Looking Back While Moving Forward--Exploring the Self-Concept and the Preparation of Effective Teachers

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Abstract

This narrative historical review uncovered a body of literature from 1960-1975 which focused on teacher perceptions as a component of teacher effectiveness. A preponderance of research and writings from this period addressed the relationship between the self-concept and the effective pre-service and in-service teacher. The writer suggests a return to this literature in efforts to create solutions to literacy and achievement gaps in 21st century education. The theory of perceptual psychology has particular relevance for teacher education. According to proponents of perceptual psychology, the effective teacher isan important component in the teaching-learning process. The effective teacher is flexible, perceptive, open-minded and has perceptions of self and others which facilitate learning and the development of an adequate sense of self. A look back at this research is needed as educators move forward creating solutions to challenges in addressing the teaching and learning needs of the 21st century learner.

Keywords: self-concept, teacher effectiveness, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, self-perceptions, teacher education

1.0 Introduction

The key to 21st century education lies in how teachers are educated and trained. A retrospective look at the centrality of research addressing the self-concept in teacher effectivenessyields a plethora of connections. How teachers perceive themselves and their students has a direct relationship to characteristics of effective teachers, the achievement of students, as well as to how students view themselves. The preparation of the pre-service teacher as a humanizing agent for today's schools is an emerging concern in teacher education. Synonymous with the need for the humanistic teacher is the need for the effective teacher. What is an effective teacher? How can pre-service teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to become effective teachers in schools today? How can the confluent approach be applied in teacher education and professional learning? A look back at literature published from 1960 to 1975 provided answers to these questions. The literature selected will focus on the Self-Concept Theory, the Historical Development of the Self-Concept Theory, Perceptual Psychology, the Principles of Perceptual Psychology and the Perceptual View of Teacher Effectiveness.

2.0 The Self-Concept Theory

The study of self has ancient roots. Man's concern with who he is has recurred for century after century. This concern has taken many forms. Recently, the self has become particularly significant to those charged with preparing effective teachers. The research findings related to the self-concept theory have provided some answers to the age-old question of teacher effectiveness. In tracing the development of the self-concept theory, it was found that early writers and philosophers who studied the self-concept had some legitimate answers to the question of effective behavior centuries ago. According to Gergen (1971), the early Greek writings of Socrates, Aristotle, and the French philosopher Rene' Descartes reflected an awareness of the effect of non-observable entities on human behavior. Socrates (Gergen, 1971) studied the relationship between the self and behavior.

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His dictum, "Know thyself," succinctly expressed his theoretical position. Continuing along the same lines established by Socrates, Aristotle concerned himself with the "physical and non-physical" aspects of behavior (Gergen, 1971). Over 2,000 years after Aristotle, Descartes expressed knowledge of the relationship between the body and the mind. Descartes believed that a person is what he thinks he is. His beliefs were depicted in his tenet, "I think, therefore, I am." The relationship of the I-thinking-knowing-behaving entity constitutes the germ from which developed the self-concept theory in psychology. It is this theory of the self which forms the basis of perceptual psychology and for research into teacher effectiveness.

3.0 Historical Development of the Self-Concept Theory

The concept of the self as put forth in early psychology tended to be narrow and restricted. The intropectionists, led by Wilhelm Wundt (Bigge, 1971;Gergen, 1971), were content to view the concept of self only as a person's awareness of his own body and his internal processes. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, William James (Diggory, 1966; Gergen, 1971) assumed a more expanded view of self. James theorized that the self could be subdivided into three categories: "a material self," "a social self," and "a spiritual self" (Diggory, 1966; Gergen, 1971; Epstein, 1973). The material self consists of one's own body, family, and possessions; the social self includes how one's self is viewed by others; the spiritual self consists of one's emotions and desires (Epstein, 1973). James (2007), in his *Principles of Psychology,* wrote, in its widest possible sense, a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes, and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account (P. 291).

