thoughts?

That is such an important ingredient to a child's learning, and living, flow of making meaning out of his/her life. And the direction schools are now forced to take is its complete antithesis.

I just now received the further Self-Esteem correspondence, so my responses are becoming a little disjointed. But respond I must. I'm so glad you got yourself involved in this, since shame has always been such a missing link here. David and John agreed on a definition of self-esteem that said:

'I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts.

"Negative-to-self feelings and thoughts" can be accepted as important tools of self-learning by parents who are trying to learn that fact for themselves.

YES, negative to self feelings and thoughts are natural - we can't stop having them any more than we can stop feeling 'ouch' when we stub our toe or skin our knees. We can't make a child's environment free from the risk of injury and we certainly can't create environments free from the risk of negative-to-self experiences. What we can do is:

1) help people become aware of how critical this kind of learning is and how they could be more alert and conscious in their relating to children when they are going through negative-self terrain (wouldn't so abuse them here by their added shaming) - The greatest benefit of the 'self-esteem movement' was/is that it raises the 'general consciousness' to a sensitivity level in this area that it didn't have before and that we need. Such is the stuff of John's legacy - taking on and bringing to a greater general awareness needed challenges.

2) we must help children grow through this great barrier reef by supporting their inside-out learning within the actual happening of negative to self feelings and thoughts. To do this parents and teachers need to have an inside-out orientation inversion - they have to stop thinking they have something to teach (out here from me/us) that is more important than how the child is actually participating in their learning (inside-out from within them) - it is I believe this very point that is the glue that holds together the framework in which the self-disesteeming assumptions take roots and get so well reinforced.

I believe so strongly that the child who is valued, not shamed, from day 1 for his or her (DB red bolded) **every expression** of affect, feeling and thought is the child who takes the "vaccination" of self-esteem with him/her into relationships with others and into situations that others may find to be "rejecting."

Its not just the pervasive lack of being shamed. We will be shamed. We will experience shame regardless of other's intentions. The question is how will we learn to participate in our shame so as to not be co-opted by shame - to feel it and see it and know it without getting lost in or become subject to it? (same with fear and the other affects)

Granted, that child is not out there in huge numbers, but they are there, and their very presence may help the world understand. I am not talking here about over-valuing (over-inflating their importance and accomplishments) or about "telling" them they are valued when they feel otherwise. Once shame has begun to pervade their thought processes and resulting scripts, they need more help than "telling" can ever accomplish. **YES!!** I also believe this kind of nurturing self-esteem is so far superior to the kind they may work very hard to develop later in life, it is worth trying to "teach" parents who may not feel that kind of value within themselves.

Very little extra effort needs to be put into creating the right learning environment for children with self-esteem, because they carry that environment within them.

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Elaine, I agree with your main intent here and I don't think in terms of 'children with self-esteem' - 'self esteem' is not a possession - this I feel is the trap the movement fell into and what makes it so vulnerable today. Children don't have self-esteem - **children are more healthy who they are when they are not 'caught' within negative to self feelings and thoughts.** As we can't prevent them from having episodes of negative-to-self feelings and thoughts the work is to help them learn how to learn through them when they are happening.

This is where we must focus much effort - without the right kind of learning environment we humans are susceptible to developing self-dis-esteeming assumptions (nuclear scripts). I think we need to develop an explicit awareness campaign and a working pedagogical scaffolding through which parents and teachers orient themselves and learn to respond to and resource children in their learning into shame - we need to explicitly intend to learn to do this - as a species, as a body politic, as a loving parent or as an ethical teacher. We can't wait for the adults to change - this is how they will change.

For those already riddled with shame and doubt, an environment of trust and acceptance becomes so big an issue, no school, as presently designed, can begin to furnish it. So where do we start? And how do we begin to undo the damage that continues to escalate every day of a child's life?

We drop the past - the damage done is how they learned to process/manager their affects - the only way out is through learning when its happening - we need to create environments that are analogous to 'performance support systems' for learning-guide-resourcing their participating in negative to self feelings and thoughts.

I intend to look up the reference to the Rowntree study, but it's hard for me to even take seriously any study that tells us

"low self-esteem is not a risk factor for delinquency, violence, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, educational under-attainment or racism."

**RIGHT ON ENERGETICALLY - I AM WITH YOU and your passion - AND - we must take it very seriously because what we are really attempting to do here is beyond political polarity if its understood deeply enough. They aren't necessarily stupid or uncaring - they are pointing to the holes in how 'self-esteem' is a, though helpful and relevant at the time, mislabel of what we are really trying to address: 'healthy inner well being' These anti-self esteem articles have their ground in the misattributions of what we really meant by 'self-esteem'. They are great learning opportunities if we don't attack or dismiss them - but come from a place more implicate and communicate back through them. I believe if we were in a dialogue with the 'other side' our values systems could come to agreement about our real intention.**

Nice to read you again - I can see that retirement is not diminishing your passion - thank you for being so alive and caring.

**John Vasconcellos to David Boulton - Self Esteem 5**

-----Original Message-----

Sent: Sunday, March 17, 2002 6:04 AM

Subject: ++ DAVID BOULTON, + DEEPER SENSE RE CHILD NATURE & POTENTIAL

DAVID -

- I ENJOYED, APPRECIATED OUR RECONNECTION, CONVERSATION, LAST NITE - + ESPECIALLY ENJOY THIS FURTHER ELABORATION ([previous message](#)) REGARDING THE NATURE OF A CHILD ANDHER/HIS DISPOSITION TOWARD LEARNING, AND HOW ESPECIALLY 'SHAME' DISABLES A CHILD AND LEARNING.

- I ESPECIALLY APPRECIATE THE EFFORT HERE TO GET US TO RECOGNIZE WHAT'S AT THE ROOT OF THE AWFUL DIATRIBE AND DISCONNECTED DIALOGUE REGARDING SELF ESTEEM, AND THE SUGGESTION WE COULD (OUGHT) RECOGNIZE AND UTILIZE THIS AS ITSELF A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY, FROM WHICH WE COULD GO DEEPER, AND RATHER THAN REJECT 'THEM AND THEIR ARGUMENTS,' INSTEAD CREATE OUR OWN DEEPER RESTATEMENT OF WHAT WE MEAN BY SELF ESTEEM, AND THEREBY HOPEFULLY PUT ALL THIS ONTO A SOUNDER HEALTHIER (AND HEALTH MODEL) FOOTING, FOR FUTURE ELABORATION, AND HOPEFULLY PROGRESS TOWARD A MORE WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURE AND DISPOSITION OF EACH CHILD.

- I'M ASKING JOSHUA HOLCOMB (WHO'S MANAGING OUR LEGACY PROJECT) TO CONSIDER WHETHER WE MIGHT (OUGHT) SLIGHTLY RECAST OUR RESPONSE ESSAY, TO INCORPORATE YOUR SUGGESTION.

- HERE'S HOPING WE WILL, IN OUR LIFETIME, FIND A WAY TO LEAD 'THE POWERS THAT BE' INTO A HEALTHIER APPRECIATION OF AND APPROACH TO THE INNATE GOODNESS AND LEARNING DISPOSITION OF EACH/ EVERY CHILD!

JOHN

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**Elaine King & David Boulton - Self-Esteem 6**

thread order - DB in blue (1st), Elaine in black (2nd), DB in this color (3rd)

At 09:31 PM 3/16/02 -1000, you wrote:

Elaine - you are cohering for me - coming in ever more clear and very beautifully so. I WILL BE IN THIS COLOR

Thanks for the thanks, David. My passion for the subject of education is endless, since it started in a one-room country school in 1946 and has been tested through every movement that came along through the years.

I am well acquainted with John Vasconcellos hard work in the area of self-esteem and have been rooting for him all the way. I have corresponded with a friend of his, Carl Rogers, and even made my way through the results of John's research, The Social Importance of Self-Esteem. I was sorry it couldn't have been more definitive; people are so hard to convince, especially with the kinds of misunderstandings that surfaced in the New York Times articles. So many people came out of that era believing self-esteem could be "glued on," \* and that's where it got bogged down, in my view.

Hope you don't mind if I break up your message to respond to a few specific points. **Not at all**

2) we must help children grow through this great barrier reef by supporting their inside-out learning within the actual happening of negative to self feelings and thoughts. To do this parents and teachers need to have an inside-out orientation inversion - they have to stop thinking they have something to teach (out here from me/us) that is more important than how the child is actually participating in their learning (inside-out from within them) - it is I believe this very point that is the glue that holds together the framework in which the self-disesteeming assumptions take roots and get so well reinforced.

I fully agree with that assessment, **but** every movement I have seen so far, and am seeing now (I am very closely in touch with teachers now in the system), keeps heading in the opposite direction. **I share your frustration with what has happened AND I think we need to learn into bringing this into social political focus. I am not so sure that 'self-esteem' is THE fulcrum of getting us to 'inside-out'. I am more inclined to think that the pathway lies in the economic value associated with educational success. The case I want to make, in addition to the self-esteem, reading and other works, is that purely in economic (cost of schooling, life incomes,...) and academic performance (test scores and gpas) terms, the best and most cost-efficient /optimal way to facilitate the learning of: X (whatever 'X' is) is to resource 'students' in their inside-out participating in learning about 'X'. The orientation inversion has powerful economic advantages. I am in this for the spirit of children AND I believe there is miraculously powerful potential for alignment between those that care about money and performance and those that care about deep well being - they both end up in the same place: learning to learn from the inside-out. I want to demonstrate that in ways that act like spark plugs in the ignition system of the inversion.**

I believe so strongly that the child who is valued, not shamed, from day 1 for his or her every expression of affect, feeling and thought is the child who takes the "vaccination" of self-esteem with him/her into relationships with others and into situations that others may find to be "rejecting."

