ABSTRACT

Although extraordinary claims have often been made regarding the success of numerous approaches aimed at enhancing children's self-concept (Canfield & Wells, 1976; Conner, 1986; Thompson & Lowson, 1992), not all researchers are convinced that such programs have any measurable effects on the interpretation of this construct (Hattie, 1992; Kohn, 1995). It has been argued by some, in fact, that such programs may be more harmful than they are beneficial, often teaching the child that s/he is the most important person in the world and so leaving him/her with the erroneous belief that it is the responsibility of others to make them feel good (Katz, 1993; Vitz, 1994). The program under investigation has been running in some Western Australian public as well as private schools since 1992, with anecdotal data suggesting that staff as well as students saw it as being beneficial in raising pupils' self-esteem. It may be the case, however, that such claims are highly exaggerated, as the program has never been formally evaluated. After detailing program content, this paper presents the results of a systematic evaluation with three primary classes from different schools. The test instrument used was the Song and Hattie About Myself test (Hattie, 1992), which measured seven sub-scales of a concept of the self. Future implications for the program are discussed.
INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to create good feelings in a group of young people given the appropriate environment, however, if the curriculum consists primarily of telling them how wonderful they are, the elation quickly wears off when they return to the real world. Consequently, more and more educators and psychologists alike are sharing the opinion that self-concept programs are of value only if they produce lasting changes and evidence a transference effect into the real-life situation (Hattie, 1987; Kohn, 1995; Tice, 1990). Such researchers argue that indiscriminate self-concept manipulations which emphasise a `quick fix' approach, often do more harm than good, leaving the individual with yet another failure with which to contend.

The `self-term' has received a great deal of attention in the literature but lack of a consistent nomenclature has made it difficult to identify precisely what it is that is being spoken about. Typically, what would appear to be the same construct has been referred to as self-worth (Covington, 1984); self-acceptance (DuBrin, 1988); self-regard (Rogers, 1950); self-estimation (Rosenberg, 1965); self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967/1981); self-attitude (Secord & Backman, 1964); self-love (Fromm, 1957/1974); self-affirmation (Tillich, 1955); self-evaluation/self-affection (Symonds, 1951); self-feeling (James, 1890); self-image (Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1977); and simply, the self (Jersild, 1952).

For the purpose of this study, the term `self-concept' will be used throughout and defined as: a system of acquired beliefs about the personal self which affects the way in which evaluative feedback is interpreted. Such a definition sees self-concept as the end product of cognitively evaluated, personally salient, stimuli. The stimuli can be internal (e.g. in the form of generalised self-accusation) or external (e.g. as in a response to an insult). Regardless of its source, it is its interpretation (cognitive) which makes an individual feel (affective) good/bad or positive/negative about him/herself. Thus, it is contended that self-concept is, at its core, an attitude which an individual has about the personal self - an attitude which engenders certain feelings. As such, it is extremely difficult to reprogram - a quick-fix weekend program is unlikely to effect any lasting change. For an individual to move from feelings of entrenched guilt, anxiety and shame, for example, to feelings of well-being, and then to remain in that condition, requires mental reorientation of considerable proportion.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM
For a number of years, the second author (Rick) has been developing a program with primary school-aged students using music to enhance self-concept. The program, at its present stage of evolution, consists of ten weekly sessions each of one hour's duration. The emphasis is on, first, developing relationships with the children and second, enhancing their self-concept by providing opportunities in which they can successfully express their own creativity. In essence, the program revolves around having fun, succeeding at creating a song, and gaining acknowledgment by performing that song in front of an audience. A key factor is the building of trust between Rick and the children, however, the importance of the class teacher is not discounted. In initial discussions about the program, the teacher is asked to remain in the classroom during the sessions and encouraged to record observations in the form of anecdotal comments. This is done so that the teacher can develop a sense of ownership for the program as well as note observations about interactions which Rick may miss while working with the children. Notes are always discussed with the teacher prior to the next session.

The first session is simply a 'getting to know you' one in which Rick introduces himself by telling the children the story of his own life's journey in which he relates successes as well as failures and disappointments. He then provides opportunity for the children to tell their own stories. The session is closed with a song or two from Rick on his acoustic guitar. From here on, each session begins by chatting with the children about anything they want to talk about (e.g. raising the issue of present hopes and fears; making a list of 'some things I don't want to be' and 'some things I do want to be' and then talking about each). Creating an environment where free and honest expression of thoughts and feelings can flourish is of paramount importance as this is seen as the linchpin of the total program.

