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ABSTRACT

A match or mis-match of cooperating teachers and student teachers on personality characteristics may have an important role in the overall effectiveness of the student teaching experience. Among the different personality factors that may affect participant relationships are flexibility, empathy, and self-esteem. To assess the validity of measures of these traits, 63 cooperating teachers rated themselves on 3 instruments: the Self-Perception Inventory, the Rehfish Rigidity Scale, and the Empathy Construct Rating Scale. Their student teachers and university supervisors rated them on the same instruments. The convergent and discriminant validities were examined for each instrument. Of the scales used to assess the three personality factors which may influence relationships among student teaching triads, only one, the instrument intended to assess flexibility (Rehfish Rigidity Scale), showed adequate validity through the statistically rigorous multitrait-multimethod design. The results of the study emphasize the need for further methodological studies in the examination of teacher characteristics. (JD)

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PERSONALITY FACTORS IN THE STUDENT TEACHING TRIAD

Robert Hughes, Jr., Gary A. Griffin and Maria E. Defino

Report No. 9021

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PERSONALITY FACTORS IN THE STUDENT TEACHING TRIAD[1, 2]

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The study of personality factors has had a long history in educational research (Peck & Tucker, 1973), and to a limited extent in clinical teacher education, or student teaching. For example, personality factors can significantly affect the communication patterns among individuals (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977). Patterns of interaction can influence the degree to which professional growth can occur, as well as the social-emotional perceptions of the participants and the way they approach subsequent teaching experiences. Researchers have proposed that cooperating teachers with particular attributes will be more effective as trainers of student teachers (Griffin, Hughes, Barnes, Carter, Defino, & Edwards, Note 1), and Griffin (Note 2) has argued that the match-mismatch of cooperating teachers and student teachers on personality characteristics may play an important role in the overall effectiveness of the clinical experience.

Among the different personality factors mentioned in student teaching literature that may affect participant relationships are flexibility, empathy, and self-esteem. Flexibility is defined as the ease with which a person adapts to different situations. It has been consistently identified as important in teacher education (Ekstrom, 1976). One illustration of its

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potential importance in student teaching is the knowledge that in association with their years of experience, cooperating teachers can be expected to be more socially rigid than student teachers (Hoy & Rees, 1977). Evidence also exists to suggest that student teachers become less flexible during their clinical experience (Hoy & Rees, 1977).

The second construct, empathy, is perhaps best understood as the twofold capacity of accurately identifying another person's deep and surface feelings, and then accurately communicating this awareness to the other person (Carkuff & Berenson, 1977). Empathy has frequently been identified as an important factor in helping relationships (Carkhuff, 1971) and in the supervisory process (Goldhammer, 1969). It could therefore play a subtle yet critical role in the professional development of the preservice teacher (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977).

The last of these personality factors, self-esteem, includes an individual's evaluation of both his/her functioning in the environment and his/her various attributes of self, or self-concept. Self-esteem may affect the student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship (Coopersmith, 1967). Garvey (1970) has concluded that preservice clinical teaching success is influenced--though not necessarily determined--by having a positive view of oneself.

Goldhammer's (1969) description of the frequent problems in supervision helps to identify the qualities of an effective cooperating teacher. He notes the problem of the supervisor flatly asserting his/her own opinion without attempting to envisage the perspectives of the supervisee. This is clearly a lack of empathic understanding, according to the definition above. Another problem noted by Goldhammer is the supervisor's being overly

committed to uniformity among various teaching processes and classroom procedures--that is, lack of flexibility. Supervisors also sometimes "play it from rank"--they are distracted by their own anxieties and needs for gratification which can result from low self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967). On the basis of previous research in teacher education and the characteristics of supervisors identified by Goldhammer, the three constructs of empathy, flexibility, and self-esteem were chosen as constructs for study in cooperating teachers.

One major problem in the study of personality characteristics in general is the lack of reliable and valid indicators. While the three constructs are conceptually different, they all represent somewhat similar personality characteristics. Adequate assessment of these constructs necessitates measures that are able to clearly differentiate among them. To examine the validity issue of the three constructs identified for this study, the authors selected instruments that had previously demonstrated adequate reliability and some evidence of validity. The following instruments were chosen: Empathy Construct Rating Scale, Rehfish's Rigidity Scale, and the Self-Perception Inventory.

