COMPETENCY AND INTERPERSONAL RATINGS OF TEACHER SPECIALTIES: WHAT TEACHERS THINK OF EACH OTHER

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The perceptions of 135 teachers of elementary, secondary, and mentally retarded students on the competency and interpersonal skill characteristics of teachers within their teacher subgroup and toward the two other subgroups were assessed by a semantic differential instrument. Two-factor (3×3) analysis of variance indicated that teachers of mentally retarded students and teachers of elementary students were rated higher than secondary teachers on the Competency and Interpersonal scales. Teachers of mentally retarded students were rated higher than elementary teachers on the Interpersonal scale. Professional self-esteem of teachers and its implications for school psychologists was discussed in light of these findings, and additional research was urged to determine the generalizability of the results.

Teachers' attitudes toward and perceptions of the teaching role, as exemplified by themselves and others, may have profound implications for individual job satisfaction, interpersonal effectiveness, and job performance. Unfortunately, teachers appear to have relatively low professional self-esteem. Many seem to have internalized the values implicit in a society that pays street cleaners almost twice the salary of the average teacher, views teaching as a low status profession, and assigns it lower rankings than do other more impartial judges (Stern & Keislar, 1975). This apparent low professional self-esteem has direct implications for school psychologists who must adapt to nonproductive teacher behaviors that may be associated with low self-esteem.

It is clear, however, that teaching is not a unitary profession. For example, grade level and specialty area are factors that are often used to categorize teachers into narrower, more distinct subgroups. It is possible that professional self-esteem varies among teacher subgroups. For example, teachers often perceive specialists and administrators as having higher status than classroom teachers (Moses & Delany, 1971a, b), while, within the teaching hierarchy, prestige tends to proceed up the grades, with nursery school teachers ranking lowest and college professors highest (Stern & Keislar, 1975). For the most part, existing studies have looked at teachers in a global sense, and few investigations have focused specifically on teacher subgroups. It is likely that professional self-esteem is composed of several dimensions, including professional competence and interpersonal skill, and it may be perceived by teachers to be present in differing amounts within different teacher subgroups. In other words, teachers' perceptions of their own and others' professional status might vary as a function of subgroup membership.

This investigation was designed to determine how teachers, categorized into subgroups based on pupil characteristics, perceive their own and others' professional status along the dimensions of competence and interpersonal skill. The teacher subgroups were teachers of elementary students, teachers of secondary students, and teachers of mentally retarded students. Of interest were several research questions: (a) What teaching area

would be perceived as most competent? (b) What teaching area would be seen as possessing the most positive interpersonal skills? and (c) How would teachers within each area rate their own teaching area in comparison to the other two teaching areas?

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 135 practicing teachers (Mean age = 28.7, *SD* age = 6.8; 27 male, 118 female) attending graduate level education classes at a large midwestern university. All teachers were given an abbreviated description of the current research, were invited to a complete debriefing, and were given the opportunity to question the experimenters as well as to decline to participate without prejudice.

Procedure

An Occupational Perception Scale was developed and employed to obtain ratings on the teacher subgroups. This scale consisted of 16 bipolar adjectives using the semantic differential format, with seven response categories. Two scores were derived from this scale: a Competency score was the sum of ratings on eight adjective pairs, such as efficient-inefficient and competent-incompetent, designed to assess the professional competency dimension, while the Interpersonal score was the sum of ratings on eight adjective pairs, such as patient-impatient and sensitive-insensitive, selected to tap the interpersonal skill dimension. Adjectives were derived from Osgood's lists (Osgood, et al., 1957) and from experienced teachers. Self-descriptions and peer ratings have been shown to have validity for similar studies (Mischel, 1972).