The self, theorized by James (2007) in the early 1900s, is defined in similar terms by today's self-psychologists. During the early 1920s, behaviorism and Gestalt psychology emerged in American psychology (Gergen, 1971). The growth and stability of Gestalt psychology would have provided a firm theoretical base for the concepts proposed by James and other self-psychologists. However, the growth of Gestalt psychology and self-psychology was temporarily repressed by other psychologists who were interested in a theory which could be "measured objectively, described in terms of definite mechanical sequences or quantities, and reported statistically" (Bigge, p. 52).

Self-psychology was particularly vulnerable to the attacks of those advocating a more scientific direction for psychology (Gergen, 1971). Self-psychology was based on the theory that behavior was largely determined by non-observable influences which could not be objectively measured. The evidence produced by this theory could not be publicly observed and verified. Constructs such as love, hate, joy, thought, and self could not be experimentally controlled and tested (Bigge, 1971; Gergen, 1971). The behaviorist view was based on observable, external behavioral influences which could be measured. The behaviorist view prevailed, and for the next fifteen or twenty years the self, as a significant determinant of behavior, received relatively little notable emphasis (Diggory, 1966).

Diggory (1966), Patterson (1973), and Stanford and Roark (1974), in outlining the psychological foundations of education, have noted that the behaviorist views man as a reactive being whose behavior is controlled by external stimuli. Man's behavior can be determined by his past experiences. His present and future behavior can be conditioned through systematic application of rewards and punishment. The behaviorist view had its greatest effect on education during the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, behaviorism proved effective in solving education problems (Combs, Avilla, & Purkey, 1973).

Following World War I, the psychoanalytic movement, stimulated by Sigmund Freud and his followers, emerged as the second significant contributor to the development of the self-concept theory (Gergen, 1971). The psychoanalytic theory represents an extension of the theory of behaviorism. Patterson (1973) has assessed both of these viewpoints as objective and mechanistic ways of describing human behavior. Man's behavior is viewed as largely determined by past experiences and unconscious stimuli (Patterson, 1973; Stanford & Roark, 1974).According to Diggory (1966), the psychoanalytic theory dealt with the self in context of the ego which was interpreted as "…the basis for self-evaluation, self-criticism, conscience, and the feeling of guilt" (Diggory, p. 26). Diggory(1966) maintained that psychoanalysis was always an "ego psychology" and that Freud's notion of the self was very similar to James' view of the self. Freud recognized the "…rational conscious control in human behavior…" as well as the "…irrational unconscious determiners of behavior…" (Diggory, p. 27). Diggory (1966) noted that Freud's recognition of the conscious self was overshadowed by his emphasis on the unconscious influences on behavior. Over a period of many years, the self progressed from being considered one of the most significant determiners of behavior by James and earlier writers and philosophers to a role of insignificance in the psychoanalytic movement (Diggory, 1966).

In between these two extremes, the Behaviorist movement completely excluded the self as a determiner of behavior. Behaviorism and psychoanalysis have been recognized as two major movements in American psychology. The application of selected principles from each of these psychological theories has affected various facets of education. During the late 1930s and the early 1940s, several factors occurred which resulted in acceptance of self-psychology as a recognized psychological theory. The literature reveals conflicting reasons for this turn of events. Combs and others (Combs, Avilla, &Purkey, 1973) surmised that American education began advancing toward a more humanistic view which called for a more positive, flexible, and less mechanistic view of human behavior. The traditional theories were no longer felt to be relevant in solving human problems. Goble (1970) suggested that the philosophical change was a by-product of the Great Depression and World War II. According to Goble, society called for a psychology of human behavior based on a more positive and uplifting view of man (Goble, 1970). Goble suggested also that during this time Maslow, Combs, and Snygg may have affected the philosophical change (Goble, 1970). These self-psychologists began at that time formulating their own theories of human behavior which were based on man's strengths and potentials rather than his weaknesses (Goble, 1970).