Its not just the pervasive lack of being shamed. We will be shamed. We will experience shame regardless of other's intentions. The question is how will we learn to participate in our shame so as to not be co-opted by shame - to feel it and see it and know it without getting lost in or become subject to it? (same with fear and the other affects)

Yes, we will be shamed and we are being shamed. It's presently the way of the world. Teachers use shame liberally as a behavior modification technique and because the "vaccination" you spoke of hasn't taken place, it works. And in the process, the minds of our children are being retarded rather than inspired and expanded, as the research on rejection and lower I.Q. scores suggested. That's why I feel that either the "vaccination" process has to begin in the home and from the moment of birth, or the entire school process has to undergo a huge transformation society is not yet ready for. Inside-out learning, unless its brought with the child from the very beginning, is a very difficult concept for the average, shamed individual to grasp.

I understand, again am home in your passion, and I see these as the same process: to help in the home or in the school, we need to respond to their inner need not entrain them in our models. How are we to help a toddler deal with shame? There is no protocol. We can say above else do no harm (not add to the shame), which is helpful, but if we want to help them learn their way through these feelings we must meet them in the flow of their actual experiencing them - we have to respond to their inside-out participation. It doesn't matter whether its an algebra test, learning to read or a toddler whose face is contorted from the shame of mommies careless tone - we have to get alongside their inside experience - we have to intend to do that for any of the vaccination to work just as for reading to work.

Children don't have self-esteem - children are more healthily who they are when they are not 'caught' within negative to self feelings and thoughts. As we can't prevent them from having episodes of negative-to-self feelings and thoughts the work is to help them learn how to learn through them when they are happening.

I'm willing to debate this point, but I believe children do have self-esteem.

This would be most helpful to explore. What is self-esteem? Are you saying its in our genes? Is it a psychological formation apriori learning - a virtual organ? When you make it an attribute of being, give it thingness, I think you are expressing self-esteem in a way that is precisely the problem. I may be wrong. I would like to learn into this. I respect that you may be seeing something I am not. As a metaphor, lets take intestinal health. Is it the result of something I am holding within or the lack of holding within? I think the later. Our bodies function and feel best when we are not 'clogged'. I see self-esteem in the same way. We have a natural self-bouyancy that might be described by many of the qualities so frequently attributed to self-esteem. This natural bouyancy is not based on an internally held inventory of self-reflections - its how we are when we are transparent to who we are being and doing. I am inclined to see it inside-out - that its the weight of negative-to-self learning that leads to self-disesteeming habits. Once we think self-esteem is a 'thing' within us that can be 'taught' or 'boosted' or .... we are on the path the critics rightfully challenge. Self-esteem is not something to learn - self-dis-esteem is what we must be careful to learn to not learn.

It is taken from them so early in life by caretakers who truly believe they are guiding them or teaching them when they criticize and get angry at things small children don't understand, we don't see it. When a mother or father holds an infant closely and smiles, that self-esteem is being verified and reinforced. When parents understand the developing mind and use shame sparingly, a child learns from that shame and accepts it as part and parcel of the feelings they live with every day of their lives. My 4 year old niece said, "I can do anything I want to do," my 3 year old daughter said "I can't do that now. But maybe I can tomorrow," and my 4 year old granddaughter said, "I'm very creative, you know." Little boys have a harder time retaining and developing that kind of self-esteem because their physical energies make them easier targets for provoking shame from tired parents.

Well said - I hear you. I have a 29, 27, 17, and 8 year old. 2 grandkids. 7 brothers and sisters and 15 nieces and nephews. I never met a child who wasn't a genius (feeling wise as well as ....)

We drop the past - the damage done is how they learned to process/manager their affects - the only way out is through learning when its happening - we need to create environments that are analogous to 'performance support systems' for learning-guide-resourcing their participating in negative to self feelings and thoughts.

Well said - I hear you. I have a 29, 27, 17, and 8 year old. 2 grandkids. 7 brothers and sisters and 15 nieces and nephews. I never met a child who wasn't a genius (feeling wise as well as .....)

We drop the past - the damage done is how they learned to process/manager their affects - the only way out is through learning when its happening - we need to create environments that are analogous to 'performance support systems' for learning-guide-resourcing their participating in negative to self feelings and thoughts.

I really wish we could do that. We haven't yet found a way to do it consistently and in a way that will keep working, especially for large groups of children. **We are fundamentally mis-oriented.** Repairing damage that's already been done is so much more difficult than doing it right from the beginning.

Yes

I appreciate being able to participate in the dialogue you are doing such a good job of promoting on this problem. It's people like you who create movement. **Thank you**

Its teachers like you that have touched the hearts and minds of our generations that I am so grateful for. As the changes gather and cohere the people who show up will be the ones who were touched (within) by their teachers - given the alpha version of the vaccine.

My best wishes to you

Elaine

And, to you my warm best wishes - David

## Kirk Vandenberghe to David Boulton - Self Esteem 7

Thanks for including me in this thread, DB. I see the nominalization distinction as primary (self-esteem as an object). I \*have\* observed that we (people) have a network of beliefs about self that can be labeled "self-concept" (self-concepting as process). "Are you an honest person?" "How do you know?" These types of questions will bring forth habitual inner representations about self (and certainly the generalizations will include massive deletion and distortion based on the network of other generalizations). When elicited, the answers can appear to be a generalized thing called "self-esteem" that can be plotted on a continuum of non-existent to high. It may be more generative to have our experience of ourselves be a "natural buoyancy (that) is not based on an internally held inventory of self-reflection" but in the current collective, we have to somehow make meaning of the vast menu of value-based nominalizations (integrity, honesty, kindness, anger). For example, I have my representation of "kindness" and a set of unconsciously selected personal reference experiences of my behavior in relation to the word. Shifting from "I am a kind/unkind person" to "In this specific instance I did some kindness" is a huge jump. I see the second jump from there as being able to experience the whole nominalizing process as unuseful and irrelevant; a system I wouldn't want to use to "rate" myself. Perhaps a child who is raised in an inside out kind of way would have such a strong sense of self that they would simply not be influenced by an other-based shaming expression like "You did/didn't do/have this thought/action so that means you are <nominalization> and will/won't be able to <action>."

I can see why for you children and education are your prime fulcrums; why it's more about having our present moment experience than learning "more, better, different" stuff. Kv

## David Boulton to Kirk Vandenberghe - Self Esteem 8

**Sent:** Sunday, March 17, 2002 1:54 PM  
**To:** Kirk Vandenberghe  
**Cc:** Yuki; John Vasconcellos; Elaine King; Gary David  
**Subject:** the role of nominalizations in inner well beingness

Kirk,

The way you brought in nominalizations to connect with my concern about the orientation of the self-esteem movement has been enriching for me. It opens the conversation into the utility-boundaries of nominalizations. Krishnamurti once made a distinction between the need for images in the world (running a business, driving a car, playing a game.....) and the need for a lack of them psychologically (He saw psychological self-measurement as a dangerous locked-loop oscillator that fragments being). In my article 'From Here to Implicity', I said:

Technology is not a substitute for (though it can at times augment) collaborative, co-mentoring, team teaching, group dialogue and of course, one on one, relationship processes. Similarly, actually contacting and caring for other forms of life like flowers and animals is entirely different than learning about them in text books or on video disks. But just as there are aspects of learning we need to minimally mediate, there are aspects of knowledge which by its nature is so abstract that it is best facilitated through

This connects right here. What we are all pointing to is this boundary.

So our dialogue goes on:

Lets explore the role of nominalizations in inner well beingness

What is the role of nominalizations in our inner most processes of being? Are they 'underneath' us? In 'front' or on 'top' of us? Nominalizations are one kind of thing another is the scripts and circuits implied in their patterns. Does consciousness emerge from nominalizations? Who is doing the nominalizing? What is doing the nominalizing? Its clear that my relationship with knowledge and all knowledge comes from nominalizations. Is there something in 'knowing' that is more than nominalizing nominalizations? Learning? What about my relationship with myself? Its obvious the value of nominalizations to measure and help me improve my performance in a sport or job - do I need them to know who I am - do they underlie me being who I am or weigh me down - both? Is being trapped in this what people have meant by the 'original sin'?

So we begin another tunnel - this one into the OS our being has learned to en-self.

Thank you for so enriching it - by what you bring to being in it with me - my friend.

David

## Gary David to Elaine King and David Boulton - Self Esteem 9

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Much has been said, and I will make only a few comments in green.

**David Wrote:** I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts

**Elaine wrote:** I can't quite reconcile those two ideas. Doesn't your definition suggest that children do have self-esteem? I see children who "are more healthily who they are" as having self-esteem. Those "self-disesteeming psychological reflexes" have not yet taught them not to trust and believe in themselves. You said "I have never met a child who wasn't a genius (feeling wise as well as...)" --I guess I would say, "as well as close to that human nature that tells us how to learn and grow."

**David:** Children don't have self-esteem - **children are more healthily who they are when they are not 'caught' within negative to self feelings and thoughts.** As we can't prevent them from having episodes of negative-to-self feelings and thoughts the work is to help them learn how to learn through them when they are happening.

**Elaine:** I'm willing to debate this point, but I believe children do have self-esteem.

**David:** This would be most helpful to explore. What is self-esteem? Are you saying its in our genes? Is it a psychological formation apriori learning - a virtual organ? When you make it an attribute of being, give it thingness, I think you are expressing self-esteem in a way that is precisely the problem. . . . We have a natural self-bouyancy that might be described by many of the qualities so frequently attributed to self-esteem. This natural bouyancy is not based on an internally held inventory of self-reflections - its how we are when we are transparent to who we are being and doing. I am inclined to see it inside-out - that its the weight of negative-to-self learning that leads to self-disesteeming habits. Once we think self-esteem is a 'thing' within us that can be 'taught' or 'boosted' or .... we are on the path the critics rightfully challenge. Self-esteem is not something to learn - self-dis-esteem is what we must be careful to learn to not learn.