Sessions two and three consist of motivating the children to come up with ideas for their own songs. The children select the topics and volunteer words which they would like included. Rick always expresses enthusiasm for the children's ideas, regardless of how left field they may seem, and every child is encouraged to contribute. Ridicule of another's contribution is not permitted. Between these two sessions, Rick puts together a song based on the children's ideas and then presents it to them for further consideration/ modification/extension, etc. The music accompanying the song always has a strong beat - one to which the children can clap, snap their fingers and add movement. For this reason, lyrics are normally constructed to a 4x4 rock-and-roll beat.

During sessions four and five, by which time the lyrics and tune of the song have been agreed upon, Rick introduces other instruments such as
the electric guitar and the banjo. The children may join in on simple instruments such as rhythm sticks, tambourine, or a small drum. If the song lends itself to harmonisation, singing in parts, dancing, etc, these variations are included and practised. Throughout, every child is encouraged to participate with excuses such as 'I can't do it' or 'I'm not good enough' being gently challenged and the child further encouraged, but with children never being forced to go beyond their zone of psychological comfort. It often seems to be the case, however, that initially reticent children voluntarily join in once their confidence begins to grow.

During sessions six and seven, learning the lyrics without visual reference is practised. Children are also invited to write out and illustrate the song with, often, several children being responsible for a single line. Group efforts are then compiled into a booklet as a permanent record of the children's achievements.

Sessions eight and nine consist of recording the song on a four-track audio recorder, this session is sometimes also video-taped. Each child is ultimately presented with an audio tape of their own song which they helped to write. During the last four or so sessions, the seed of performing their own song publicly is sown. Although reluctance or outright refusal is often the initial response, by session eight or nine, the group is usually ready to boast of their achievements to others. It is during these sessions that rehearsals take place and a public performance (e.g. at a school assembly or parents' night) scheduled.

Group formation theorists (e.g. Schmuck & Schmuck, 1988) have suggested that the culmination of a group-oriented task can be accompanied by sadness and a sense of loss. The final session is therefore devoted to task closure. Personal and group achievements are emphasised, as is the fact that as a result of the program, the children can now rightly see themselves as individuals who are capable of dreaming dreams and achieving realities which may previously have been thought of as being impossible.

UNSOLICITED COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM

From comments received, it seems that the program as described has been enthusiastically endorsed by students, teachers and parents alike. The following are samples of comments from school personnel:

I fully endorse the work done by Rick with the children. It promotes great self-esteem, language, confidence and enjoyment of music. Very positive results. (primary principal)
In his work with the students, Rick demonstrated that he has outstanding rapport with children of all ages and backgrounds (education support and mainstream students). He showed particular dedication and was genuinely concerned for the social adjustment and personal confidence of the children. (primary teacher)

Every session has been a positive learning experience with every child learning and singing songs they've been involved in writing. Definitely enhances every child's learning. (primary teacher)

Comments from the children have been no less positive:

We thank you for giving up your own time to help us year sevens with our singing. You have given us a big boost of confidence in our singing. You're the best. (extract from card presented by students, year seven)

You are a rocken roll star. You play music and I like your music. (year two student)

Rick brought his acoustic guitar. It was fantastic and beautiful. I wish I could marry him. It would be nice. I wish I could be a singer like Rick. (year three student)

The following accolades from a parent are presented verbatim:

My daughter ___ [Year 6] was in your self-esteem program you held during the term. Wednesdays became a highlight of her week and she was always more cheery and full of excitement. ___ told me much of what she did, whatever else the program entailed it had a positive effect of my daughter. I would like to congratulate you on your program and hope it continues and becomes a permanent part of the curriculum as kids need fun and to feel good about themselves.

Since it was first trialled in 1992, children of different ages, ability levels, and ethnic backgrounds have experienced the program. The program has been offered in government as well as private schools. It seems that music is indeed the universal language! As a result of its popularity, the program has attracted considerable media interest (‘Students Given Boost', 1993; ‘Rick Breaks the Sound of Silence', 1994 ‘The Word is Spreading', 1995).

RESEARCH STRUCTURE

To date, the program has only been informally evaluated with evaluation being closely linked to degree of enthusiasm displayed by school personnel, parents and children. Even though the program obviously provides a great deal of enjoyment for the children, is it in fact doing what it purports to be doing? In other words, is it raising the
level of the children's self-concept? In an attempt to find out, a pilot study was undertaken with children from three primary schools.