In addition to the reasons proposed by Combs (Combs, Avilla, & Purkey, 1973) and Goble (1970), Gergen (1971) has proposed that the position of the self-psychologists was strengthened by weaknesses found in the theoretical positions of the traditional psychologists. Gergen (1971) contended that the position once assumed by the traditional psychologies began to weaken following the results of several experiments which could only be explained by referring to "non-observable constructs." The theorists were forced to consider certain internal concepts which were thought to be related to external behavior (Gegen, 1971). Experimental study of the self-concept was approved. In 1961, Gergen (1971) noted that more than 2,000 self-concept studies had accumulated since the 1940s. Diggory (1966) observed that the most productive group of researchers were those who studied the self-concept. Diggory believed that the position of the self-psychologists was solidified mainly because of the controlled experimentation conducted in the study of the self. The factors contributing to the emergence of self-psychology as a third view of human behavior were innumerable. It was evident that changes had occurred which made the idea of a new Third Force in American psychology acceptable. The new philosophical view of human nature was not intended to completely engulf the traditional philosophies but to offer alternative means of viewing human behavior.

4.0 Perceptual Psychology

The inception of Third Force Psychology led to self-psychology being referred to as a phenomenological, perceptual, interactional, and an existential approach (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962). The proponents of this movement have been referred to as personalists, humanists, self-psychologists, phenomenologists, perceptual psychologists, transaction lists, and existentialists (Combs, 1965). The advocates of the theory of perceptual psychology have all taken a slightly different position on the approach, but according to Combs (1965), all have in common "a deep concern with questions of man's being and becoming" (p. 13).The theoretical principles of the perceptual approach have been applied by practitioners involved in the people-related professions. According to Combs (1965), it has sometimes been called the "practitioner's" psychology. The theory of perceptual psychology is based on principles of behavior which are consistent with the stated goals and objectives of education. The theory is also highly consistent with findings resulting from teacher effectiveness research. Perceptual psychology, therefore, has particular significance for the teaching profession.

5.0 Principles of Perceptual Psychology

Perceptual psychology is based on the positive and healthy aspects of human behavior. Confidence is professed in man's ability to direct his own life. A central assumption which permeates perceptual psychology is that man's potential behavior and direction of growth are assumed to be good (Patterson, 1973; Stanford & Roark, 1974). To make any other assumption would be counter to the entire theory. In perceptual psychology, man is viewed as proactive. He is able to act upon his environment as well as to react to it. The external and internal influences on behavior are acknowledged, but man is viewed as the ultimate determiner of the direction his behavior will take. Man is not manipulated and controlled by his environment (Combs, 1965; Patterson, 1973; Stanford & Roark, 1974). He is free to make choices and is thought to be responsible for his behavior. Man's behavior is determined by his perceptual field, and therefore, the organization of the perceptual field is important. In order to avoid being manipulated and controlled, man must be capable of adequately perceiving "what is" (Patterson, 1973; Stanford & Roark, 1974).The objectives of perceptual psychology are realized if man is helped to improve his relations with self and others.

Perceptual psychology is concerned with people's feelings, attitudes, beliefs, desires, loves, hates, and values and all other human qualities (Combs, 1965; Patterson, 1973; Stanford & Roark, 1974). These principles of perceptual psychology are reflected in the perceptual view of teacher effectiveness.

6.0 The Perceptual View of Teacher Effectiveness

Adequate perceptions are basic to teacher effectiveness in the realm of perceptual psychology. The assumption is that the behavior of the teacher is determined "by his private world of perceptions" (Combs, 1965, p. 19). A person's behavior is "the direct result of how he sees himself, how he views the situations in which he is involved and the interrelations of these two" (Combs, 1965, p. 12). Therefore, in order to change one's behavior, it is necessary to change his perceptions. Teacher education programs based on the perceptual approach are concerned with the pre-service teacher's perceptions of his teaching field, perceptions of others, perceptions of self, perceptions of the purpose and process of learning, perceptions about appropriate teaching methods (Combs, 1965).The most important of all perceptions existing for an individual are those he has of himself (Blume, 1971; Combs, Avilla & Purkey, 1973; Snygg & Combs, 1949). Perceptual psychology views teacher effectiveness as a personal expression of the self. The effective teacher is able to use his self as an instrument in enhancing the teaching-learning process (Combs, Avilla & Purkey, 1973). The "self-as-instrument" approach, as defined by Combs et al. (1973), involves combining one's knowledge and personal sensitivity in realizing the goals and purposes of education. The teacher's self-concept is an important entity in this approach. Combs (1965) has stated that "the individual's self is the center of his world, the point of origin for all behavior. What he believes about himself affects every aspect of his life" (p.17). Research has shown that in-service and pre-service teachers with positive self-concepts perform successfully in a variety of teaching situations.