I understand David's point about children not "having" self-esteem. Primarily, I see the term "self-esteem" as a high order abstraction. It's a bookmark, not the "text" itself. It's a term that sums up many lower order processes at the affective level. I think it's helpful to distinguish between the affective *order* that lends itself to the *image* of self-esteem, which is the explicate order. We also need to know what kind of "self" we're dealing with. The natural buoyancy David speaks of I see as the maximization of affect flow(or minimizing the inhibition of affect.) Further, that buoyancy may also involve the ability to maximize positive affect (interest-excitement; enjoyment-joy) and to minimize negative affect in regard to one's "self." Education then is the process of developing the methods that support those three factors. Nathanson's formulation of the "empathic wall" is important to the process as well. He wrote in a message to David recently:

The empathic wall is a gravity shield that must work equally well for all affects and be capable of down-regulation whenever we wished deeper penetration into each other's mass. Whoever experiences shame in the company of another has not been taken over by the greater mass of that other but entered a warp preventing mutualization just as if s/he and that other suddenly had become entirely the south pole of a magnet with no north available.

I see that it has to do with movement of the 'core' sense of self -- the 'core' self I see as affective-perceptive-motoric *movement* both physically and psycho-logically, and both implicately and explicately. When kids can move freely within and without themselves with a minimum of inhibition, you have removed the dis-esteeming impediments.

The need for such a concept as self-esteem emerged from new conditions in evolution that arose from self-reflexive consciousness going out of coordination. All of this could be written as the history and evolution of shame in Western culture. Without those uncoordinating conditions, such a concept of self-esteem might never have been needed. Self-esteem, then, is not what we're talking about. I agree with David that it's dis-esteem that needs to be understood. I don't think cognitive explanations (script-based) are adequate to the task as exemplified by the article on rejection.

**Elaine wrote:** I believe so strongly that the child who is valued, not shamed, from day 1 for his or her **every expression** of affect, feeling and thought is the child who takes the "vaccination" of self-esteem with him/her into relationships with others and into situations that others may find to be "rejecting."

This is well put, and I also must emphasize and support that with the reminder that it is not shame-affect, but the shame of shame that is involved with self-dis-esteem. That, I think is Elaine's point above -- to not be shamed for feeling anything, and to speak and act to our children in ways that they can feel that most psychic impediments can become doorways.

Both of you are helping me see that BOTH the inside-out and the outside-in descriptions are necessary to complete the overall description.

Gary

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**David to Gary re Jack Canfield to Vasconcellos comments - Self Esteem 10**

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Gary,

This is the response from Jack Canfield the author of all those 'chicken soup for the soul and \_\_\_\_' books. His responses shine a light on our communication problems - many of his translations of the meanings are within the very trap he implies he is free from ( 'outside-in'). I suggest you bring Nathanson up to speed on this thread and proceed to get him and this group into dialogue. Canfield has a big public microphone. L, DB

-----Original Message-----

Sent: Sunday, March 17, 2002 10:32 PM

Subject: Re: DAVID BOULTON RE SELF ESTEEM - -

JACK - GOOD HEARING FROM YOU 2X - YES, WE ARE ON OUR WAY TO A DEEPENING DIALOGUE, A DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION OF AUTHENTIC SELF ESTEEM!

In a message dated 3/17/02 12:40:00 PM, jcanfield writes:

<< I really like everything David says here. Important concepts. This has always been my approach to self-esteem -- (as well as creating loving, safe environments) teaching kids (and adults) how to observe their own internal processes and reduce or eliminate the self-destructive ones and how to develop self-accepting and self-empowering ones. AMEN!

It is learning how to be in charge rather than reflexive in the area of beliefs, thoughts, self-judgements, internal images of self (as well as others and the world), expectations, intentions, etc.

AGAIN, AMEN!

+ IT ENTAILS OPENING UP DEEPLY ENOUGH WITHIN, TO OURSELVES, OUR EMOTIONS, OR BODIES - SO THAT EACH OF US TRULY BECOMES THE AUTHOR OF OUR CHOICES, ACTIONS.

I like the level of dialogue that is being created by all of this. Thanks, John. --

SURE, JACK - THAT'S ONE OF THE FINEST BENEFITS, OPPORTUNITIES, THIS POSITION PROVIDES ME - - -

Elaine > David > Elaine.... Self Esteem 11

David,

I would be happy to be "looped in" to any of the threads you are developing. Besides being so interested in your goals, I find your directions and the way your mind handles them to be fascinating.

When you say:

the question then becomes what modes of conscious participation will develop these faster than consciousness reflexes in ways that are intrinsically learning-oriented rather than mechanical?

I find myself quite curious as to how you might go about that.

May "the flow" be with you!

Elaine

Elaine,

Its been a real pleasure to travel this space together. I think we are in deep sync accord. For me our next frontier is understanding how everything we are talking about here (self-esteem and learning to learn from the inside-out) runs very deep into the micro-time, faster than we are conscious of, reflexes that regulate our attention. As in reading where I describe one aspect of the process as:

To read well our minds must process letters into sounds, sounds into words, words into meanings and meanings into a stream of comprehensions **faster than we can consciously participate in the process**. This implies, as we are not evolutionarily adapted for reading, that **we must learn mental reflexes or 'scripts'** that will perform the unconscious processing for us. In order to develop these, faster-than-conscious-reflexes, we need 'training'. The question is what kind of training?

I believe we learn to learn in similar ways - we develop unconscious reflexes that guide the process - the question then becomes what modes of conscious participation will develop these faster than consciousness reflexes in ways that are intrinsically learning-oriented rather than mechanical? With reading its easier because its comparatively static.

If you are interested in this thread I will loop you in as it develops.

Thanks so much dear lady - David

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Elaine King

**Sent:** Sunday, March 17, 2002 2:05 PM

**To:** David Boulton

**Cc:** Gary David

**Subject:** Re: self-esteem

Hi Elaine,

Thank you and it should be said that Gary and you have been the catalysts in this round - THANK YOU! I will be in this color again (magenta?)

**Gary was the catalyst, and he is now remaining strangely silent. Gary? Silent?**

. My belief is that the child's mind, in its own sometimes stumbling (and stuttering) way, is working to learn and to become whole and that it should be trusted. **Yes, and its even more important that we create environments in which children learn to tune and instrument a trust in their own 'minds'**. Children won't necessarily learn all they need to learn by proceeding exclusively from trusting themselves. There is a legitimate role for curriculum.

**There is a legitimate role for stimulation in many areas of learning, and curriculum serves the purpose, at least for now. Without that, we could do away with teachers. I'm not about to get myself in that much trouble with my teacher friends, as well as with my daughter and sister-in-law.**

Though educators, and curriculum-planners, can sometimes be convinced, a teacher who faces far too many students every day, many of them too shamed to participate, feels quite differently. During the peak of the self-esteem movement in the 60s and 70s, many classrooms and various types of curricula were designed to foster inside-out learning,

I think this may have been true in spirit, it obviously is and was in the intention of teacher like you, however, I wonder if we ever went deep enough in our understanding of 'inside-out learning' more specifically the bottom line: healthy learning reflexes are developed in relation to the learner's participation in the flow of their learning - this happens in a time scape and at a level of subtlety we have been largely oblivious to - our curriculum needs to create gross navigational scaffolding and thereafter acknowledge, respond to learn from what learner's are needing to resource their ever more optimal participation from their inside-out experience. I think the problems are still mis-orientations. I understand that its a huge challenge to support so many learners at once - yet I think it can actually be made easier by coming from the orientation we are describing.

**You are so right about that. I have seen it done only once - by a sixth grade male teacher - and it was beautifully done. Once the preliminary work of re-orienting a group of students to understand that their participation was expected and valued, the teacher's work was extremely minimalized. He was relaxed and happy and thoroughly enjoyed his students. He attracted media attention and the other teachers in the school became unhappy (shamed) with his success and what they considered to be a chaotic learning environment. He was, through a number of unfortunate circumstances, finally forced to leave.**

but they generally failed because so many teachers were unable to understand the concept. They completely believed that children are lazy, unwilling to learn, and in need of constant training (outside-in learning) and punishment (calling it discipline).

Yes and I understand that, given the way it all works now to take children away from their inner process rather than support them in participating in it, children are unwilling and disinterested (ever read my 'insidious curriculum piece'? I'm not sure. I've read much of your impressive work and will check this one out. <http://www.implicit.com/insidious.htm>) we haven't met them in a way that feels to them resonant with how their natures are oriented to learn - they don't want to be in 'kid prison' (as many kids have described it to me)

**"Kid prison" is becoming a more apt label every day, with the present fears about shootings.**

I fervently hope some of that attitude is changing, and I stand with you every step of the way in finding the common ground everyone can embrace.

You also said

I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts and

Children don't have self-esteem - **children are more healthily who they are when they are not 'caught' within negative to self feelings and thoughts.**

I can't quite reconcile those two ideas. Doesn't your definition suggest that children do have self-esteem? I see children who "are more healthily who they are" as having self-esteem. Those "self-disesteeming psychological reflexes" have not yet taught them not to trust and believe in themselves. You said "I have never met a child who wasn't a genius (feeling wise as well as...)" --I guess I would say, "as well as close to that human nature that tells us how to learn and grow."

Elaine see my conversation with Kirk about nominalizations - he created a good descent scaffolding for us to get into sync here. Respond to that thread on this point and we will travel wherever it takes us.