Sample

A representative sample, which consisted of three in-tact classes, was selected for the study. Teachers who participated in the study were invited to do so by the school principal, with the schools themselves also being involved by invitation. The benefit to each school was a free ten week program which would normally cost $500. The first group consisted of a composite year six (coded school 0; Females = 11, Males = 10) and was selected as representing a primary school from within the independent school sector. This school was also in what may be considered a lower socio-economic area. The second group was a year 5/6 (coded school 1; Females = 17, Males = 11) government school located in a middle-class suburb. The third group (coded school 2; Females = 11, Males = 15) also consisted of a year 5/6 class from a government school but which drew children from an upper-middle socio-economic district. Ten and eleven year olds were selected as it was considered that younger children may not have the reading skills necessary for comprehending the test items, while older children may have felt too self-conscious to participate seriously in the activities. Mixed-sex schools were selected as past research has yielded conflicting results regarding sex differences and self-concept (e.g. Hattie, 1992; Marsh, Smith, & Barnes, 1985; Piers, 1969).

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are to be investigated:
1. There is a difference between males and females on pretest self-concept sub-category scores.
2. In both males and females, within each school self-concept sub-category, scores will show significant improvement over time.
3. There will be differences in self-concept subcategory score changes over time across schools within each gender.

Design

The design was pseudo-experimental in nature in that there were no control groups. As this was a pilot study, it was considered that preliminary investigation with experimental groups only would yield sufficient information to determine whether future, more rigorous studies, were warranted. The dependant variable was the self-concept test score and the independent variables were school and gender. The procedure consisted of administering a pre-test and post-test, with the self-concept program comprising the intervening treatment. The program consisted of ten weekly one hour sessions.
Program effectiveness was evaluated using the About Myself test of self-concept devised by Song and Hattie (1982) and further elaborated by Hattie (1992). This instrument was selected because of its sound theoretical base as well as its reported potency for differentiating between the subcategories of self-concept. The model (Figure 1) is based on the hierarchical and multifaceted notion of self-concept as articulated by Marsh and Shavelson (1985) but with some modification. Estimates of test reliability have been shown to be 'very reasonable' (Hattie, 1992, p. 163) and when relationships were compared between Piers-Harris, Coopersmith, and Song and Hattie scales, results indicated that 'the three tests are measuring similar underlying dimensions and this provides much credence to the Shavelson et al. based models' (p. 167).

Self-concept sub-categories, together with defining characteristics, are listed below:

- Ability self-concept - the extent to which an individual believes he/she is capable of achieving;
- Achievement self-concept - the product of a person's actual academic achievement;
- Classroom self-concept - confidence in classroom activities;
- Peer self-concept - an individual's popularity and interaction with friends;
- Family self-concept - an individual's perception of acceptance or non-acceptance by his/her family;
- Confidence - emotional aspects of self-concept;
- Physical self-concept - an individual's attitude towards his/her physical appearance.

Subjects were asked to complete the test on the first occasion they met with one of the researchers. This timing was deliberate because it was at this point that subjects were the most ignorant about the program, thus potential Hawthorne effects were minimised. Subjects were presented with a copy of the test (Appendix 1) and informed that they could take as long as they desired to complete it, but to ensure that they answered each question as honestly and accurately as possible. Most subjects completed the task in about five minutes. Subjects were asked to retake the test in week ten, at the conclusion of the program.
Results

Histograms indicated marked nonnormality within gender and school for each subcategory, distributions were generally rectangular with the bulk of the data towards the upper end of the score range. As such, the data were analysed nonparametrically. As this was a pilot study, an alpha level of $p < 0.05$ was used. All analyses were undertaken using the software package SPSS for Windows, version 5.0.

Hypothesis One.

Two tailed Mann Whitney U tests (Siegel & Castellan, 1988) with $p$ values unadjusted for ties indicated no significant differences between gender within school 0 or school 2. Significant differences were found within school 1 in the self-concept sub-categories of achievement, ability, peer and confidence. Rankings indicated that females scored higher than males in these four subcategories (Table 1.)

Kruskal Wallis one way ANOVA's indicated significant differences between schools for female peer, male ability and male peer self-concept (Table 2). All other comparisons were not significant.

