

# THE EFFECTS OF EMPATHY-TRAINING ON THE EMPATHIC RESPONSE LEVELS AND SELF-CONCEPTS OF STUDENTS IN A TEACHER-TRAINING PROGRAM

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## Abstract

The purposes of the study were to determine the effects of relatively short term empathy training on prospective teachers' empathic abilities and self-concepts. The experimental samples consisted of two intact groups of undergraduate students enrolled in a five week modular course in education entitled "Analysis of Self and Teacher Behavior." The two experimental groups received empathy training which consisted of practice responding to videotaped excerpts of counselling interviews, a filmed demonstration of empathic responding, and role-playing exercises. The findings indicated that empathy training resulted in statistically significant increases in levels of empathic ability for both experimental groups. Statistically significant changes in self-concept were found for one of the experimental groups and changes for the other experimental group, though not statistically significant were in a similar direction.

## Résumé

Le but de la recherche était de déterminer les effets d'un entraînement de courte durée sur le développement, chez de futurs enseignants, de leurs capacités de compréhension d'autrui et de leur conception personnelle. Les sujets expérimentaux consistaient de deux groupes autonomes d'étudiants "sous-gradués" inscrits à un cours pilote de pédagogie intitulé "Autoanalyse et comportement pédagogique". Les deux groupes témoins ont subi un entraînement caractérisé par des réponses à des interviews d'orientation vidéo-enregistrées, par une démonstration filmée de réflexes de compréhension et par des reconstitutions de situations scolaires. Les résultats obtenus ont indiqué qu'un tel entraînement a suscité dans les deux groupes une hausse statistiquement significative des capacités de compréhension d'autrui. En ce qui concerne la conception personnelle, des modifications statistiquement significatives ont été enregistrées dans l'un des groupes, tandis que dans l'autre ont été notées des modifications dans le même sens bien que sans signification statistique.

The traditionally held priorities in the field of Education have been those primarily concerned with the cognitive development and the academic training of the school-age child. Affective and mental health needs of the learner have generally been considered to be of only ancillary importance within the educational setting. There is an abundance of evidence to suggest that such insensitivity to affective needs of students contributes significantly to the lack of success experienced by many teachers (Vitro & Yvon, 1972). Thus, in recent years there has been a noticeable trend toward the recognition of affective

components of the learner as important to overall school adjustment. Many current teaching strategies and educational philosophies have attempted to translate such affective dimensions into major educational objectives (Vitro, 1971 & 1972). As a result of this trend, there has emerged a growing need to modify teacher-training experiences primarily through the incorporation of methods and strategies that engender and promote sensitivity to affective needs as a major objective of the teacher preparation program and it has been suggested that counsellors should be the agents of such changes

(Fraser, Byrne & Shaver, 1971). Empathy training is an example of such a method that has been researched and implemented within several teacher-training programs.

The quality of empathy is recognized as a vital element in many helping professions and especially in the teaching profession (Aspy, 1970; Avila & Purkey, 1971; Delaney & Eisenberg, 1972). Research has demonstrated a relationship between empathic ability and effective teaching from the elementary school level (Mantaro, 1972; Lewis & Lovell, 1965) through the college level (Wagner, 1971; Perkins, 1971). Furthermore, research has indicated that training in empathy can be a source of personal growth and/or adjustment (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971; Pierce & Drasgow, 1969; Cohen, Johnson & Hanson, 1971). Since the personal adjustment of teachers is considered by many to be an important element in teacher effectiveness (Combs, 1965, 1972; Dinkmeyer, 1971; Purkey, 1970; Hamachek, 1971), it would seem to follow that training in empathy might serve the dual purpose of providing prospective teachers with an important skill as well as an opportunity for personal growth. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of empathy training on the empathic abilities and self-concepts of college students in a teacher-training program.

#### *Methods and Procedures:*

The experimental samples consisted of two intact groups of undergraduate students enrolled in a five week module (mini-course) in Education entitled "Analysis of Self and Teacher Behavior". The class met twice a week for an hour and a quarter providing a total training period of approximately 10 hours. One control sample consisted of an intact group of undergraduates from a second division of the same module in which no formal empathy training was provided. A second control sample consisted of an intact group of undergraduates enrolled in a different five week module entitled "Behavior Problems of the School-aged Child".

The two experimental groups received empathy training which consisted primarily of practice exercises in responding to videotaped excerpts of counselling interviews. In addition, the filmed demonstration of Client Centered Therapy illustrated by Carl Rogers in the series "Three Approaches to Psychotherapy" was shown, and opportunity was provided for role-playing exercises related to empathic responding. Experimental Group 1 and Control Group 1 were

posttested only. Experimental Group 2 and Control Group 2 were pre and posttested.