**Yes, Kirk is exactly right about nominalizations in regard to self-esteem. It was funny; I had just been talking to my other daughter, who counsels the very shame-filled parents of drug and alcohol-syndrome babies, about self-esteem. She made the same point. If we think in terms of self-esteeming, maybe we can make this work. It's the root of self-esteem that I see growing in a baby or small child who has not yet developed "self-disesteeming" scripts and patterns of behavior.**

I always liked the following appraisal of a child who is "self-esteeming" by Nathaniel Branden, in his book "The Psychology of Self-Esteem," published way back in 1969.

The hallmark of healthy self-assertiveness in a child is his visible delight in the action of his mind, his desire for the new, the unexplored, the challenging,- his refusal to accept on faith the platitudes of his elders and his insistent use of the word "Why?" his boredom with routine, his indifference toward the undemanding, his obsession with questions, his hunger for (mind and body growth). ---He is a self-generator.

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Thank you for showing up in this Elaine for helping me learn and hopefully for helping all of us grow into this emerging new stage. - David

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**Repeat those words but signed Elaine**

**Elaine >to Gary + David: Self Esteem 12**

**Gary and David**

**I would be interested in your responses to this definition of self-esteem --from Nathaniel Branden, The Dis-owned Self - 1972**

**Elaine**

CHAPTER 3: Self-Acceptance and Self-Awareness

Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth. It is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living. The conviction that one is competent to live means: confidence in the functioning of one's mind; confidence in one's ability to understand and judge the facts of reality (within the sphere of one's interests and needs); intellectual self-reliance. The conviction that one is worthy of living means- an affirmative attitude toward one's right to live and to be happy; a self-respect derived from the conviction that one practices the virtues one's life and happiness require.

Self-esteem is a basic need of man, a cardinal requirement of his mental health and psychological well-being. There is no value judgment more important to man than the estimate he passes on himself. This estimate is ordinarily experienced by him, not in the form of a conscious, verbalized judgment, but in the form of a feeling, a feeling that can be hard to isolate and identify because he experiences it constantly: it is part of every other feeling. It is involved in his every emotional response.

An emotion is the product of an evaluation: it reflects an appraisal of the beneficial or harmful relationship of some aspect of reality to oneself. Thus, a man's view of himself is necessarily implicit in all his value-responses. Any judgment entailing the issue, "Is this for me or against me?" entails a view of the "me" involved. His self-evaluation is an omnipresent factor in man's psychology

## Gary to Elaine Self Esteem 13

Elaining

Thanks for the Rogers' article. I sent it on to David.

**I was thinking in terms of the "shame viruses" others try to infect kids with. The vaccine of self-valuing provides you with a script that says you are not deserving of the attack and helps you determine if you need to do anything differently. Does that make any sense? I didn't think so.**

It makes perfect sense. I guess where we differ is in our "approaches" to the inquiry, and not in values to an outcome. I can't speak for you as to your approach, but mine is what I might call a "structural" approach. I want to have an understanding of the *impediments* to human freedom. My sense is that humans, being creatures who not only live in space, live in time, both innately and invented. Left to our own devices, we will seek freedom of movement in time. Cognition, on the other hand (no pun intended) seeks limiting conditions for its transformative powers to function. Cognition is closely related to the motoric, perception, symbol-making, and memory, so that what we learn in one spacetime can be transferred to other contexts. Affect is always NOW and wherever "we" go, our affects are there ready to meet the contingencies of any environment.

My orientation is, I admit, influenced by an overriding passion for freedom of movement at all levels of my becoming since my childhood. I had some freedom as a child, but many, many limiting conditions imposed on me. I think that humans will go to great lengths to seek movement. Affects are like water and will seep through the cracks of any opening even if it's temporary.

There are usually two descriptions that must be accounted for in human affairs: the description of an observer (from the outside in), and the description of a participant (from the inside out). I am with you on your descriptions of "self-esteem" from the standpoint of an observer. What I, and I think David, too, are attempting to come to is a description from the standpoint of a participant -- from the inside out. From this perspective, I try to reach the actual impediments to the inner flow without a goal-image of self-esteem as defined by those such as Branden: Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth. It is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living.

From the inside, self-esteem is not a state or condition but a sense of participation, accomplishment, and mastery in the processes that lead to freedom of meaning-movement. I use the word participation since much of this "mastery" is in the form of cooperation with those aspects that are beyond voluntary control.

Tomkins wrote:

"Control rests, of course, not only on the mastery of internal neurological circuitry but on the coordination of this knowledge with an equally efficient knowledge of the nature of the external environment. We have stressed the internal circuitry since it is the relatively constant means to the mastery of the great variety of other domains that are variable. It is the language of achievement. If one does not master this language, one masters nothing else. It is paradoxical that it is the external world that is the teacher of the language of the internal world. Again, the external world must be reproduced within this circuitry if it is to be assimilable and use to the individual so that ultimately the dichotomy between the inner and outer domain becomes a dichotomy within the inner world. We do not embrace solipsism in this any more than does the biochemist who studies the transformations that are necessary before foodstuffs can be used by the body. Because of the great variety of domains that can be learned, the characterization of these domains presents an endless task for analysis, whereas the principal varieties of internal transformations are more limited."

I don't think parents can "learn" to provide the conditions for self-esteem for their children for the most part. They may be able to learn a few "techniques," but I think of it more as a "conversion" (like in a religious conversion) where they see the light of the importance of affect in their own lives, and can empathize with what their children are living. It's a different way of life.

I see Branden's views such as: The conviction that one is competent to live means: confidence in the functioning of one's mind; confidence in one's ability to understand and judge the facts of reality (within the sphere of one's interests and needs); intellectual self-reliance. *creating more confusion than clarity. It's the old cognitive explanation of self-esteem. In my view, the main impediment to self-esteem lies in the realm of affect in general and shame in particular. An emotion is the product of an evaluation. It depends what he means by "evaluation." Again, I think he is referring to cognitive evaluations, and not other non-intellectual evaluations. And the statement that emotion coming from cognition is plain wrong in light of today's knowledge.*

Self-esteem is a basic need of man, a cardinal requirement of his mental health and psychological well-being. There is no value judgment more important to man than the estimate he passes on himself. This estimate is ordinarily experienced by him, not in the form of a conscious, verbalized judgment, but in the form of a feeling, a feeling that can be hard to isolate and identify because he experiences it constantly: it is part of every other feeling. It is involved in his every emotional response.

From the viewpoint of an observer, this statement makes some sense. But the "feeling" he is talking about is not as difficult to formulate as he says. I can't go into it now, but it involves what Polanyi calls "personal knowledge," proprioception in the "virtual" domain of minding, etc. I agree that it's not in the form of a conscious, verbalized judgment. Also, I don't know what self he means by Any judgment entailing the issue, "Is this for me or against me?" entails a view of the "me" involved. His self-evaluation is an omnipresent factor in man's psychology.

## Elaine to Gary: Self Esteem 14

On first reading of Gary's strong statement, I must admit to feeling a bit "ganged-up on" and misunderstood, along with a sudden surge of shame for my lack of knowledge and expertise in areas you have both mastered so well. I will take the opportunity to explain myself, as Gary has just done.

First of all, I did not send Branden's definition of self-esteem as representative of my own. I sent it because he is the only philosopher/psychologist I know who has taken the time to think about it to the extent of writing 2 books on the subject. Without knowing the views of others, we can't know how to approach the area or make our views known to others who may have been taken in by them.

You wrote:

**My orientation is, I admit, influenced by an overriding passion for freedom of movement at all levels of my becoming since my childhood. I had some freedom as a child, but many, many limiting conditions imposed on me. I think that humans will go to great lengths to seek movement. Affects are like water and will seep through the cracks of any opening even if it's temporary.**

My freedom of physical movement as a child was vast, by today's standards. We lived in small towns of 100 to 200, where everyone knew everyone and children generally had a protective eye on them but few restrictions. Within that space frame, we were free to do and think and talk about whatever we chose, limited only by the restrictions and values we carried with us from home. Today's kids are badly in need of that kind of freedom. The restrictions that held me back were in the area of affect, and because restricted affect results in thought and behavior that often is not "free," I, too, became extremely interested in why I, and seemingly everyone else I knew, so often communicated and behaved in ways we didn't really intend.

**There are usually two descriptions that must be accounted for in human affairs: the description of an observer (from the outside in), and the description of a participant (from the inside out). I am with you on your descriptions of "self-esteem" from the standpoint of an observer. What I, and I think David, too, are attempting to come to is a description from the standpoint of a participant -- from the inside out.**

Branden's descriptions are not "my" descriptions, though he may well have summed up all aspects of an observer's descriptions better than anyone else. David's definition: **human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts** is an excellent one, and if I have implied otherwise, I didn't intend to. I did feel the need to include the basic feeling about ourselves we, as individuals, carry with us that was transmitted to us in our very earliest contacts with our caretakers, **before we have become limited by any "self-disesteeming psychological reflexes."** I said, "Nothing could be more inside-out than that feeling you carry within you throughout your life and use to meet challenges and rejections with equanimity." **For me, that is about as inside-out as I can get, because it moves me from within and greatly affects my relationships, as well as my inner orientation to life, despite, and in addition to, the many "self-disteeming" reflexes I later developed. If I had been neglected and rejected as an infant, I cannot imagine that my general orientation to life and my "self-disesteeming psychological reflexes" wouldn't be quite different.**

**From the inside, self-esteem is not a state or condition but a sense of participation, accomplishment, and mastery in the processes that lead to freedom of meaning-movement. I use the word participation since much of this "mastery" is in the form of cooperation with those aspects that are beyond voluntary control.**

The feeling of self-worth, of human worth, I am talking about is the very matrix of my sense of participation and accomplishment, underlying and helping me continue to move a little more freely in time and space. Rather than learning self-disteeming reflexes, can't our human nature be met with the kind of care that will help us trust and believe in its thrust toward growth and participation? Don't we need to look, too, at the kind of self-esteeming inner world that helps us trust our own formative directions? And I see my views as being very closely tied in with Polanyi's "personal knowledge."

