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A COMMUNICATING STYLES SURVEY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

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The Problem

This study has focused on identifying inservice primary school teachers' communicating styles. An underlying assumption is that no one style can be considered good or bad; and, no style is preferred as more right than another. However, if clusters of primary school teachers' communicating styles can be identified it could provide empirical data on the ways teachers transmit and receive information. Such data might be useful to teacher educators for designing and implementing inservice programs based on the ways teachers transmit and receive information. Hence, the effectiveness of inservice education efforts might be improved because they could be related to the teachers' communicating styles.

Specifically, the following questions were asked:

1. What are the relationships between four specific communicating styles of primary school teachers in North Queensland? (North Queensland is defined as that area of Queensland north of Rockhampton.)
2. Do these relationships alter according to the subjects': age, sex, years of teaching experience, grade level taught, and geographic location (rural/suburban)?

METHOD

Subjects

The sample group was made up of 84 teachers selected by a random sample of 180 teachers enrolled in the Townsville College of Advanced Education's Bachelor of Education and Inservice Diploma in Teaching courses.

Research Instrument

In an attempt to tap teachers' communicating styles the Mok Communicating Styles Survey (CSS) was selected (Mok, 1975). The CSS is designed to measure the subjects' relative strength of use of the four major styles: Sensor, Feeler, Thinker, and Intuitior. Each style represents a communicating (sending and receiving) style individuals use in interpersonal communications.

Based on Jung's theories the CSS's four communicating style scales are: Sensor (S) - experiencing mainly on the basis of one's own sensory perceptions; Feeler (F) - relating to and understanding experience through emotional reactions and response to feelings; Thinker (T) - analysing, ordering in logical fashion; and Intuitior (I) - conceiving, projecting and inducing (Fordham, 1968).

The CSS used in this study consisted of 18 self descriptive statements each of which are followed by four endings. Subjects were asked to indicate the order in which they felt each ending was not characteristic of themselves by filling in the ending with the numbers 6, 4, 3 or 1: the number 6 for the ending most like them, 4 for the next most, 3 next most and 1 least like them. For example:

I am likely to impress others as:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. practical and to the point | 1 |
| B. emotional and somewhat stimulating | 4 |
| C. astute and logical | 3 |
| D. intellectually oriented and somewhat complex. | 6 |

Mok hypothesises that it is necessary to explore the relative emphasis of the four communicating styles under favourable circumstances (FC) as well as the emphasis they are given under stress conditions (SC).

Representative examples of CSS items to illustrate each of the communicating styles under *favourable conditions* are:

- a) Sensor style - I am likely to impress others as practical and to the point.
- b) Feeler style - I want projects I work on to be stimulating and involve lively interaction with others.
- c) Thinker style - When communicating with others I convey impatience with those who express ideas that are not obviously thought through.
- d) Intuitior style - In terms of the dimension of time I probably concentrate most on significant long range actions I plan to take and how they relate to life's direction.

Representative examples of CSS items illustrate each of the communicating styles under *stress conditions* are:

- a) Sensor style - Sometimes I suspect I may "come through" to others as being too concerned with specifics and matters related to "how to".
- b) Feeler style - In tense meetings with others, I may occasionally "let my hair down" too freely, expressing feelings which may have been better left unsaid.
- c) Thinker style - When the "chips are down", I feel it is preferable to stick to a systematic approach that has proved to be effective before, even though by taking more risks I might win a few more victories.
- d) Intuitior style - When others pressure me I am inclined to step back into my own world of thought.

The CSS was selected in this study because:

- (i) the instrument is easily interpreted by subjects. This was seen as important because feedback to subjects would be provided on their communicating style;
- (ii) content and construct validity of the instrument has been determined on the theories of Jung (Pettersen, 1979), hence it has a strong theoretical framework;
- (iii) the test, re-test reliability has been reported at .97 (Pettersen, 1979).

Analytical Procedures

Two types of analytical procedures were selected to explore the data gathered in this study:

- (a) Means of raw scores were computed for each of the four communicating styles under favourable conditions (FC) and stress conditions (SC) as measured by the CSS. These scores were sorted into the following categories according to the subjects': age, sex, years of teaching experience, grade level taught and geographic location. The Newman-Keuls statistical technique of multiple-comparisons was used to determine significant differences between each mean and every other mean.
- (b) Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to determine relationships between each of the four communicating styles under favourable conditions and stress conditions.

Data were collected during November-December, 1979. No names appeared on the CSS. There was some population mortality as subjects did not always complete personal data items, e.g., age, sex. The .05 level was accepted as the level of statistical significance for correlations to be reported and for the difference between the means.

DISCUSSION

This study has shown communicating styles which reflect the ways primary school teachers transmit and receive information. From an analysis of the results, four findings are interesting.¹

First, the finding that these teachers, overall, have a primary sensor style under favourable conditions and a cluster of both primary sensor and thinker styles under stress suggests that:

- (i) These subjects' communicating style under favourable conditions is characterised by heavy emphasis on action. That is, they thrive on getting things done here and now, without unnecessary and time-consuming deliberations. It could be inferred that they believe in the *significance* of what they are doing, and should therefore exploit, in constructive ways, the opportunities for satisfaction that each day affords (Mok, 1975, p.10). Consequently, in this style, these subjects are likely to express a direct, down-to-earth approach to their teaching tasks.