The primary purpose of the present study was the assessment of validity of the three instruments. In order to make this assessment the Campbell and Fiske (1959) multitrait-multimethod experimental design was applied. The rationale behind this procedure is that if a personality construct is identifiable and distinguishable, then results from several methods of assessing the same construct should be similar (convergent validity). Also, the construct should be sufficiently different from other personality constructs as to be rated relatively independently of them (discriminant validity).

To assess the validity of measures of empathy, flexibility and self-esteem, cooperating teachers were asked to rate themselves on the three instruments. Also, their student teachers and university supervisors rated them on the same instruments.

METHOD

Subjects

The participants in this study were 63 teachers from a medium-sized school district in the southwestern United States. All of the teachers currently were supervising a student teacher in their classrooms. Each teacher volunteered to participate in the study and consented to having his or her student teacher and the unversity supervisor rate their behavior on the experimental scales.

Instruments

An instrument was identified for each of the constructs that had been identified as important in the supervisory process. These instruments were chosen on the basis of the previously reported reliability and validity. Selection of instruments depended in part on whether they had already demonstrated acceptable reliability as this is a crucial prerequisite for examining validity. Therefore, to measure self-esteem the Self-Perception Inventory developed by Soares and Soares (1980) was selected. It consists of 36 paired adjectives describing behavior characteristics; some sample items appear in Table 1. On this instrument the degree of one's perceived similarity or dissimilarity can be rated in regard to each pair of adjectives. The authors have reported test-retest reliabilities of .82 over a four-week period. Also, the self-perception scores correlate .52 with the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Soares & Soares, 1980).

An adaptation of Rehfish's (1958) Rigidity Scale was used to assess the teachers' degree of flexibility. The scale primarily focuses on flexibility in observable behaviors, rather than flexibility in thinking or other intrapsychic processes. In addition to the original 39 items, the investigators added 26 items to expand the set of observable behaviors indicative of flexibility on the scale. A six-point Likert format was utilized to provide the opportunity for each participant to rate the perceived degree of similarity to each statement. Sample items appear in Table 1.

The Empathy Construct Rating Scale (La Monica, Note 3), used to assess the empathic sensitivity of the participants, is an 84-item, self-report, Likert-response instrument. It assesses several aspects of a person's empathic responding, including the ability to perceive the other's world, communicate this understanding, and "feel with" another person. A set of sample items appears in Table 1. La Monica has reported an alpha coefficient of .96 for this scale. To control for response set on the flexibility and empathy scales, half of the items were worded positively and half were worded in a negative direction.

Procedures

Each cooperating teacher in the study was asked to complete three instruments about themselves: Self-Perception Inventory, Flexibility Scale, and Empathy Construct Rating Scale. The student teacher and the university supervisor in each triad were asked to rate their cooperating teacher on each instrument as well. Thus, there were three ratings of each teacher: a self-report, a rating completed by the student teacher, and a rating completed by the university supervisor. This resulted in three sources of assessment (multimethod) of three personality constructs (multitrait). The

ratings were made after the student teacher had been in the classroom for between eight and sixteen weeks.

RESULTS

Reliability

The first level of analysis was to identify the shortest and most reliable version of the flexibility and empathy scales. A series of analyses were conducted to examine the inter-item correlation matrix and the item-scale correlations. For each instrument the weakest items--that is, those with the lowest inter-item and item-scale correlations--were identified and removed from the scales. This procedure resulted in a 17-item Flexibility scale and a 23-item Empathy scale. For the Flexibility scale, the reliabilities (alpha coefficients) were .87 among university supervisors' ratings, .89 among self-ratings, and .83 among the student teachers' ratings. For each group of raters on the Empathy scale, university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers, the alpha coefficients were .97, .96, and .96, respectively. Alpha coefficients were also computed for the 36-item self-esteem scale resulting in internal consistency scores of .94, .89, and .95, respectively for university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher ratings. Table 2 presents the reliabilities for all of the instruments.

Validity

The convergent and discriminant validities were examined for each instrument. Table 2 presents the results of the intercorrelations of all of the instruments from the ratings of each person. The convergent validity diagonals indicated that the Flexibility scale had the most consistent validity. All three coefficients pairing each method were significant

($p < .05$): .31, .45, and .31. One coefficient comparing the student teacher and university supervisor ratings of empathy was significant, .47 ($p < .05$). Also, the correlation between the university supervisor and cooperating teacher ratings of self-esteem was also significant, .27 ($p < .05$). These results indicated that only the flexibility scale had adequate convergent validity. That is, there were significant correlations among three independent ratings of a trait.