**I don't think parents can "learn" to provide the conditions for self-esteem for their children for the most part. They may be able to learn a few "techniques," but I think of it more as a "conversion" (like in a religious conversion) where they see the light of the importance of affect in their own lives, and can empathize with what their children are living. It's a different way of life.**

There is no doubt within my own mind that "conversion" (transformation, maybe) is the only truly effective way to learn about affect. And that must always be what we work toward. Anything else is "glued on," to use a term I've used before. But I am very concerned about what is continuing to happen in the meantime. I want to find ways to transmit some of what infants and toddlers are feeling now, because the lack of empathy that now exists is not only being passed on through generations, it is escalating in frightening numbers and ways -- a little like the stray cats in my back yard.

If you feel my own (not Branden's) addition to the self-esteem mix somehow runs counter to yours, you'll have to find another way to convince me, because I'm not yet convinced. I am in awe of the knowledge both of you possess in our minds' inner workings, and I love learning what I can along with you. But I am also more generally (and passionately) involved with our interrelationships and our modes of communicating, connecting and understanding one another. Maybe you "guys" and your intellects need a little female fumbling here too.

Loving regards to both of you.

Elaine

## Defending the Efficacy of Healthy Self-Esteem Self Esteem 15

John,

I added a data-byte that Bob gave me the other day. Bob also gave me a wonderful personal story, which I think works nicely at the beginning.

Thanks to Jack for his encouragement to do this.

I have also added verbiage on 'shame' per David Boulton. I chose not to include the article on rejection lowering IQ because it speaks about self-control rather than self-esteem, and I don't think it will dramatically improve what we already have. I've also included a citation of that awful Psychology Today article, putting it in the same (sinking) boat as Slater's. I've verified all our sources. Take a read next time you're at the pool...

Let's shop it! Any luck contacting the NYT editor?

-Joshua

### DEFENDING THE EFFICACY OF HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

*Senator John Vasconcellos*

*Robert Reasoner*

*Michele Borba, Ed.D.*

*Len Duhl, M.D.*

*Jack Canfield*

"I grew up in a predominantly Italian immigrant section of Brooklyn. It was a neighborhood of working class people, but there were several seedy pool halls, street gangs and hoods. I entered the seventh grade at P.S. 259 with a school history that included mediocre grades, atrocious conduct and a flip attitude that reflected 'School is for creeps!'

For a long time I was viewed as a hopeless student until I was placed in Miss Lawson's class. She turned me away from the streets to books. Until then I had hated books and dreaded reading. My uncles distrusted book learning and said that too much reading makes a person go crazy. My Ma and Pa seldom read anything except True Confessions and the Daily Mirror. All my friends considered reading a drag. But as a result of Miss Lawson's personal interest in me and the concern and confidence she expressed in me I eventually achieved the highest grade average in junior high school.

I dropped out of school to take on back-breaking jobs in warehouses, piers, factories, railroad yards and construction. Because of the memory of Miss Lawson and the academic aptitude she nurtured in me I decided to continue school. I graduated and went on to college, where I graduated magna cum laude, to UCLA for my master's degree, to Oxford for further study, and finally graduated from Harvard Law School, where I was selected as the class valedictorian.

Fom my own experience I know that by fostering self-esteem and caring enough, a dedicated inspiring teacher can change a young person's life from one of misery to one of success."

Judge Joseph Sorrentino, Criminal Prosecutor, Author, Los Angeles, CA<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Trouble with 'The Trouble with Self-Esteem'

The New York Times Sunday Magazine has, by its February 3 publication of Lauren Slater's article *The Trouble With Self-Esteem*, performed a valuable service by bringing into public debate the issue of whether we can cultivate a constructive, self-realizing, responsible society by developing in individuals a healthy, authentic self-esteem. Slater's cynical and deeply misguided appraisal of self-esteem deserves a published response by an opposing coalition of leaders in the field, so the people of America (especially our parents and their children) are fully apprised of both sides of this proactive debate.

The emotional needs of young people today are in a state of crisis. In 30 years we've seen a 300% increase in adolescent suicide and a 1000% increase in adolescent depression<sup>[2]</sup>—higher than any other country in the world. We all decry the rising social epidemics of school violence and drug abuse, which decades of reseach have shown to be clearly related to the breakdown of family and community support systems used to nurture healthy self-esteem in our youth. Fact is most educators, parents, and community leaders agree on the qualities that are most important to develop in young people, and high self-esteem is one of those qualities most commonly mentioned. Although perspectives on how to develop these desired qualities in our children vary widely, each is tethered to a centuries-old debate about our essential human nature, going as far back as Comenius<sup>[3]</sup> in the 1590's. Comenius believed that a newly born child does not arrive into this world as an empty vessel, but is more like a seed awaiting to be nourished. We affirm this faithful view of humanity, and believe that through love and nurturance we are all innately inclined to becoming more life-affirming, constructive, responsible and trustworthy.

Drawing upon a long tradition of social theory and research, we further believe that nurturing a healthy self-concept based on pride and positive thinking is a sensible alternative to the shame, self-degradation and hopelessness that has become so pervasive in our youth today. We remain steadfast in our belief that the self-esteem movement represents the cutting edge in the development of human potential. For parents, policy makers and community leaders it also represents our most propitious and effective means of building social capital and developing sustainable solutions to the major social challenges with which we are faced.

### **Toward a more constructive definition of self-esteem:**

Authorities in the fields of psychology, education, and healthcare have attempted to clarify what is meant by *high* self-esteem. They agree that high self-esteem implies the healthy, authentic nature of self-esteem, rather than just "liking yourself a lot" or "feeling good about oneself" as Lauren Slater's article suggests. Characteristics such as conceit, egotism, arrogance, narcissism, or a sense of superiority should not be considered aspects of high self-esteem. Such characteristics are more indicative of defensive, pseudo, or low self-esteem.

Most authorities now agree with Nathaniel Branden Ph.D., world reknown psychotherapist and author, who defined self-esteem several years ago as "the disposition to experience oneself as being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness." This definition was acknowledged by psychology professor Christopher Mruk Ph.D. of Bowling Green University in his book Self-Esteem: Research, Theory, and Practice to be the one sound definition that has withstood the test of time.

Our sense of competence is grounded in the belief that we are generally capable of producing desired results. It arises from being secure in the efficacy of our mind, our ability to think, to make appropriate choices and decisions. It comes as a by-product to trusting ourselves, living consciously, striving to be 'realistic' in how we view ourselves and others, and by taking pride in our accomplishments. Having confidence in ourselves makes other less threatening, which enables us to be more tolerant and respectful of others, to be accountable, fair and open-minded.

Our sense of worthiness is tethered to our core beliefs about ourselves and our human nature. To believe we are all worthy of love, life, and liberty is to believe we are all deserving of respect, nurturance, and happiness. Authentic self-esteem is life affirming, not to be dismissed as some "romantic, sometimes silly...belief that we are special from head to toe," and certainly not some scam by psychotherapists to retain their clientele, as Slater's article suggests. Rather, it's a by-product of taking pride in who we are and what we do.

Parents, educators, and counseling professionals are continually being encouraged to establish conditions that foster healthy self-esteem, and for several compelling reasons.

First, low self-esteem has been closely associated with so many problem behaviors, especially among adolescents. Robert Rothman reported in *Education Week*<sup>[4]</sup> that as many as 50% of the nation's adolescents are considered to be 'at risk' of engaging in a variety of problems due to low self-esteem. According to his report, adolescents with low self-esteem typically suffer from a crisis of self-confidence that manifests through a variety of behaviors. They are easily influenced or manipulated by others, and are often subject to being scapegoated by their peers. They can be observed either withdrawing from social contacts or attempting to prove their significance by showing off, engaging in risky behavior, bullying others, or developing notions of grandiosity to compensate for their low self-esteem.

Second, research studies have clearly identified low self-esteem as a major risk factor for a number of psychological conditions. Keagan reported in his article "Positive Self-Esteem" that low self-esteem either causes or contributes to anxiety, defensiveness, drug abuse and alcoholism, depression, interpersonal problems as well as low academic achievement.<sup>[5]</sup> Gurnery in his research review published in *Educational Research* found there was a close link between low self-esteem and juvenile delinquency, violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and chronic welfare dependency.<sup>[6]</sup>

The statistical coupling of low self-respect with depression, suicide, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, eating disorders, and economic outcomes has all been well documented. There are some researchers who have not found this to be true. Most empirical deviations are likely the result of using different definitions of self-esteem. Regardless, proving that low self-esteem is a major causal factor will always be nebulous since negative behavior will always be impacted by multiple factors. Nevertheless, low self-esteem is found to be a common factor in most cases.

A third reason for the significance of self-esteem is that it is a primary factor in behavioral change. Individuals are not likely to change their behavior unless they first change how they see themselves. If a child accepts the position that s/he doesn't have the capability to succeed in school, chances of academic success are obviously diminished, regardless of intellectual ability. For this reason, virtually all remediation programs designed to correct problem behaviors, whether in children or adults, incorporates a self-esteem component.

Fourth, numerous research studies have documented that children who turn out to be highly successful, contributing adults and who lead generally happy lives come from those families who have established conditions that foster high self-esteem. One such longitudinal study was conducted by University of California professor and author Stanley Cooper-Smith, who followed up on 1739 adolescents and published his findings in his book *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem*. He found that creating family standards of behavior that are clearly defined and consistently enforced, providing unconditional love and respect, and having high expectations were leading factors in developing high self-esteem.

