

## Book Review:

### *Discovering Me: A Guide to Teaching Health and Building Adolescents' Self-esteem.*

Leslie Herod. Boston: Allyn & Bacon Publishers 1999. 364 pp., softcover

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With the events of 1999 creating an incredibly tumultuous time for America's adolescents and our schools, Leslie Herod's guide for school teachers, *Discovering Me: A Guide to Teaching Health and Building Adolescents' Self-Esteem*, is a timely manual for helping teachers guide students as they journey through their adolescent growth. Self-esteem is an issue that is timeless and often difficult to attend to when so many other academic responsibilities take precedence for teachers. Yet, Leslie Herod's guide is a creative, imaginative, and useful teaching tool that focuses on self-esteem and emphasizes supportive and fun learning environments for teachers and students. It focuses on immediate teaching needs with practical classroom activities.

*Discovering Me* is a creative and thought-provoking guide that teaches the teacher how to work with adolescents in a classroom setting. It is about perspective, empowerment, and creative approaches when working with adolescents. With the guide's eight chapters and corresponding handouts, topics relevant to adolescents today are covered. Topics such as relationships, future goals, stress coping skills, communication skills, human growth and development, what constitutes a healthy body—such as nutrition and self-evaluation are included.

The guide's layout is easily navigated, and the titles are eye-catching. Each of the chapters has activities and each activity is segmented into how much time it will take to complete, what the purpose is, what materials are needed, the process of how to conduct the activity, and closing thoughts and hints. In most instances, the time is short (with a range for adjustments) and the materials are either the handouts contained in the appendix or simply one's "imagination." The closing thoughts and hints are from experienced teachers who have used the activities.

In chapter one, the question of "Who Am I?" is addressed with subsection topics of self-discovery,

personality development, relationships and building confidence. Some of the activities included in this chapter are "Get Out of That Box," "Zoom!," "Oh Look! It's Me!," and "Halitosis Golf." As an example of how the activities are constructed, the purpose of "Get Out of That Box" is to challenge students and teachers to think creatively and to "encourage students to cooperate and collaborate to solve problems creatively" by working outside the confining "box" of one's own mind. It encourages students to interact and learn from themselves and others. The time suggested is 20 minutes, and the materials are tables or desks and chairs. As with most of the activities within *Discovering Me*, the materials are not complex and the time is not overwhelming. Depending on the classroom and time constraints, most activities could be conducted during any class period.

The remaining seven chapters follow the layout of chapter one. Chapter two addresses relationships and how friends, peer pressures, and responsibility to others figure into interpersonal relationships for students. Chapter 3 helps students to prepare for the future by setting goals, making decisions, learning to problem solve, and changing behavior. Chapter 4 provides activities that identify stress and how to cope with it. Chapter 5 works with students' abilities to communicate, their attitudes, and refusal skills. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on human growth and development and how to maintain a healthy body. Included in these chapters are instructional guidelines about secondary sex characteristics, the reproductive system, pregnancy and fetal development, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, nutrition, diet, exercise, and hygiene. The last chapter provides a self-evaluation section and addresses use of alcohol and drugs.

Each of the chapters in the appendix correspond with the written text chapters and are intended to be used as a supplement. There are excellent illustrations, cartoons, poems, quizzes, self-analysis sections, critical thinking activities, questions, and

a multitude of activities for teachers to use with students.

The author states that the guide was developed for a middle school curriculum, but many of the topics address issues that may be better suited for high school students. Issues such as alcohol, sex, and condoms are topics that need to be addressed, but in some instances and school systems, these are not acceptable topics for young adolescents. But the vast quantity of topics covered allows for selective use, and depending on the school system and teacher needs there are a wide variety of topics from which to choose. Mostly, this guide contains age-appropriate materials for adolescents and young adults.

Self-esteem is not a new concept, but the approach used in this guide introduces new ideas and alternatives to encouraging adolescents on their journey toward empowerment and self-esteem. While the layout and structure of *Discovering Me* is simple, the message on which it is based is complex. The discovery of the world around us creates the need to discover how we fit into it. Adolescents (as well as adults!) are faced with the challenge of maintaining self-esteem in the face of some very difficult situations in our current society. The task of developing a resource for teachers to create a more conducive classroom environment for students' self-discovery is a daunting one, yet Leslie Herod has managed to create such a resource. *Discovering Me* is a resource that is intended for adolescent use, but the messages of "believe in yourself," empowerment, and creative thought, are applicable not only to adolescents, but to the teachers and adults with whom the adolescents interact. Through her research and experience, Ms. Herod has developed a practical, useful, creative, and timely resource for teachers and students.

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