The findings were also examined in terms of the discriminant validity. The failure of the empathy and self-esteem measures to produce a high degree of convergent validity almost assures an inability to detect discriminant validity. Neither the empathy nor the self-esteem measures resulted in adequate discriminant validity. However, the Flexibility scale did show some evidence that this construct could be distinguished from the other traits. In general, the validity coefficients for the Flexibility scale were higher than the corresponding correlations between different traits measured by different methods. These are located in the heterotrait-heteromethod triangles in Table 2. However, the validity coefficients for the Flexibility scale were not higher than most of the coefficients in the heterotrait-monomethod triangles.

There was some indication that the student teachers and university supervisors were less discriminating in the ratings than were the cooperating teachers. In the monomethod-heterotrait blocks, the correlations of three constructs were generally low for the cooperating teacher, .16, .07, and .30 indicating that in their self-reports, cooperating teachers differentially rated themselves. The correlations among the student teachers' ratings and university supervisors' ratings were .81, .75, .63, and .66, .64, and .67,

respectively. These correlations were quite high and suggest that these raters did not substantially distinguish among the three traits.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study emphasize the need for further methodological studies in the examination of teacher characteristics. In particular, it demonstrates a continued need to explore the classical measurement issues of reliability and validity. Of the scales utilized to assess three personality factors which may influence relationships among student teaching triads, only one--the instrument intended to assess flexibility--showed adequate validity through the statistically rigorous multitrait-multimethod design. Before the other two instruments are abandoned as being invalid, however, consideration must be given to explanations for these results.

Viewed from a different perspective, this study may provide more information about the participants who filled out the instruments than it does about the instruments themselves. The high correlations among ratings of different cooperating teacher traits made by university supervisors and student teachers suggest that the latter two groups generally did not distinguish between the different traits. In other words, it is possible that supervisors and student teachers were assigning their ratings of cooperating teachers on the basis of global, overall positive or negative assessments. These poorly differentiated views, as expressed on the instruments, may have been accurate reflections of supervisors' and student teachers' relatively limited opportunity to interact with and know the cooperating teachers, rather than being clear indicators of the instruments' quality. In essence, we may not have asked the best possible candidates to make these judgments. Because of this possibility, a clear interpretation of

the validity of these instruments cannot be made solely on the basis of the results of this study.

Knowing that instrument validity remains a salient issue in research in teacher education, some broad implications for practice may be tentatively set forth. First is the issue of whether or not scores on personality instruments can legitimately be included in the process of assigning placements for student teaching. Second, if teacher educators can agree (and if research supports the idea) that personality factors need to be given consideration in establishing student teaching placements, the next two issues of importance become: (1) which personality factors to consider-- the ones which seem logically or intuitively important to successful student teaching, or the ones which have the best-developed instrumentation (if these are in fact exclusive groups); and (2) whether or not matches or mismatches on these factors are to be utilized as the standard for making placements-- or is there some interactive, optimal match-mismatch balance across different personality factors to strive for in assigning a placement? Clearly, we do not have the answers to these questions. Further research is needed to appropriately gauge both the validity of various personality instruments with the specific population of student teaching triads, and the utility of this information to teacher educators in providing for clinical teacher education experiences. Presently, the Research in Teacher Education program area of the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education is conducting a study of student teaching in which personality characteristics, teacher experiences and supervisory experiences, and school and university variables are being examined. This large-scale, multi-method, multi-site study is expected to provide more information about these important issues in terms of methodology and practice.

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Table 1

Sample Items From the Measures of
Self-esteem, Empathy and Flexibility

Self-Perception Inventory (self-esteem)

Accepted	_____	_____	_____	_____	Rejected
Cheerful	_____	_____	_____	_____	Depressed
Creative	_____	_____	_____	_____	Conforming
Hopeful	_____	_____	_____	_____	Anxious
Self-confident	_____	_____	_____	_____	Insecure
Worthy	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unworthy