1. The complete report of this research can be obtained by writing to the authors.

- (ii) Under stress, there is a dominance of both sensor and thinker styles, with secondary feeler and intuition styles. Hence, the subjects are, under stress, characterised by action as well as relying heavily on logic and planned problem solving, that is, the thinker style. At their worst, under stress, these subjects might fail to consider sufficiently the long-range consequences of their actions, as well as being perceived as "dry" and "cold".

Second, the negative correlations, with the overall sample between sensors and intuitors (under favourable conditions) and between feelers and thinkers (under stress) infers that:

- (i) under normal conditions those teachers who demonstrate the characteristics of being doers, with a heavy emphasis on action, are not likely to be innovative, enjoy theory, conceptual thinking and show long-range thinking;
- (ii) under stress, those subjects who rely heavily on logic and planned problem solving, are unlikely to be concerned about the feelings of others and could be impersonal and unemotional.

Third, the finding that subjects with 5 or more years teaching experience are dominantly sensors under favourable conditions, while subjects with 1 to 4 years teaching experience are primarily both sensors and feelers suggests that :

- (i) teachers who have been in the classroom situation for some time (5 or more years) are likely to be concerned about action and getting things done;
- (ii) teachers starting out in the profession (1 - 4 years teaching) are likely to be both concerned about action and getting things done, as well as being empathetic and drawing out the feelings of others.

Fourth, teachers in the early years (Grades K - 4) under favourable conditions are primarily sensors, which teachers in the upper primary grades (5 - 7) are both dominantly sensors and thinkers suggests that: K - 4 teachers have active classrooms where children are kept busy, rather than sitting passively, moreover, pupils would be using materials and working with their hands; 5 - 7 teachers have also active classrooms, but there would also be an emphasis on written materials, giving homework and writing specific comments on papers.

These findings raise a number of questions: Why did the data fall out the way it did? Why did intutor fail to dominate as a primary style? Two reasons may account for these results.

First, the fact that sensor was the dominant communicating style might be explained by the nature of the primary school teachers' role. Essentially, to be effective they should know how to organise and maintain a classroom learning environment that maximises time pupils spend on productive activities and minimise time lost through confusion (Brophy, 1979). Consequently, this scenario would appear to relate to the sensor teaching style which is characterised by heavy emphasis on action,

where the teacher thrives on getting things done without unnecessary time-consuming deliberation. Indeed, to keep pupils engaged on productive activities might require a teacher who sizes up situations quickly, does not waste time, demands results and has an energetic approach to work.

Second, that intuitor failed to be a primary style might be explained by the belief that: (a) primary teachers are so heavily involved in maintenance tasks (e.g., daily teaching, managing the classroom) that they do not become involved in innovation, long-ranging thinking and the process of teaching, and (b) the intuitor style has not been reinforced by "significant others", such as peers or principals, when classroom teachers did attempt to investigate innovations, probe the "meaning" of teaching, and suggest new solutions to critical problems facing the school.

Looking towards the future, while it would be unrealistic to force teachers to alter their personalities, and so change a communicating style, it might be feasible to expose teachers to a range of communicating styles. Perhaps communicating styles technology can be used to help individuals diagnose style behaviour, and so provide feedback to them concerning which styles are being applied constructively.

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WORK EXPERIENCE AND TRAINEE TEACHERS

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An educational policy problem currently receiving some scrutiny is the advisability of school teachers being persons with experience of work and life situations outside of educational institutions (See Williams, 1979, Vol. 1, p.99 and The Schools Commission, 1979). Proposals on this matter include enrolment of more mature age students in teacher training; requiring teacher trainee students to have significant work experience prior to or during their period of training; providing teachers with seminars and other interactive opportunities for improving their knowledge of industry, the world of work and the wider society; and providing opportunities for secondment of teachers to industrial organisations for significant periods.

Various rationales are offered in support of such proposals. The Schools Commission discussion paper suggests that mature age students will have a broader perspective on life and this will result in a "more effective teaching force" (p. 12); that work experience will place trainee teachers in a better position to make their career choice and will provide them with a better understanding of pupils' social environment (p. 15); and that industrial contact and experience will keep practising teachers abreast of changing technological and vocational requirements and will result in them returning to teaching with new enthusiasm (p.31).

Another rationale alluded to in the Williams Report is the argument that problems of youth employment are partly due to unrealistic expectations and negative attitudes of school leavers; that such expectations and attitudes are developed in schools; that this is due to the teachers' lack of experience outside of educational institutions; that teachers and present trainee teachers do lack such experience; and thus teachers and trainee teachers should be required to have such experience (I will call this rationale the Effects on Youth Employment rationale). One suspects that the support of this rationale by the ACTU and the Employer representatives are based on different interpretations, with the ACTU concerned that people should understand the perspective and attitudes of the workers and the Employers concerned that people should understand free enterprise and not see "profit" as a dirty word.

This paper is concerned with this Effects on Youth Employment rationale as it applies to the proposal to require trainee teachers to have some significant work experience. The paper is shaped by two questions:

1. To what extent do present teacher trainee students already have significant work experience?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the possible benefits of such experience?