Assessment of empathic ability was accomplished by having the subjects make written responses to sections of the "Critical Moments in Counselling" videotape (Thayer, Petersen, Carr & Merz, 1972). Subjects' responses were independently blindly rated by three experts in accordance with the "Empathic Understanding In Interpersonal Processes: A Scale For Measurement" (EUIPASM) instrument (Carkhuff, 1969). Using the Interclass Correlation Formula (Ebel, 1951) the reliability of the expert's ratings was computed to be .89. This procedure prevented the possible distortion of rank order correlation coefficients due to differences between raters in general level of rating. A semantic differential scale constructed by the investigator was utilized to measure self-concept. The semantic differential yielded a discrepancy score between the two concepts "My Real Self" and "My Ideal Self" for each subject. There is support in the literature for the contention that a moderate real self — ideal self discrepancy reflects a sense of personal adjustment (Butler & Haig, 1954; Strong & Feder, 1961; Varble & Landfield, 1967; Wilcox & Fretz, 1971). Reliability and validity measures on the Semantic Differential were obtained using 79 students pooled from the same population as the subjects of the study. Test re-test reliability (one week) was .85 and the correlation between the discrepancy score of the semantic differential and the self-satisfaction subscale of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1964) was -.58 (both coefficients were significant beyond the .01 level of significance).

#### *Results:*

The means and standard deviations for all groups on all tests are presented in Table I.

In order to determine the effects of empathy training on prospective teachers' empathic abilities and self-concepts, a single classification analysis of variance was computed for each of the variables. A significant F ratio ( $F = 188.9$ ;  $df = 3,69$ ;  $p < .01$ ) reflected differences on posttest scores of empathic ability between groups. Further analysis using Duncan's Multiple Range Test revealed that both experimental groups achieved significantly higher scores than either control group. In addition it was revealed that experimental group 2 had significantly higher ( $P < .05$ ) scores than experimental group 1.

The results ( $F = 3.60$ ;  $df = 3,69$ ;  $p < .05$ ) also showed a significant difference in posttest

Table I  
Means and Standard Deviations for All Groups on All Testing

Group	Empathic Ability				Self-Concept			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd
E1			1.93	0.26			14.00	4.63
E2	1.03	.048	2.14	0.25	11.75	6.09	8.50	4.57
C1			1.00	0.11			15.05	10.71
C2	1.01	.029	1.01	0.31	13.66	5.34	12.11	4.48

self-concept discrepancy scores between groups. Again Duncan's Multiple Range test was employed to identify where the differences lay. This analysis revealed that experimental group 2 had significantly lower self-concept discrepancy scores than control group one.

In order to determine whether differences existed between pretest and posttest scores on the two variables for experimental group 2 and control group 2 an analysis of covariance of posttest scores with pretest scores as covariates was computed. The analysis revealed that experimental group 2 achieved a significant increase ( $F = 335.3$ ;  $df = 1,35$ ;  $p < .01$ ) in level of empathic ability whereas control group 2 did not. Also, experimental group 2 achieved a significant reduction ( $F = 4.73$ ;  $df = 1,35$ ;  $p < .05$ ) in self-concept discrepancy scores while control group 2 did not.

#### Discussion

The highly significant increases in empathic responding in the experimental groups were consistent with the findings of previous research (Hartzell, Anthony & Wain, 1973; Mosther & Spinthall, 1971; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965). Further, where most studies of empathy training have employed few subjects, this study demonstrated that relatively large groups ( $N = 18 - 20$ ) could be effectively trained. However, the data revealed that neither experimental group reached the minimally facilitative level described by Carkhuff (1969). This may have been partly due to the nature of the measuring instrument and training procedures utilized. The EUIPASM has five levels, level three being minimally facilitative. By definition, achievement of levels 4 and 5 require a highly developed

relationship, a condition impossible to achieve given the single problem video-tape excerpts employed in the training. Nevertheless, the training did result in increasing prospective teachers' sensitivity to feelings. Such heightened sensitivity and the increased likelihood of some empathic responses by teachers can be considered useful in view of the spread of effect of such behavior on the atmosphere of a class.

The effects of empathy training on prospective teachers' self-concepts were less clear cut. The nature of the training procedures may have limited the effects. Subjects made written responses to the excerpts and had little opportunity to perceive themselves in the helping role. Had their responses been videotaped, the perceptions of themselves as helpers may have had a greater impact on their self-concepts than mere verbal reinforcement of written responses. The very nature of the self-concept may also have accounted for the limited changes. As Purkey (1970) has pointed out, a person's self-concept tends to be stable and resistant to change. Therefore, the relatively brief exposure to empathy training may not have been sufficiently powerful to effect changes in subjects' self-concepts. However, experimental group 2 did show a significant reduction in real self — ideal self discrepancy scores. Further, statistical analysis revealed that the reduction in discrepancy occurred as a result of increases in real self-concept scores and decreases in ideal self-concept scores. Thus, at the very least, the reduction in real self — ideal self discrepancy might be interpreted as evidence of a more realistic self-appraisal, an accomplishment worthy in its own right.

In spite of the limitations of the procedures employed in this study, training in empathy shows

promise as an effective means of assisting prospective teachers to develop a fundamentally important interpersonal skill. The results also suggest potential benefits of such training for the personal development of future teachers. With some procedural refinements such as videotape feedback and an extended training period even better results might be achieved. Empathy training for prospective teachers merits serious consideration for incorporation in teacher preparation programs. Such training would go a long way toward closing the gap between the cognitive and affective domains in teacher education.

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