Fifth, schools that have implemented self-esteem programs report positive changes in their students. In a 12 year study by Hawkins reported in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* and published in the New York Times, it was reported that enhancing self-esteem in 1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders reduced risky behaviors and improved school performance and attendance.<sup>[7]</sup> Children participating in the study were 19% less likely to have committed violent acts, 38% less likely to indulge in heavy drinking, 31% less likely to engage in sexual intercourse, and 35% less likely to have caused a pregnancy or to have become pregnant.

In an article published in *The School Executive* it was reported that a three-year control study found that schools that implemented the *Building Self-Esteem* program had less anti-social behavior among the general student population, less absenteeism, more positive leadership, and higher academic motivation.<sup>[8]</sup> When this program was implemented on a district-wide basis, average daily attendance increased to 99.7%, achievement test scores increased 10-15%, dropout rate declined from 18% to 4.5%, drug abuse declined, and the percentage of students going on to college increased from 65% to 89%.

In a control study of over 1,000 students by Michele Borba, Ed.D. it was found that the number of students in school who were considered to be "at risk" of school failure or involvement in social problems was reduced by 66% as a result of their participation in a schoolwide, skill-based self-esteem program that focused on five elements: security, identity, affiliation or belonging, a sense of purpose, and skills of competence.<sup>[9]</sup> There was also a 41% reduction in student physical aggression and a 46% reduction in student detentions for misbehavior. Clearly, research has demonstrated that self-esteem programs can make a difference.

Finally, *Fortune* magazine has reported that companies are stressing the need for individuals who adjust easily to change, work cooperatively, exhibit tolerance and respect for others, take on challenges, and show initiative and self-motivation. For that reason they consider high self-esteem to be one of the essential characteristics they look for in new employees.

In a longitudinal study of all the children born in the UK in 1970 with follow-ups every five years thereafter, researchers found that low self-esteem was a strong indicator of unemployment as adults.<sup>[10]</sup> Boys with high self-esteem as young children reduced the likelihood of unemployment as adults. The report concludes that more attention should be paid to self-esteem and non-academic behaviors as a means of identifying future difficulties in society. Moreover, they found self-esteem to have a far greater impact on future success than talent or intelligence.

### **Opposing the cynical view of self-esteem:**

Recently a few authors have taken the position of discounting the efficacy of self-esteem and have raised doubts regarding its significance. Nicholas Emler Ph.D. in *Psychology Today*<sup>[11]</sup> and Lauren Slater both report on research where the authors associate high self-esteem with having an inflated ego, and with behaviors more commonly associated with insecurity such as arrogance and conceit. When researchers use such absurd definitions for self-esteem, it's no surprise they conclude that "people with high self-esteem pose a greater threat to those around them than people with low self-esteem."

Further, Slater reports that the main objective of school self-esteem programs is "to dole out huge heapings of praise, regardless of actual accomplishment." Anyone who's knowledgeable about the published programs knows that this is not the case. Most programs are designed to develop attitudes and skills based on reality and actual accomplishment, not heapings of undue praise. Such programs seek to enable students to make better decisions, engage in goal setting, develop more effective social skills, and see themselves realistically. The author trivializes efforts to foster self-esteem by profiling affirmations such as "I adore myself" or "Today I will accept myself for who I am, not who I wish I were." She ignores all the other strategies that are required to foster high self-esteem.

Lauren Slater concludes that self-esteem and pride can be bad for your health—a ridiculous notion! When she refers to self-esteem as a quasi religion, and implies that mental health professionals propagate the value of self-esteem for personal gain, she does a great disservice to all those who search for ways of increasing the chances that our youth will have a healthy, productive, and satisfying life.

Fact is we're losing approximately one-third of our youth to problems such as school failure, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, violence, and suicide. These are social problems that we each and all have a stake in. They are a common concern of most all parents, educators, civic leaders, and mental health professionals who believe that developing healthy self-esteem in young people is one of our few effective approaches for reducing such problems.

In conclusion, Slater suggests that developing self-control, responsibility, and critical self-appraisal should be an alternative to developing self-esteem. What she doesn't realize is that several years ago Nathaniel Branden identified those same traits as critical steps to developing and retaining healthy self-esteem. It's time this debate moves on from whether self-esteem is important to how we use positive research on self-esteem to develop strategies that effectively build a healthy and inclusive society. Clearly, self-esteem is a topic for serious on-going research. And for those who dare, it invites us to examine our most basic beliefs about our essential human nature. Ask yourself, are we each and all deserving of a healthy, authentic self-esteem?

#### About the Authors

**Senator John Vasconcellos** is a 35-year veteran of the California State Legislature, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, and originator of the California Task Force on Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility.

**Robert Reasoner** is President of the International Council for Self-Esteem, former school superintendent, and author of *Self-Esteem and Youth: What Research Has To Say About It*.

**Michele Borba, Ed.D.**, is an educational consultant and author of *Building Moral Intelligence* and *Parents Do Make a Difference*.

**Len Duhi, M.D.**, is a psychiatrist, UC Berkeley professor of public health and urban planning, and professor of psychiatry at UC San Francisco.

**Jack Canfield, M. Ed.**, is co-author of the best-selling Chicken Soup for the Soul series and Chairs of the Foundation for Self-Esteem in Culver City, California.

[1] Excerpt from Mentors, Masters and Mrs. Mac'Gregor by Jane Bluestein

[2] Source J. Cloud, *What Can the Schools Do?* Time, May 3, 1999 pp. 38-40

[3] Source Alec Meiklejohn, Education Between Two Worlds

[4] August 1, 1990

[5] Published in Guidepost, February 19, 1987

[6] 1987: 29(2): 130-136

[7] March 15, 1999

[8] April, 1992

[9] Michele Borba, Ed.D., *Effectiveness of a School-wide Self-Esteem Program on Elementary Students' Behavior and Academic Self-Concept*, 1992, unpublished

[10] Report delivered by Leon Feinstein, "Economic importance of academic, psychological and behavioral attributes developed in childhood" at the Labour Economics Seminar at the CEP and EEG Annual Conference, 1999 in Swansea, England.

[11] Nicholas Emler, *Bursting the Self-Esteem Bubble*, Psychology Today, April, 2002. P. 16.

## Elaine to Gary and David Re: Defending the Efficacy of Healthy Self-Esteem Self Esteem 16

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Appreciated receiving the current draft on the Self-esteem article. Certainly well-written and pretty comprehensive, but where was the "verbiage on shame?" Did I miss something? I think this sensible statement did effectively dispel the idea that there could be any value in defining self-esteem as Emler and Slater did. I really didn't know what to expect of the article; I take it your "inside-out" view hasn't been assimilated into this ongoing work.

As far as this article went, my views were best represented by the phrases, "being worthy of happiness" (Branden), "trusting ourselves," (p.2) and believing that "we are all deseving of respect, nurturance and happiness." (p.3) Coopersmith's findings that "**creating family standards of behavior that are clearly defined and consistently enforced, providing unconditional love and respect, and having high expectations were leading factors in developing high self-esteem**" (p.4) are certainly related to the broad definition that was put forth, but I preferred his words from that same book that "Parents (of children with hi self-esteem) are most concerned and accepting of their children and least likely to be severe in their punishment. They may insist on running a tight ship, but they appear merkedly different from parents who are authoritative in practice and character structure." (my emphasis) The difference lies in placing more emphasis on the child than on parental expectations.

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The basic beliefs that I feel must be present in any discussion of self-esteem are partially summed up on page 2 when Comenius is cited with the follow-up "**We affirm this faithful view of humanity, and believe that through love and nurturance we are all innately inclined to becoming more life-affirming, constructive, responsible and trustworthy,**" and the closing statement, "**And for those who dare, it invites us to examine our most basic beliefs about our essential human nature.**" And that takes us right back to David's more cogent and concise definition: **human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts.**

Elaine

**John Vasconcellos & David Thread Self Esteem 17**

Order David normal (1st) John ALL CAPS (2nd) David **Blue** (3rd)

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-----Original Message-----

Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2002 7:57 PM  
Subject: Re: Self-esteem - per david Boulton

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ALOHA DAVID - I JUST REDISCOVERED YOUR OLDER MESSAGE OF YOURS - -

Subj: Self-esteem - how I think about it  
Date: Monday, February 11, 2002 1:42:09 AM

John,

This is a more up to date version of what I shared with you in our early conversations about 15+ years ago - WOW, DAVID - IT'S BEEN THAT LONG ALREADY WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS . . . **. yes - it seems like yesterday and at the same time like we have known each other forever - I am grateful for our years**

I think...

Self esteem is the buoyant absence of negative-to-self, emotional and intellectual, self-assumptions. A flowing from within channeled and focused by learning and not automated by the reflexes of wounded self-imagery. OKAY

Self-esteem is a term that describes the ground of our relationship with ourselves. Its not accumulative, it is the lack of a certain kind of accumulation.

YEP - IT IS WHO WE ARE BY NATURE - - **and the nature in who we are**

John, I have long felt that people make a confusion by trying to define self-esteem in terms of its positive attributes. I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN HERE, DAVID - AND SHARE IT SOMEWHAT - THO IN OUR SOCIETY:

- WHERE 'BEING' IS SCORNED & SHAMED, AND '
- WHERE HAVING' HAS BECOME WORSHIPPED ALMOST AS A GOD,
- SOME FORMS OF 'DOING' ARE AT LEAST CONDUVCIVE TO HEALTHY CONSTRUCTIVE

LIVING.

I understand what you are saying but I don't think we can't advocate for 'having' self-esteem as a compensation for 'being shamed' or it will not only fall into the very trap you (and the critics) lament, it will channel our learning through the wrong orientation. I think characterizing self-esteem as a possession rather than a freedom from being possessed (via negative-to-self, affective and cognitive habits) is mis-orienting - I don't think its what you mean - I think you accept it as a tacital-relevance necessity. We need to develop ways to help children 'learn their way through' the negative-to-self feelings and thoughts they will inevitably encounter.