Post hoc tests (Siegal & Castellan, 1988) analogous to post hoc $t$ tests with a Bonferroni alpha adjustment for parametric ANOVA's indicated for female peer self-concept that schools 1 and 2 were significantly different, with school 2 ranked lower. For males, ability self-concept was significantly different between schools 0 and 1, and schools 1 and 2, with school 1 ranked lower than schools 0 and 2. Male peer self-concept was significantly different between schools 0 and 1, and schools 0 and 2, with school 0 ranked higher than schools 1 and 2 (Table 3). Alpha for each two tailed test within each subcategory was $p < 0.03$. 

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INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

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Krusal Wallis one way ANOVA's indicated significant differences between schools for female peer, male ability and male peer self-concept (Table 2). All other comparisons were not significant.

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INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

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Hypothesis Two

Wilcoxon signed rank tests were used to compare self-concept subcategory change over time within both school and gender. Tests were one tailed as it was hypothesised that self-concept should improve from Time 1 (T1) to Time 2 (T2). This, however, occurred only for male class self-concept (z=2.20, p=.01) in school 2. All other tests were not significant.

Hypothesis Three

To compare self-concept sub-category change over time across schools within gender, T2-T1 difference scores were calculated. Kruskal Wallis one way ANOVA's indicated no significant changes over time in either gender with the exception of female peer self-concept (c² = 10.92, p = 0.004). Post hoc comparisons as per hypothesis one indicated that school 0 changed significantly over time compared to schools 1 and 2, but schools 1 and 2 did not (schools 0 & 1: z = 2.23, p = .03; schools 1 & 2: z = 1.36, p = .17; schools 0 & 2: z = 3.26, p = .001). Figure 3., median scores at T1 and T2, showed that school 2 had the greatest increase in median scores over time with the other two schools decreasing. Similar plots by gender and subcategory indicated in general that self-concept scores decreased over time, albeit not significantly and that T1 scores were generally close to the maximum possible scores for each subcategory, although not dissimilar from the Song and Hattie mean scores (Figure 4). As these trends were contrary to the hypothesis, pretest boxplots for each gender across schools were drawn (Figure 2.). Strong ceiling effects were evident across almost all subcategories which then did not allow any significant increase in scores from T1 to T2, only the potential for score decreases.

Two tailed Mann Whitney U tests indicated that there were no significant changes in self-concept sub-category scores across gender within each school from T1 to T2.
Discussion

With reference to the first hypothesis, results varied considerably across schools, with differences being noted in only four of the subcategories within school 1. Why achievement, ability, peer and confidence surfaced as significant in this school only is difficult to determine. A possible reason could be the disproportionate number of males (N = 11) to females (N = 17), thus potentially giving the females greater group solidarity which allowed them to feel better about the four subcategories which related directly to aspects of self-concept and which are principally moulded within the school milieu.

Where significant changes were found over time (male class self-concept in school 2, and female peer self-concept across schools) the absence of a control group meant that these self concept changes could not be solely attributable to the music program itself. In multigroup pretest postest designs with no controls, internal validity is threatened by the following factors (Cook & Campbell, 1979). External events which were related to self-concept changes but not related to the treatment may have occurred either in or out of the music sessions, thus overriding any positive or negative treatment effects. The ten week time period between tests may have been important as subjects, especially primary school children, may rapidly change either physically or psychologically due to natural maturational forces during this time. Subjects may have also been more relaxed or anxious when tested at T2 than at T1 or less interested due to the repeated testing. Test implementation at T1 and T2 may have also been sufficiently different to cause subjects to respond differently at these times.

The most likely factor which may account for the lack of significant findings in this study may have been the presence of ceiling effects at T1. Subjects then have no choice at T2 than to either respond as they did at T1, registering no change overall, or to respond lower at T2, contrary to the hypotheses. This is related to the threat of statistical regression, where extreme scores in the score distribution at T1, usually shift to the mean of the score distribution at T2. Due to the score ceiling at T1, this could have only resulted in score decreases at T2 for those with ceiling or near ceiling scores and this effect could be seen graphically. However, these decreases in general would not have been significant either as only 3 out of the 42 Wilcoxon tests had p values greater than or equal to .9 in the hypothesised direction of T2 scores greater than T1 scores.

Subject selection also requires further consideration in future research. It may be more appropriate to utilise existing criteria (e.g. government indices) to sort regions into socio-economic status and then randomly select schools and classes within regions where possible, rather than by invitation as done here. It was assumed in this study that the three schools drew students from and reflected
their immediate localities, but for the independent or alternative schools this may not be entirely true. Also larger and more even sample numbers across schools and gender would increase statistical power considerably.

