

GLENN HUNDLEBY,\*  
*Canadian Educational and  
Psychological Consultants,  
Edmonton, Alberta;*  
HARVEY ZINGLE,  
*Faculty of Education,  
University of Alberta,  
Edmonton, Alberta.*

## COMMUNICATION OF EMPATHY

**ABSTRACT:** This research project demonstrates that a systematic training program in *CUE: Communicating, understanding and empathy* (Hundleby, 1972) can have some significant effects on the participants. Even though the treatment in this investigation consisted of 14, 80-minute lessons, the high-school students who received the training were able to communicate empathy at a significantly higher level than were their control counterparts. Not only did the trained subjects score higher on paper and pencil tests of empathy, but also they were identified by independent interviewers as "better communicators" and as "someone I could go and talk to" significantly more often than were the control students.

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of empathy as a therapist variable in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis has long been recognized (Fiedler, 1950, 1951; Fromm-Reichman, 1950). However, it should be emphasized that the empathic skill of the practitioner, as distinguished from his training in diagnosis, is something he shares in degree with every man. According to Carl Rogers:

. . . the therapeutic relationship is only a special instance of interpersonal relationships in general, and . . . the same lawfulness governs all such relationships (1961, p. 39).

In his private life, the therapist's needs for empathy resemble those of the layman in that they both require the empathic skills necessary for effective communication, for realistic and appropriate behavior, and for spontaneous participation in the familial, social, and occupational groups to which they belong (Katz, 1963). It is through training and experience that the professional learns to empathize more freely, and to correct distortions and blocks in the use of whatever empathic abilities he might possess.

Several studies (Berenson, Carkhuff, & Myrus, 1966; Reddy, 1969;

\*This article is based on a part of the first author's doctoral dissertation which was selected for the CGCA Top Dissertation Award. The Award was presented at the CGCA Conference in Winnipeg.

Jordan, 1969; Carkhuff & Banks, 1970; Truax & Lister, 1971) have shown that laymen can also learn skills which appear to facilitate the use of or enhance their present empathic abilities. The assumption is that empathic skills may benefit the layman in his relationships with others much in the same way that such skills provide for a good therapeutic relationship. However, this assumption is largely untested. It was the purpose of this study to investigate whether individuals who received training in empathic skills would be more successful in specific interview situations than persons who did not receive such training.

### *Empathy*

Empathy, as used in this study, involves both an awareness or understanding of the thoughts and feelings of another person, as well as the verbal facility to communicate this understanding.

The process of being aware of or understanding the thoughts and feelings of another was seen as being what Dymond proposed as "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does (1949, p. 127)." This view is consistent with descriptions of empathy as "a state of mind or feeling of the other person (Katz, 1963, p. 4)," "a power to feel with (Overstreet, 1952, p. 10)," and others, which stress, particularly, an ability to place oneself in another's shoes and to perceive the situation from his perspective (Cottrell & Dymond, 1949).

On the other hand, understanding, which is a relatively static concept, has been postulated (Carkhuff, 1969a, pp. 84-85) as essential but not sufficient for empathic communication. It is necessary, in addition, that the individual successfully communicate to the other person that he is being understood.

Operationally, empathy was defined as the score obtained on the *High School Communication Index* (Hundleby, 1973), which is a revised form of the *Standard Communication Index* (Carkhuff, 1969a). Responses to the 10 stimulus expressions which comprise this index were rated using the *Scale for the Measurement of Empathy in Interpersonal Processes* (Carkhuff, 1969a). The actual *communicated empathy score* (CE) was the mean rating obtained from the 10 written responses.

### PROCEDURE

Subjects for this investigation were 55 grade-12 students enrolled in two separate classes. Assignment of students to these classes, which were selected from a compulsory course for all grade-12 students, was done by computer in order to accommodate individual timetables. Students in one class constituted the treatment group (N = 28) while students in the other class became the control group (N = 27).

The treatment consisted of 14, 80-minute lessons which were based on skills of listening, observing, and communicating. Most lessons included extensive role-playing activities, which emphasized learning through self-experience. The training program was gathered and developed by the present writer, and is entitled *CUE: Communicating*,

*understanding and empathy.**Outcome Criteria*

Treatment effects were assessed through a procedure which involved a series of post-treatment interviews. In each case, a student from the treatment group was randomly paired with a student from the control group. After interviewing each of these students separately for approximately 20 minutes, a trained interviewer chose one as the "better communicator" of the pair. Then, each student was again interviewed, this time by a student peer interviewer, who chose one student as "someone I could go and talk to" from each pair. Altogether, 57 random pairs of students were interviewed, making a total of 228 interviews. The trained interviewers were all graduate students majoring in counseling psychology at the University of Alberta. Student peer interviewers were high-school students, selected randomly from the same school as the experimental subjects. In all cases, interviewers did not know the experimental subjects they interviewed.