Garvey (1970) explored the relationship between student teaching grades and the self-concept. Student teachers were divided into a low group and a high group based on letter grades received during student teaching. Those students receiving two A's in student teaching were designated as the High Group; the Low Group consisted of those students who received grades lower than two B's. This group designation resulted in twenty-eight students in the High Group and twelve students in the Low Group. All twenty-nine major scores of the Clinical and Research Form of the *Tennessee Self-concept Scale (TSCS)* were used to make comparisons. The *TSCS* was administered four months prior to the student teaching experience. Results showed that the High Group reported higher self-concepts and evidenced less variability, conflict, and uncertainty in self-perceptions. The difference between the groups was statistically significant at the .05 level or better on thirteen of the twenty-nine scores. In a study similar to Garvey's study, Hatfield (1961) investigated the relationship between elementary education student teachers' reported self-concept and overall student teaching performance. In contrast to Garvey's study, Hatfield's study was not hampered by the shortcomings inherent in using letter grades as the only measure of success in student teaching. Hatfield used an average of four performance ratings as the criterion of success. The performance ratings were collected over a period of two quarters. The degree of congruence between "My Self" and "My Ideal Self" constituted the measure of self-acceptance. Hatfield found that those student teachers who were rated as successful student teachers also had positive self-concepts.

Crane (1974) found that not only does the self-concept affect success in student teaching but that the self-concept affects adjustment to preparation for teaching. Crane investigated the relationship of acceptance of self and others to adjustment to teaching. The study developed out of a concern for the increasing number of students who withdrew voluntarily from education courses giving the reason that they no longer wished to teach. Three groups of students were identified: students who appeared to be well adjusted to the course and to teaching; students who were less well adjusted; students who were unable to adjust. Crane reported a significant relationship between attitudes towards self and others and adjustment to teaching. The students who were unable to adjust had significantly worse opinions of themselves and others than the other two groups. Crane's research suggests that the self-concept may be used to identify students who would not be likely to adjust to teaching or preparation for teaching early in the teacher education program. The effect of the self-concept extends beyond its effect on skills and performance. A study by Aspy and Buhler (1975) involved investigating the relationship of the teacher's self-concept and the students' academic achievement. Six third grade teachers and one hundred and twenty third grade students were the participants in this study. A selection of twenty students was made from each teacher's class. Pretest data were collected by means of *The Stanford Achievement Test* and was used to select five boys and five girls with the highest IQ's and five boys and five girls with the lowest IQ's. IQ differences within each of the groups were non-significant.

On the basis of measurements resulting from *Parker's Self-concept Checklist* and *Fielder's Q-Sort* procedure for teachers, the six teachers were grouped into a high self-concept group and a low self-concept group. Post-test data were collected from the students by means of the *Stanford Achievement Test*. The results revealed that the mean gain by students of the high self-concept teachers on four subtests was substantially higher than the students of the lower self-concept teachers. It was shown that the students of the high self-concept teachers made greater total gain than students of the lower self-concept teachers. Boy and Pine (1971) made observations which validated spy and Buhler's findings.We submit that when a student learns something, it is because he has responded to the teacher as a person, a person who relates to students with a core attitude of acceptance, empathy, concreteness, transparency and personal genuineness (p. ix).These findings by Garvey (1970), Hatfield (1961), Crane (1974), Aspy and Buhler (1975), and Boy and Pine (1971) revealed that the adequacy of a teacher's self-concept can affect his ability to perform effectively as a teacher. The pre-service teacher who has a positive self-concept is able to adjust to preparation for teaching and to perform successfully during student teaching. The achievement of students also is affected by the adequacy of the teacher's self-concept.