Yes, the 'doing' - emphasis on the 'ing'

I am concerned with how it is our children learn negative to self assumptions. THAT OUGHT BE OUR PRIMARY CONCERN -

- AND I SUSPECT IT HAPPENS AT THE HANDS OF WELL-INTENTIONED PRINCIPAL PRESENCES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHILD, WHO ARE PROJECTING THEIR OWN LACK OF SELF ESTEEM . . .

To use your vaccine metaphor -

ACTUALLY, OUR SELF ESTEEM TASK FORCE CAME UP WITH THAT, AND I THEN CHECKED IT OUT WITH JONAS SALK, WHO ALLOWED AS HOW IT IS AN APPROPRIATE METAPHOR - -

- how do we 'vaccinate' the child against the in-form-ation of negative-to-self-assumptions.

OH, DAVID, HOW I WISH I KNEW - - - OR CERTAINLY MY EXPERIENCE AS A CHILD WAS JUST THE CONTRARY - WHEREBY I INCORPORATED 'NEGATIVE-TO-SELF ASSUMPTIONS TOTALLY!

By exposing our bodies to 'safe' doses of a pathogen, vaccines create learning environments for our immune systems. They function like 'simulators' - they give us a chance to work out a response without being in a life-threatening situation. THAT'S HELPFUL TO KNOW, A VALUABLE PLACE TO BEGIN FROM . . .

In order to develop a vaccine to the disease of self-disesteem, some appear to argue for accumulating self-positive knowledge and experience. This is then dismissed by the 'other side' as being over generalized and not specifically earned - there is a fear that it leads to self-inflation by principle rather than via healthy feedback. THAT SEEMS TO BE THE COMMON WAY IT OPERATES, DAVID - AND THAT'S PART OF WHY I KEEP ON TRYING TO BRING THE DIALOGUE BACK AND DOWN EXPLICITLY TO OUR BASIC VIEW OF OUR HUMAN NATURE - FOR THEREIN IS TO BE FOUND THE FUEL OF ALL OUR EXPECTATIONS AND CHOICES AND ACTIONS, TOWARD OURSELVES AND TOWARD EACH & EVERY OTHER, ESPECIALLY INCLUDING OUR CHILDREN . . .

I think you would get more universal agreement if the thrust of self-esteem was more on reducing self-disesteem. I WONDER WHEHER WE WOULD - - - -

How do we immunize self learning from the ravages of self-disesteem?  
AGAIN, YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED ONE OF (IF NOT THE VERY MOST) CENTRAL ISSUES WE FACE.

To do that I think that we have to get closer to how our learning nature, in the fields of our learning environment circumstances (home, school...) unconsciously learns strategies to avoid the shame and pain felt. "Oh, I am just no good at..." "I am not good looking" "I am not a loveable person" - "I am not smart" - I'M NOT PICKING UP ON WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO TEACH ME HERE, DAVID - -

I believe what you mean by the term self-esteem is simply: human nature free from the self-disesteeming psychological reflexes we learn to modulate our negative-to-self, feelings and thoughts.  
AMEN - YOU GOT ME CLEAR!

If so, the question becomes how do we create environments in which children have the opportunity to learn to participate rather than be passengers in their feelings and thoughts.  
OR - 'HOW DO WE CREATE ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH CHILDREN ARE ENCOURAGED TO BE OPEN TO THEMSELVES AND THEIR OWN FELINGS AND EXPERIENCING, AND LIVE FROM WITHIN THEM, RATHER THAN BE DICTATED TO BY OUTSIDE 'SHOULD'S' & 'SHOULDN'T'S.'

Getting self-esteem on the map was a huge step for all of us.  
ABSOLUTELY! HISTORIC! GROUND-BREAKING (LITERALLY AS WELL AS FIGURATIVELY)!  
LIBERATING! PROMISING! INSPIRING! THAT 'HUGE STEP ENABLED EACH OF US TO SHIFT OUR PATH ONTO A WHOLLY CONTRARY PATH, TOWARD RECOGNIZING OUR OWN INHERENT TRUSTWORTHINESS, TOWARD REALIZING OUR OWN INNATE HUMAN POTENTIAL - FOR GOOD!

I congratulate you again for driving that into happening and for being the champion and hub of this noble effort to defend the self-esteem movement.  
THANK YOU, DAVID, IT'S MY PLEASURE!  
AND IT IS OURS - EACH & ALL OF OURS ON THIS PRECIOUS TEAM WE HAVE CONVENED - IT IS OUR CHALLENGE, OUR MISSION, OUR LIVES - TO SO LEAD OUR LIVES AS TO DEMONSTRATE BEYOND DOUBT TO/FOR ALL THE SKEPTICS & ESPECIALLY TO ALL THE CYNICS - THAT WE HUMANS CAN AFFORD (AND CANNOT AFFORD NOT TO) LEADS LIVES OF FAITH, AND OF HOPE, AND OF COURSE OF LOVE - INDIVIDUALLY, AND ALTOGETHER.

ONDELAY!

BTW - my single most significant concern in the learning to read process is related to 'self-esteem'. In China they call reading English out loud, 'red facing'.

HOW CURIOUS . . .

## [#18 Sharon Begley's Wall Street Journal Article on Self-Esteem](#)

The Wall Street Journal  
April 18, 2003  
Science Journal  
by Sharon Begley

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### Real Self-Esteem Builds On Real Achievement

At the annual meeting of psychology researchers in Boston three years ago, two scientists weighed in on a question that seemed to be as much in need of investigation as whether the sun rises in the east.

The pair had asked a professor to send weekly e-mail messages to students of his who had done poorly on their first exam for the class. Each missive included a review question. In addition, one-third of the students, chosen at random, also received a message -- advice to study, for example -- suggesting that how well they did in the course was under their own control. The other third received the review question plus a "You're too smart to get a D!" pep talk aimed at raising their self-esteem, which everyone knows boosts academic performance.

Oops.

Compared with the other e-mail recipients, the D and F students who got the self-esteem injection performed notably worse on later tests.

It has been 20 years since self-esteem became a household word and an educational mantra. The watershed moment came in 1986, when California funded a task force to increase the self-esteem of state residents, based on arguments that the \$245,000 annual cost would more than pay for itself in reduced welfare dependency, unwanted pregnancy, school failure, crime and drug addiction.

With that, the self-esteem movement was off and running, preaching that one's beliefs about oneself have important consequences no matter what the underlying reality. Healthy self-esteem was to be the wellspring from which wonderful outcomes flowed.

Now, the most exhaustive study ever finds that programs to raise self-esteem fall woefully, even comically, short.

In the case of the struggling students, the likely reason the self-esteem intervention backfired speaks volumes. Students work hard partly because it helps them do better academically; 95s feel better than 65s. But "an intervention that encourages them to feel good about themselves regardless of work may remove the reason to work hard -- resulting in poorer performance," suggest psychologist Roy Baumeister and colleagues in a monograph to be published next month in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. (The four were tapped by the American Psychological Society to undertake the study.) If you get to feel good without learning Maxwell's equations or the causes of the Korean War, why bother?

It isn't just school performance. From the 200-plus studies they analyzed, the APS group found no evidence that boosting self-esteem (by therapeutic interventions or school programs) results in better job performance, lowered aggression or reduced delinquency. And "high self-esteem does not prevent children from smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or engaging in early sex," it concluded.

Of course, self-esteem and school or job performance is correlated. But long overdue scientific scrutiny points out the foolishness of supposing that people's opinion of themselves can be the cause of achievement. Rather, high-esteem is the result of good performance.

Boosting self-esteem without helping people learn more or perform better does not bring higher achievement at school or work (and can backfire, as our D and F students show). And speaking of backfiring, high self-esteem fosters experimentation, which may increase teenage indulgence in sex, alcohol or drugs.

One solid link does seem to exist between higher self-esteem and performance. The higher your opinion of yourself, the more likely you are to persist in the face of failure. It is left as an exercise for the reader to decide whether this is a desirable character trait. Sometimes, isn't it better to just cut and run?

Self-esteem proponents have also fallen into the trap of taking people at their word. People high in self-esteem report that they're more likable and have better relationships than do those with low self-esteem. But "this is true mainly in their own minds," says Prof. Baumeister, a psychology professor at Florida State University, Tallahassee. Objective measures typically find the opposite, undercutting the claim that high self-esteem brings superior social skills.

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Even the National Association for Self-Esteem is backpedaling. President J.D. Hawkins, who criticizes scientists for confusing "healthy self-esteem" with narcissism, argues that "self-esteem is more than just feeling good about yourself. It's about being socially and individually responsible."

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Still, it's a popular product. "People contact us daily saying they need help with their self-esteem," says Mr. Hawkins, who notes the widespread use of the "Esteem Builders" program in K-12 education.

Amid the ashes of self-esteem, the APS team finds one benefit: High self-esteem makes you happier. But that jolly outcome ensues whether your self-esteem is justified or delusional.

As we persist in praising children even for mediocre work and trivial accomplishments, I can't resist ending with a plea from the APS scientists: "Psychologists should reduce their own self-esteem a bit and humbly resolve that next time they will wait for a more thorough and solid empirical basis before making policy recommendations to the American public."