*Better communicator:* Communicative ability, in the sense of "better communicator," referred to the extent to which an individual partook or shared in the conversation with the trained interviewer. This view, based on the Latin derivation *communicatus* — meaning to share, is consistent with that of Rogers (1961, p. 157), who described true communication as "the sharing of self." According to Rogers, the continuum runs from a complete unwillingness to share self, to the self as "a rich and changing awareness of internal experiencing," which is readily shared in a receptive climate. Similarly, Mead (1934) suggested that if communication could be made theoretically perfect, "the individual would affect himself as he affects others in every way (p. 327)." For,

the development of communication is not simply a matter of abstract ideas, but is a process of putting one's self in the place of the other person's attitude (p. 327).

*Someone I could go and talk to:* Behaviors necessary to the formation of interpersonal relationships have variously been labelled coping behaviors (Kroeber, 1964; Blocher, 1966), role-taking (Mead, 1934; Cottrell & Dymond, 1949), a sense of self (Erikson, 1950), and reality-testing (Fromm, 1956). Each of these concepts represents either a direct attempt to describe empathy or is a function based on the development of empathic skills. As such, empathy may be viewed as a skill which facilitates the development of interpersonal relations, or, in the words of Gordon Allport, a "warm relating of self to others (1961, p. 285)." Thus, it was expected that students who possessed empathic skills would be chosen more often as "someone I could go and talk to" than students lacking in these skills.

Further comparisons were made between the treatment and control groups using the CE. These scores were obtained from the *High School Communication Index*, which was administered before and after the treatment period.

CONCLUSIONS

A statement of the hypotheses, with a summary of the findings of this investigation, are presented in Table 1. Three major conclusions can be drawn from the results:

1. High-school students can be taught to communicate empathy. Students who received training scored significantly higher on communicated empathy than control students.
2. Students who are chosen by interviewers score higher on communicated empathy. Both the trained and the student peer interviewers identified students who communicated significantly higher levels of empathy. Indeed, it may be concluded that the ability to communicate empathy influenced choices, whether or not the interviewers knew they were looking for empathy.
3. Students who have received training in communicating empathy can be identified by independent interviewers. Trained students were chosen as "better communicators" and as "someone I could go and talk to" significantly more often than control students.

TABLE I  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis	Statement of Hypothesis	Finding	Probability
I	Treatment subjects will score <i>higher</i> on communicated empathy than control subjects.	Supported	.02
II	Subjects chosen as "someone I could go and talk to" will score <i>higher</i> on communicated empathy than subjects not chosen.	Supported	.001
III	Subjects chosen as "better communicator" will score <i>higher</i> on communicated empathy than subjects not chosen.	Supported	.019
IV	Treatment subjects will be chosen as "someone I could go and talk to" <i>more often</i> than control subjects.	Supported	.05
V	Treatment subjects will be chosen as "better communicator" <i>more often</i> than control subjects.	Supported	.01
VI	There is a positive relationship between being chosen as "someone I could go and talk to" and being chosen a "better communicator."	Supported	.002

DISCUSSION

This study showed that high-school students can be taught skills in communicating empathy, which may be of direct benefit to them in their everyday lives. Such a finding is particularly relevant to the introduction of a similar training program into high-school guidance

and family-life education courses. Indeed, students who took part in the training program were more likely to be chosen as "someone I could go and talk to." To some, this may seem a minor consideration; however, it represented a major achievement in the lives of those students who found greater success in relating to other students.

While this study showed that many students benefited from the training program, some students became particularly effective in relating to others in a very personal manner. The suggestion is that it may be possible to select a number of students who could become "peer counsellors" under the direction of the school guidance counsellor. Indeed, Truax, Wargo, & Silber (1966) showed that lay hospital aides produced positive outcome changes in the behavior of hospitalized mental patients. Similarly, Rioch, Elkes, Flint, Daneky, Newton, and Silber (1963) reported on the effectiveness of "mature housewives" who were trained to work with schizophrenic patients. Thus, there is some evidence to indicate that peer counsellors could be effective in counselling other students.

A final implication of the present study relates to the training of teachers. A number of previous studies have reported instances where levels of communicated empathy had direct relevance to teacher-student and parent-child relationships (Davitz, 1964; Isaacson, McKeachie, & Milholland, 1963; Pace & Stern, 1958; Thistlewaite, 1959). Lewis, Lovell, & Jessee (1965) found that sixth grade students whose teacher offered high levels of communicated empathy made greater academic gains than those whose teacher offered low levels. Similar studies reported an average of one and a half years difference in achievement growth over one school year, as well as significant differences in truancy (Aspy & Hadlock, 1967; Aspy, 1969). Kratochvil, Carkhuff, & Berenson (1969) found teachers' levels of communicated empathy significantly related to reading achievement, particularly in the first two grades. However, these studies followed an *ex post facto* design, and were based on the natural empathic abilities of the teachers. No investigation set out to train teachers to communicate empathy and then measure appropriate outcome criteria in the classroom.

Although still untested, the findings of the present study tend to suggest that teachers could improve their levels of communicated empathy through training. The introduction of such training programs into teacher education could be beneficial. However, the potential for inservice programs in communicating empathy also exists in many school districts. Indeed, many of the concepts and skills presented in the *CUE* training program are based upon concepts and skills stressed in counsellor education. Thus, school counsellors who have received specific training in counselling could work as consultants to teachers in inservice seminars, as well as in helping to improve relationships within the classroom.