In addition to having an adequate self-concept, the effective teacher, according to the principles of perceptual psychology, has accurate perceptions about people and their behavior. Gazda (1973) commented, If a student is to learn from a teacher he must be valued by that teacher; he must be understood by that teacher; and the teacher must be able to communicate with him and present a good model for him to imitate (p. 50).As Combs et al. (1973) has stated, "If a teacher believes his students have the capacity to learn, he will behave differently from the teacher who has serious doubts about the capacities of his charges" (p. 23). Rosenthal and Jacobson (Hamachek, 1969) found that students taught by teachers who were led to expect greater intellectual gains showed significantly greater gain in intelligence over an eight-month period than other students in the school. In the Florida Studies, Combs et al. (1973) studied the effects of the values, beliefs, and purposes of teachers on students in the classroom and found that when teachers see students in genuine and positive ways, the teacher interacts with students in open, democratic, and free ways. In the presence of these teachers, students are able to attain their goals with purpose and meaning. Webb (1971) observed that a teacher's behavior and the way a teacher relates to his students is an important basis for a student's attitude toward learning. Webb compared the effect of sensitive and less sensitive teachers on eighth grade students identified as insecure, school problems, and problem-free. The results indicated that more positive student attitudes tend to be associated with the more sensitive teacher. The problem-free students did not respond significantly to either the sensitive or insensitive teachers. The low ability, insecure students who were considered school problems were more negatively affected by the insensitive teachers than any other group of students. Webb (1971) contended,

The lack of teacher sensitivity to students who are shy and insecure or to those who have poor opinions about school and themselves have a marked negative effect on their self-esteem and consequent learning attitudes. Davidson and Lang (1960) found that teachers influence the personality development of their students. The interaction-effect of the child's perception of his teacher's feelings toward him on the child's self-concept, school achievement, and classroom behavior also was investigated. The *Checklist of Trait Names* was administered twice to the students. During the first administration, the students were asked to respond in terms of "My teacher thinks I am" to arrive at a measure of perceived teacher feelings. The second test, the "I think I am" scale was used to measure self-perception. Two hundred and three elementary students who were above average in reading ability were selected for the study. Ten teachers also were selected. The teachers provided academic achievement ratings for each of their students. Findings showed that the adequacy of a child's self-concept is significantly related to the child's perception of his teacher's feelings toward him. The results revealed that there were positive and significant relationships between a child's perception of his teacher's feelings toward him, his classroom behavior, and academic achievement.

The effective teacher has adequate perceptions of his students. Because the self-concept is formed in interactions with significant others, the teacher, as a significant other, must accept himself and be able to convey an attitude of acceptance to students. Students need to feel confirmed by those people most important to them (Appell & Appell, 1965). According to Mixer and Milson (1973), "the expectations of others (such as parents and teachers) are internalized into self-perceptions. The child becomes the way he is treated" (p. 347). The student's perception of his teacher's perception of him is related to his behavior, his self-concept, and his achievement. The effective teacher has adequate perceptions of the purposes of learning and uses appropriate teaching methods and interaction styles (Combs, Avila & Purkey, 1973). Combs et al. (1973) emphasized that "whatever we do is always determined by the purposes we have in mind at the time of our behaving and misbehaving" (p. 25).