Conclusion

Prima facie statistical evidence suggests that the programme as described, has at best, only a marginal affect on altering students' self-concepts. It would be premature, however, to dismiss the program as ineffective. If nothing else, parents, teachers and students gain obvious benefit from Rick's input and students, from anecdotal evidence, thoroughly enjoy the program and do seem to feel better about who they are as individuals. The fact that self-concept gains are not statistically discernible at this point, does not mean that the program has no value. It may mean one or more of four things. First, the program may be efficacious for areas other than self-concept - interpersonal skills or pastoral care, for example. That is to say, it may be too narrow to simply state that the program is about gains in self-concept scores. Second, research over the past quarter of a century has, if nothing else, shown self-concept to be somewhat of an amorphous construct (Wiley, 1974; 1989). It may be the case that the program is in fact tapping into aspects related to self-concept which are not within the parameters of the instrument used. Thirdly, the measurement instrument itself, while useful in providing a one-shot picture of self-concept, may not be sufficiently sensitive to capture changes over time, especially so given the ease of obtaining ceiling effects (Table 4). Finally, a compelling reason for the null results and one which finds its basis in the theoretical model, is that significant self-concept shifts can take place only over extended periods of time. That is to say, self-concept is essentially a stable and enduring construct and one which needs to be so in order for individuals to maintain a coherent and integrated self-identity. Rapid changes over short periods tend to disintegrate one's world, are seen as threatening and therefore to be avoided. One hour per week over a ten week period may not provide the in-depth input necessary to create significant self-concept changes. Extending the program over two or three terms may yield different results, as may more intensive input during the ten week period - say, two or three times per week.

To summarise, in terms of actually increasing students' self-concept scores in any measurable fashion, such claims can not be made on the strength of the evidence presented in this study. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that the program does have some value. Firm conclusions about its effectiveness in raising children's self-concept, seem to be premature at this time and so further investigation, perhaps with a restructured approach, as discussed, is warranted.
REFERENCES


Rick breaks the sound of silence (?1994). [newspaper source uncertain].


Greenwood, Western Australia: Read-ed Publications.


Table 1
Pretest Results of Mann-Whitney U Tests: within schools by Gender, School 1

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Table 2
Pretest Results of Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA's: within Gender by School

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Table 3
Post-hoc Tests on Significant Subcategories within Gender by School

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</table>
z = 2.23, p = .026 N = 26
z = 0.13, p = .897 N = 25
z = 2.51, p = .012

Table 4
Comparison of Composite Pretest & Postest Scores with Song & Hattie Reported Means for Upper Primary-aged Students (1992, p. 163)

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Figure 1.
Song and Hattie model of the self-concept.

Figure 3
Box Plots: Self-concept Sub-categories by School

Appendix 1
About Myself test of Self-concept

This is not a test but a way of getting to know something about you.

Circle one number (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) for each question that best describes you most of the time.

Please answer as honestly as you can. Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

1. Persons of my age group enjoy my company. 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. I am an attractive person. 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. I have confidence. 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. I am a cheerful person. 1 2 3 4 5 6

5. I am sure of myself in school. 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. I am proud of my ability in school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. I am just as nice as I should be. 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. I am happy with the school work I do. 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I wish I had been born into another family. 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I feel good about school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I would change many things about myself if I could. 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. I think that I have the ability to get good marks at school. 1 2 3 4 5 6

13. The way I look bothers me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. I feel my family trusts me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. My friends have confidence in me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. I feel left out of things in class. 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. I am loved by my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6
18. I am popular with others of my own age. 1 2 3 4 5 6
19. I am proud of my school reports. 1 2 3 4 5 6
20. I feel that I can be trusted. 1 2 3 4 5 6
21. I get along well with other people. 1 2 3 4 5 6
22. I think I'm smart enough to cope with school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
23. I am satisfied with my school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
24. My family is disappointed in me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
25. I am an important person to my friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6
26. I am proud of my school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
27. I think that I can get the results I would like to get in school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
28. I have respect for myself. 1 2 3 4 5 6
29. I feel unwanted at home. 1 2 3 4 5 6
30. In the kinds of things we do in class, I feel I am as good as the other people in my class. 1 2 3 4 5 6
31. Most of my teachers do not understand me. 1 2 3 4 5 6
32. I would not like to change my physical appearance. 1 2 3 4 5 6
33. I feel worthless in class. 1 2 3 4 5 6
34. I feel good about my school work. 1 2 3 4 5 6
35. I think I am good at all times. 1 2 3 4 5 6
Table of Figure 2
Peer Self-concept - Differences within Gender Group by School: Female

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