In summary, then, the focus should be on training teachers to communicate empathy. At the same time, counsellor education programs should stress the importance of counsellors functioning as consultants. The inference is for further investigation, but the impetus for change is exciting.

RESUME: Ce projet de recherche démontre qu'un programme d'entraînement systématique à la communication, à la compréhension et à l'empathie (Hundleby, 1972), peut avoir des effets significatifs sur les participants. Même si le traitement dans ce projet ne consistait que de 14 leçons de 80 minutes, les étudiants de niveau secondaire qui ont été ainsi formés ont pu communiquer de façon empathique à un niveau significativement plus élevé que les étudiants du groupe témoin. Non seulement les sujets du groupe expérimental ont mieux réussi les tests d'empathie papier-et-crayon, mais ils ont été identifiés par des observateurs indépendants comme plus aptes à communiquer et "comme des gens à qui on peut parler" beaucoup plus souvent que les sujets du groupe témoin.

## REFERENCES

- Allport, G. W. *Pattern and growth in personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.
- Aspy, D. The effects of the level of facilitative conditions offered by teachers upon student achievement indices. *Florida Journal of Educational Research*, 1969, 11, 39-48.
- Aspy, D., & Hadlock, W. The cumulative effects of facilitative conditions upon student performance. In R. R. Carkhuff & B. G. Berenson, *Beyond counseling and therapy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.
- Berenson, B. G., Carkhuff, R. R., & Myrus, P. The interpersonal functioning and training of college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1966, 13, 441 - 446.
- Blocher, D. H. *Developmental counseling*. New York: Ronald Press, 1966.
- Carkhuff, R. R. *Helping and human relations: A primer for lay and professional helpers*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. (a)
- Carkhuff, R. R. *Helping and human relations: Practice and research*. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. (b)
- Carkhuff, R. R., & Banks, G. Training as a preferred mode of facilitating relations between races and generations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1970, 17, 413-418.
- Cottrell, L. S., Jr., & Dymond, R. F. The empathic responses: A neglected field for research. *Psychiatry*, 1949, 12, 355-359.
- Davitz, J. R. *The communication of emotional meaning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Dymond, R. F. A scale for the measurement of empathic ability. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1949, 13, 127-133.
- Erikson, E. H. *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton, 1950.
- Fiedler, F. E. A comparison of therapeutic relationships in psychoanalytic, non-directive, and Adlerian therapy. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1950, 14, 436-445.
- Fiedler, F. E. Factor analyses of psychoanalytic, non-directive and Adlerian therapeutic relationships. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1951, 15, 32-38.
- Fromm, E. *The art of loving*. New York: Harper, 1956.
- Fromm-Reichman, F. *Principles of intensive psychotherapy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.
- Hundleby, G. D. *CUE: Communicating, understanding and empathy manual*. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, June, 1972.
- Hundleby, G. D. *Communication of Empathy*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1973.
- Isaacson, R. L., McKeachie, W. J., & Milholland, J. E. A correlation of teacher personality variables and student ratings. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1963, 54, 110-117.

- Jordan, D. L. A comparison of the effects of didactic and experiential training on accurate empathy, nonpossessive warmth, and genuineness. *Dissertation Abstracts*, 1969, 29, (9-B), 3487-3488.
- Katz, R. L. *Empathy: Its nature and uses*. London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.
- Kratochvil, D. W., Carkhuff, R. R., & Berenson, B. G. Cumulative effects of parent and teacher offered levels of facilitative conditions upon indices of student physical, emotional, and intellectual functioning. *Journal of Educational Research*, 1969, 63, 161-164.
- Kroeber, T. C. The coping functions of the ego mechanisms. In R. White (Ed.), *A study of lives*. New York: Atherton, 1964.
- Lewis, W. A., Lovell, J. T., & Jessee, B. E. Interpersonal relationship and pupil progress. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1965, 44, 396-401.
- Mead, G. H. *Mind, self and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.
- Overstreet, B. W. The power to feel with. *National Parent Teacher*, 1952, 47, 10-12.
- Pace, C. R., & Stern, C. G. An approach to the measurement of physiological characteristics of college environment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1958, 49, 269-277.
- Reddy, W. B. Effects of immediate and delayed feedback on the learning of empathy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1969, 16, 59-62.
- Rioch, J. M., Elkes, C., Flint, A. H., Daneky, R. E., Newton, W. G., & Silber, C. National Institute of Mental Health pilot study in training mental health counselors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1963, 33, 678-689.
- Rogers, C. R. *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.
- Thistlewaite, D. L. College press and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1959, 50, 183-191.
- Truax, C. B., & Lister, J. L. Effects of short-term training upon accurate empathy and non-possessive warmth. *Counsellor Education and Supervision*, 1971, 10, 120-125.
- Truax, C. B., Wargo, D. G., & Silber, L. D. Effects of high accuracy empathy and non-possessive warmth during group psychotherapy upon female institutionalized delinquents. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 1966, 71, 267-274.