## #19 David's response to the WSJ Article on Self Esteem

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-----Original Message-----

From: David Boulton [<mailto:dboulton@implicity.org>]

Sent: Sunday, April 20, 2003 3:29 PM

To: sciencejournal

Subject: Re: Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers

Dear Editors,

Regarding the Friday April 18th 2003 article: Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers

I understand and agree that artificially boosting self-esteem has been misleading and perhaps in some cases harmful. However, I think to be balanced, an article such as this one should acknowledge the great benefit of the self-esteem movement. The movement put 'inner psychological well being' on the political map. It proposed that many of our society's behavioral problems are related to if not caused by unhealthy psychological structures. It connected the dots: how a child learns to be her or his self, effects their ability to be effective participants in everything they do in school and later in life. What the self-esteem movement did was direct our attention to what is developing on the inside of our children - not just because it was a profoundly good thing to do, but also because the economic cost of the behaviors of psychologically unhealthy persons is so staggering. The underlying fulcrum equation is solid: if we spend x dollars helping children develop more healthy selves, we will get it back many times over in social expense savings.

The question was how to do it. I think we went wrong when we formulated self-esteem as something to 'build up'. I think what we have learned is that, quite the contrary, self-esteem is a lack of building up. It is not about boosting the accumulation of positive feelings, self-imagery or self-concepts, its about minimizing the accumulation of negative feelings, self-imagery and self-concepts. More and more we are coming to see that we human beings would naturally gravitate to healthy psychological well being *if we didn't learn otherwise*.

The following link leads to a dialogue on self-esteem in which California Senator John Vasconcellos (the original architect/leader of the self-esteem legislation that started it all in California) myself and a number of other thoughtful and diversely talented people further flesh out this conversation:

<http://www.implicity.org/selfesteem/index.htm>

PS. Please forward this email to Sharon Begley - thank you.  
David Boulton

**#20: Response to David's Response to WSJ  
David- Blue, John- ALL CAPS**

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-----Original Message-----

From: Begley, Sharon [<mailto:Sharon.Begley@wsj.com>]  
Sent: Monday, April 21, 2003 4:18 AM  
To: 'David Boulton'  
Subject: RE: Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers

Thanks very much, Mr. Boulton. I will indeed read the dialogue---thanks again.

Sharon Begley  
Science columnist  
The Wall Street Journal  
200 Liberty Street  
NY NY 10281-1003  
212-416-3268

-----Original Message-----

From: JV2work@aol.com [<mailto:JV2work@aol.com>]  
Sent: Friday, June 13, 2003 3:35 AM  
Subject: MAHALO, DAVID/Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers

CATCHING UP HERE -

Don Nathanson, author of "Shame and Pride", sent me a copy of a Wall Street Journal article on Self-Esteem. The message below is my response to the article.

I APPRECIATE YOUR RESPONDING, DAVID, TO THIS NON-SENSE!  
- DID THE JOURNAL HAVE THE INTEGRITY TO EVER PUBLISH YOUR TRUTH-TELLING?

-----Original Message-----

From: David Boulton [<mailto:dboulton@implicity.org>]  
Sent: Sunday, April 20, 2003 9:29 AM, To: '[sciencejournal@wsj.com](mailto:sciencejournal@wsj.com)'  
Subject: Re: Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers

Dear Editors,

Regarding the Friday April 18th 2003 article: [Real Self-Esteem Builds on Achievement, Not Praise for Slackers](#), I understand and agree that artificially boosting self-esteem has been misleading and perhaps in some cases harmful.

YES, BARELY . . . .

However, I think to be balanced -

THAT IS A STANDARD THE JOURNAL HAS NEVER HONORED, DAVID.

- An article such as this one should acknowledge the great benefit of the self-esteem movement.

PROBABLY ESPECIALLY BECAUSE PERSONS WITH HEALTHY SELF ESTEEM COULDN'T BE SO WEDDED TO WEALTH & PROPOERTY FOR THEIR IDENTITY AS ARE THE FOLKS WHO MAKE UP THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The movement put 'inner psychological well being' on the political map.

THAT IT HAS ACCOMPLISHED - MUCH TO THE CHAGRIN (FOR IT UTTERLY CHALLENGES THEIR SENSE OF THEMSELVES, THEIR IDENTITY) OF THE NAY-SAYING CYNICS . . .

It proposed that many of our society's behavioral problems are related to if not caused by unhealthy psychological structures.

THESE SICK FOLKS WOULD MUCH RATHER PERPETUATE THE SICKNESS . . .

It connected the dots: how a child learns to be her or his self, effects their ability to be effective participants in everything they do in school and later in life.

AND THEY'D LIKE ALL BUT CYNICS LIKE THEMSELVES TO DO POORLY -

- BOTH SO THAT THEIR CYNICAL VIEWS AREN'T CHALLENGED, CAN SUSTAIN;

- + BECAUSE SUCH DEFICIENT FOLKS HUNGER FOR FULFILLMENT VIA THEIR PECULIAR BRAND OF MATERIALISM (CF NORMAN O. BROWN'S 'LIFE AGAINST DEATH.')

What the self-esteem movement did was direct our attention to what is developing on the inside of our children -

DAVID - YOU'VE GOT TO BEAR IN MIND THAT FOR THESE FOLKS, NOTHING HAS DEVELOPED INSIDE, THEY HAVE NO EXPERIENCE OF THAT DIMENSION OF THEMSELVES, AND OF LIFE ITSELF!

- not just because it was a profoundly good thing to do, but also because the economic cost of the behaviors of psychologically unhealthy persons is so staggering.

THAT'S A COST THAT SUSTAINS THEIR PROSPERITY . . . .

The underlying fulcrum equation is solid: if we spend x dollars helping children develop more healthy selves, we will get it back many times over in social expense savings.

THEY THRIVE OFF OUR BANKRUPTING OURSELVES VIA SUCH SOCIAL EXPENSES . . . .

The question was how to do it.

AH, DAVID, YOU HAVE IT SO CORRECT!

I think we went wrong when we formulated self-esteem as something to build up.

AMEN!

I think what we -

SADLY, DAVID, TRAGICALLY, ONLY SOME OF US - SO FAR - - -

- have learned is that, quite the contrary, self-esteem is a lack of building up. It is not about boosting the accumulation of positive feelings, self-imagery or self-concepts, it's about minimizing the accumulation of negative feelings, self-imagery and self-concepts.

AMEN!

More and more we are coming to see that we human beings would naturally gravitate to healthy psychological well being if we didn't learn otherwise.

DAVID, YOU TRULY ARE A VISIONARY, YOU TRULY RECOGNIZE THE TRUTH REGARDING, AND WITHIN, OURSELVES!

The following link leads to a dialogue on self-esteem in which California Senator John Vasconcellos (the original architect/leader of the self-esteem legislation that started it all in California) myself and a number of other thoughtful and diversely talented people further flesh out this conversation: MAHALO, DEAR DAVID - - - -

<http://www.implicit.org/selfesteem/index.htm>

PS. Please forward this email to Sharon Begley - thank you.

AND I'M WILLING TO BET YOU NEVER HEARD A WORD IN RESPONSE, DAVID, RIGHT?

#21 David's Response to January 20, 2005 Scientific American Article:

**Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth**

[www.sciam.com/article.cfm?chanID=sa006&collID=1&articleID=000CB565-F330-11BE-AD0683414B7F0000](http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?chanID=sa006&collID=1&articleID=000CB565-F330-11BE-AD0683414B7F0000)

Dear Editors of Scientific American,

January 21, 2005

Re: Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth - January 20th Article in Scientific American

I wish to thank you and the authors for this important contribution to the self-esteem dialogue. I would also like to share the following with you and the authors:

**Who doesn't want 'inner-health' and 'outer success' for themselves and their children? Clearly, they are related and the potential benefit of deepening our understanding of how they're related warrants serious scientific inquiry. The question here is whether the 'self-esteem' discussion is taking us there.** Unfortunately, both sides appear lost in the mythic assumptions that A) 'self-esteem' is a good 'domain-name' for a serious scientific inquiry into 'inner/subjective health' and B) that whatever we mean by it, it's something that is accumulated and built up into an edifice.

Modern neuroscience is proving that we are naturally oriented towards 'inner/subjective health'. However, maintaining that health depends on healthy-learning. **It is the accumulation of self-negative images, primitively imagined to protect ourselves from overwhelming feelings (inadequacy, fault, shame...) that stress and overwhelm the health of our learning.** When we become learning-disabled by our aversion to negative feelings, in ways fundamental to the learning/development of ourselves, we exhibit what is often referred to as 'low self-esteem' and its associated effects.

Our nation's reading crisis connects to our nation's educational difficulties and social pathologies via 'inner subjective health' / 'self-esteem' in ways that illustrates this:

It is not the absence of the positive effects of reading proficiency that are most responsible for the strong correlation between reading improficiency and social pathology. It's the collateral injurious effects of attempting to learn/improve reading proficiency that, more than only dis-enabling, are adversely effecting cognitive and emotional health. [www.childrenofthecode.org](http://www.childrenofthecode.org)

An aversion to shame evoked in insufficient learning environments results in 'learning aversions' that fundamentally harm cognitive and emotional health and development. Within affected dimensions of learning, learning aversions become, cognitively and emotionally, pathological learning disabilities. The affected dimensions (complex, abstract, mind-trust, learning-faith, 'self-esteem'...) are co-implicate in the developmental/unfolding learning of 'self' and in educational attainment. Social pathology is an inevitable effect of such personal learning disabilities.

All of which is to say, that in the emerging scientific model of education, one rapidly moving towards medicine (ala Flexner) and consequently challenging notions like 'self-esteem', I think our concern for 'self-esteem' (whatever we call it + more importantly the health of learning) can be best served by the first principle of medicine which is:

**Above all else, do no harm**

Thanks,  
David Boulton

Producer, Children of the Code, A Public Television Documentary

[www.childrenofthecode.org](http://www.childrenofthecode.org)

[www.implicit.org](http://www.implicit.org)

Stewarding the Health of Our Children's Learning - The Code and the Challenge of Learning to Read It.

Please do forward this to the article's authors.