The teacher's perceptions of his purposes and objectives affect his behavior as indicated in reports by Flanders (1970), Hamachek (1969), and Fitts (1971).Flanders (1970) found that the achievement and attitudes of students taught by teachers who used a variety of interaction styles were superior to students taught by teachers who used only one or two styles. Hamachek (1969) discovered that poor teachers made more homework assignments and daily textbook assignments than good teachers. Supplementary books and project assignments were used by the majority of the good teachers. Fitts (1975) reported the results of a study from Project Impact, an investigation conducted by the Polk County Board of Education in Des Moines, Iowa. An attempt was made to determine the relationship between the teacher's self-concept and student use of Divergent, Evaluative, Memory, Convergent, and Routine levels of thinking. The *Tennessee Self-concept Scale* was administered to 208 elementary and secondary education teachers. The Total Positive Score, an overall measure of self-esteem, was correlated with each of the levels of thinking. Results indicated that teachers with more positive self-concepts stimulated students to use Divergent and Evaluative levels of thinking and to spend less time in Routine, Memory, or Convergent thinking activities. Hamachek (1969) concluded after reviewing research related to the instructional methods and interaction styles of good and poor teachers that good teachers tend to be flexible and sensitive to the perceptions of others. The good teacher is willing to experiment with new approaches, skillful in asking questions, and knowledgeable of subject matter. In addition, the good teacher uses well-established testing procedures, facilitative interpersonal skills, and is able to personalize teaching (Hamachek, 1969, p. 342).

7.0 Conclusions

The self-concept theory represents a positive, forward-looking view of human nature. It provides the basis for what is a Third Force in American psychology, perceptual psychology. In contrast to earlier psychological theories, perceptual psychology is more congruent with the stated goals and objectives of education, and it has provided a solid theoretical basis for teacher effectiveness research. Teacher effectiveness research based on the principles of perceptual psychology makes it clear that the effective teacher is first and foremost a person of unique personhood (Hamachek, 1969). The effective teacher is well informed, has accurate perceptions of self and others,is able to combine knowledge and personal sensitivity in enhancing teaching and learning.The perceptual approach calls for a new kind of education which will help the prospective teacher "to become the best that he is able to become" (Goble, 1970, p. 67). The approach does not call for creating a "society of conforming, uniform adults…" (Burns, 1969, p. 84). The personal qualities proposed by the perceptual approach can be developed in pre-service teachers by providing experiences in which they can encounter themselves and others in a facilitative environment. Wilgoren (1973) emphasized that teacher training and professional development need to be characterized bystrategies that lead to self-discovery, internal reliance, responsibility for growth, and opportunities for personal involvement in real and open relationships and experiences (Wilgoren, 1973, p. 474).In the 1962 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Yearbook, *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962), it was stated that prospective teachers need experiences which will help them develop understanding and acceptance of self and others. "For a teacher to teach for adequacy in others, there must be some feeling of adequacy in the teacher himself" (ASCD, 1962, p. 114). The concerns reflected by these writers and other perceptual psychologists have stimulated interest in purposely designed experiences which will help pre-service teachers develop adequate perceptions of self and others. The centrality of the self-concept to the teaching and learning process has long been documented and has historical, theoretical and practitioner support. The theory of perceptual psychology has particular relevance for teacher education. The effective teacher is well-informed and has accurate perceptions of the purposes of education and is able to use appropriate methods of teaching (Combs, Avilla, &Purkey, 1973; Hamachek, 1969).In-service and pre-service teachers who have positive self-perceptions tend to function with success in student teaching (Garvey, 1970; Hamachek, 1969; Hatfield, 1961) and adjustment to teaching and preparation for teaching (Crane, 1974). Studies also revealed that a teacher's self-concept affects the student's self-concept (Davidson & Lang, 1960), achievement (Aspy & Buhler, 1975) and attitude toward learning (Hamachek, 1969; Wass & Combs, 1974). Teachers who view themselves as adequate tend to have positive views of the goals and purposes of teaching (Combs, Avilla & Purkey, 1973).   These teachers are able to use interaction styles and instructional methods which help students function successfully in school (Fitts, 1975; Hamachek, 1969).

As schools move toward an emphasis on the social and emotional learning of students and the implementation of interventions designed to address deficits in literacy and achievement of students, a Call to Action is needed.

Teacher education institutions and school districts are called to take a retrospective view of research findings addressing teacher effectiveness and teacher self-perceptions and move forward intentionally and purposefully addressing how pre-service and in-service teachers view themselves and others.

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