Teachers were asked to rate one teaching area (teacher of elementary, secondary, or mentally retarded students, and two other occupations: nursing and social work, which merely served as foils. Teachers were randomly assigned Occupational Perception Scale booklets, so that attributes such as age, sex, and teaching experience, as well as teaching area rated and teaching area of rater, would be randomly determined.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A two-factor (3×3) analysis of variance (Nie, et al., 1975) was used to analyze the results for each of the two dependent measures of Competency and Interpersonal skill. Factor 1 was the teaching subgroup rated (teacher of elementary, secondary, or mentally retarded students), and factor 2 was the teaching subgroup of the rater (teacher of elementary, secondary, or mentally retarded students). This analysis made it possible to assess how teachers within areas rated themselves as well as others, and to determine whether there were differences across teachers. ANOVAs on both the Competency scale, $F(2) = 5.41$, $p < .01$, and the Interpersonal scale, $F(2) = 31.5$, $p < .001$, resulted in significant main effects for factor 1 (teaching area rated), while factor 2 (teaching area of rater) and the interaction terms were not significant for either dependent measure. Scheffé tests ($p < .05$) indicated that: (a) teachers of mentally retarded students were rated higher than teachers of secondary students on both dependent measures, and (b) teachers of elementary students were rated higher than teachers of secondary students on the Interpersonal scale.

Results of the present investigation reveal, for this sample of teachers, that teachers of mentally retarded students were perceived by themselves and by their elementary and secondary teacher colleagues as being more professionally competent and possessing more positive interpersonal skills than were elementary or secondary teachers. The lack of significant interactions between teacher areas being rated and the teaching area of the

rater suggest that these results are consistent within areas. An examination of cell means and standard deviations reinforces this conclusion (Table 1). Secondary teachers, for example, were not only rated the lowest by teachers from other subgroups, but also rated their own subgroup lowest, while all teacher subgroups gave high ratings to teachers of the mentally retarded.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations on Competency and Interpersonal Scales
by Teaching Subgroup

	Mentally Retarded		Subgroup Rated Elementary		Secondary	
Subgroup of Rater	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mentally Retarded						
Competency	45.13	5.89	47.00	7.87	41.47	5.99
Interpersonal	48.27	5.09	46.67	6.32	38.73	5.98
Elementary						
Competency	47.53	6.79	46.13	7.41	43.47	6.68
Interpersonal	50.40	4.64	46.67	6.11	37.53	7.45
Secondary						
Competency	48.27	4.27	44.73	7.43	42.80	7.04
Interpersonal	50.20	5.03	47.27	6.36	42.73	7.60
Total						
Competency	46.98	5.65	45.96	7.46	42.58	6.49
Interpersonal	49.62	4.91	46.87	6.13	39.67	7.25

The relatively low ratings of secondary teachers, by themselves and by other teacher subgroups, emphasize the need for school psychologists to be aware of the professional self-esteem status of this teacher subgroup. Student self-esteem has been found to be positively correlated with academic achievement, with participation in extracurricular activities, and with interest in public affairs (Lauer & Handel, 1977). Although no investigation has established the relationship between low teacher self-esteem and teacher performance in the classroom, it may be hypothesized that effects will parallel those seen in students: lack of motivation for optimum performance, lack of independence, and diminished ability to cope with the frustrations of daily job events.

Since it is generally agreed that attitudes influence behavior (Stern & Keislar, 1975), the school psychologist must be alert to the attitudes of teachers toward teacher subgroups. A pervasive sense of professional devaluation, for instance, could be one often unexplored explanation of the frequently reported observation that consultees fail to adequately execute plans they developed in cooperation with the school psychological consultant. An additional instance where attitudes toward teacher subgroups might influence behavior is when a program or intervention plan involves several teacher subgroups. In this case, attitudes within and between subgroups might help to generate behaviors detrimental to the program and lead to an erroneous conclusion regarding the worth of the program itself. Thus, along with personal characteristics and consultant ap-

proach (Wenger, 1979), teacher subgroup membership might be an additional interaction factor to be considered.

The teachers who participated in this study may not be representative of all teachers, or attitudes may have been shaped by unique situational variables present only in this particular geographic region. Additional research should be undertaken with different subjects in other locations to test the generalizability of the present results. However, consideration of and sensitivity to teachers' professional self-esteem and attitudes toward other teacher subgroups would be a productive strategy for school psychologists that entails little risk of negative effect.

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