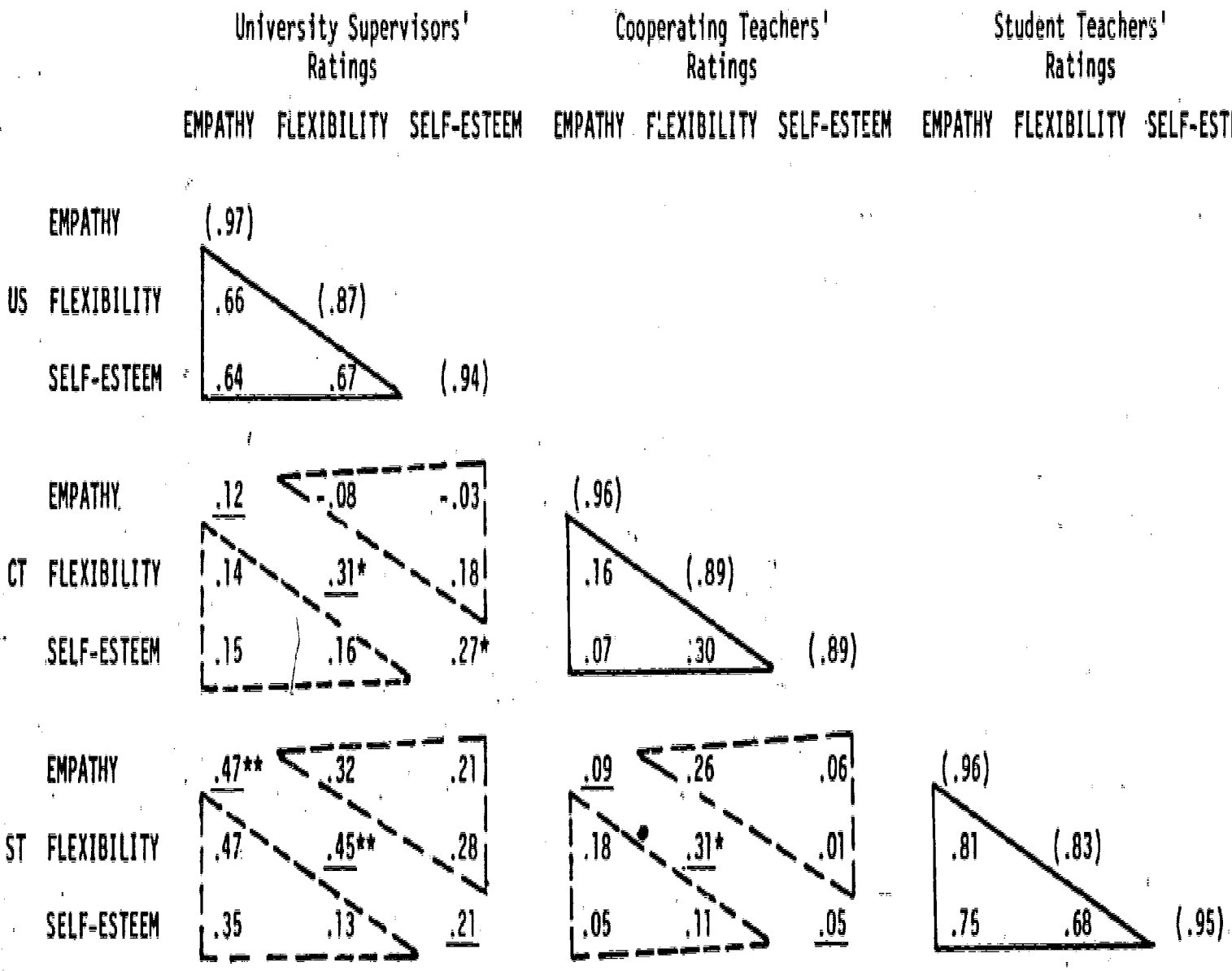
Different Situations Adaptation Scale (flexibility)

Prefers regular hours
Does not like uncertain or unpredictable things
Avoids trouble at all costs
Seldom sees more than one viewpoint
Rarely changes opinions about other people
Trusts others to do their best

Empathy Construct Rating Scale (empathy)

Places herself/himself in another person's shoes
Helps another freely
Is comforting during periods of stress and uncertainty
Respects the values of others
Communicates warmth and concern
Understands the "human" situation

Table 2



Note: The validity diagonals are the three sets of underlined values. The reliability diagonals are the three sets of values in parentheses. Each heterotrait-monomethod triangle is enclosed by a solid line. Each heterotrait-heteromethod is enclosed by a broken line.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$