

Acceptance of Self, Acceptance of Others, and Preferred Teaching Approach

Robert B. Burns

One hundred and eighty-one teacher training students sat three attitude measuring instruments to investigate the relationships between attitudes to self, attitudes to others and attitudes to educational practices. Clinical studies within the ambit of Rogerian psychotherapy suggest that a relationship between self and other attitudes should be positive. Substantial and statistically significant positive correlations, in the order of $p < 0.01$, emerged consistently in this study between attitudes to self and attitudes to a range of others and to progressive child centred educational practices. Self acceptance level would seem to be an index of attitudes to a wide range of others. This relationship provides a principle of utmost importance for human relationships since the application of psychological processes to enhance the self concept should facilitate as a corollary a decrease in interpersonal tensions and intergroup conflict. This relationship is of particular consequence in the teaching context since teaching is a sharing of self with others. The results of the study suggest that those with low self acceptance prefer ($p < 0.01$) to avoid close encounters with pupils and prefer a more traditional formal teaching style.

Introduction

Research on teaching, usually trying to answer the question "what makes a good or effective teacher", has had a long but to some extent unproductive history. There exists a plethora of findings but few are solid, respectable, or hang together in a meaningful way. The source of the trouble has been the lack of a reliable, objective, universal criterion of teacher effectiveness. The impossibility of discovering such a single criterion is inherent in the diverse nature of the teacher's role, and in the many and varied activities performed in a wide range of contexts.

However, since teaching involves close personal relationships with a range of others, a sharing of self with others, and the existence of an underlying potential threat to self esteem and confidence in the multi-skilled tasks of classroom management and programming, attitudes to self and attitudes to others should relate to each teacher's habitual way of operating in the classroom context. A number of studies have shown that teachers who can produce in their classrooms a warm,

supportive, accepting ethos tend to facilitate student performance (e.g., Ryans, 1961; Combs, 1965). Teachers who have positive self concepts talk less at students and involve students more in their own learning than teachers with more negative self concepts (e.g., Trowbridge, 1973). Hence there appears to be reasonable grounds for hypothesising that teachers' self concepts influence their preferred teaching style.

Many therapists have noted this positive relationship between attitudes to self and to others. Adler (1927) claimed that the tendency to disparage others arises out of feelings of inferiority. Fromm-Reichmann (1949: 167) in a similar vein based on therapy observations noted "one can only respect others to the extent that one can respect oneself". The work of the client centred therapists also promotes the positive relationship between attitudes to self and to others. For them the basic change in the client lies in the way they come to perceive themselves and as a corollary to perceive others. In a large number of clinical cases reported by client centred therapists (e.g., Rogers, 1951; Raimy, 1948; Stock, 1949) in the early years of the Rogerian school, an array of substantial and significant correlations were offered to promote this relationship as a major proposition of that school. In fact it became Rogers' eighteenth proposition (Rogers, 1951).

However, few studies have been conducted on this important principle since so that currently all previous work on the relationship between attitudes to self and attitudes to others appears to have been characterised by the following features:

- a) it is largely theoretical as exemplified by Adler, Rogers, etc.;
- b) there is a strong clinical bias in the experimental work using small samples undergoing individual therapy; and
- c) the work was performed essentially in America.

There does appear in both theoretical and practical terms sufficient grounds for more research into this self-others relationship, which is of vital importance to effective interaction with others, among non-clinical samples. This study therefore extends the research on the relationships between attitudes to self and to others in an Australian context, with a comparatively larger group of a non-clinical character, a group training for the teaching profession in which positive attitudes to self and to others are a necessary foundation for effective classroom performance. Additionally previous work within the clinical field has focussed on a "generalised" other rather than any specific others. It will be a major thrust of this study to determine whether the relationship holds to specific others and to specific group others. This extension would seem particularly appropriate to study with trainee teachers who must build effective relationships with a wide range of others in the extant multi-cultural setting of most Australian classrooms.

Method

The Subjects One hundred and eighty-one students, 123 female and 58 male, sat three scales to measure their attitudes to themselves and their attitudes to specific

group and generalised others, and to educational practices. All the subjects were training for the teaching profession.

The Scales

- (a) Berger's (1952) Acceptance of Self and Others scale was selected to index attitudes to self and the generalised other as it appears to be the most carefully developed scale with more extensive evidence of reliability and validity than the other few scales in that area. The direction of the wording of the items has been switched at random to obviate the development of a response set. A full description may be found in Shaw and Wright (1967: 432-36) - the Acceptance of Self subscale contains 36 items and the Acceptance of Others subscale has 28 items.
- (b) The Semantic Differential (Osgood, *et al.*, 1957) was used to assess attitudes to specific others. Concepts representing significant others for student teachers were rated on twenty evaluative scales of which the positive and negative poles were reversed randomly.
- (c) Attitudes to teaching approaches were assessed with the Educational Attitudes Scale (Kerlinger and Kaya, 1959) on a continuum from traditional to progressive. This twenty item scale has extensive reliability and validity evidence reported (Shaw and Wright, 1967). High scores on each of the variables represent respectively positive attitudes to self, to others, and a progressive child centred philosophy.

Null Hypothesis That there are no statistically significant relationships between attitudes to self, attitudes to others and attitudes to education practices.

Results

Table 1 reveals an array of statistically significant positive correlations between attitudes to self and attitudes to specific others, to the generalised other and to educational approaches. This consistent pattern implies the rejection of the null hypothesis. This strong correlational evidence is supported by consideration of the mean differences between high self acceptance and low self acceptance groups on the person concepts (Table 2). These two criterion groups were formed from the top and bottom thirds respectively on the distribution of the acceptance of self subscale. Four of the concepts in Table 2 have significant mean differences in excess of the 1% level, with the High Self Acceptance criterion group in each case producing the more positive acceptance.

Table 1
Correlations for Male and Female Students Between Acceptance
of Self Scale and Other Scales

Scales	Group	r	p
Acceptance of Self Scale with:			
a) Acceptance of Others Scale	Men	+0.54	<0.01
	Women	+0.52	<0.01
b) Educational Attitudes	Men	+0.61	<0.01
	Women	+0.65	<0.01
c) Semantic Differential:			
i) Mother	Men	+0.54	<0.01
	Women	+0.57	<0.01
ii) Asian Pupil	Men	+0.70	<0.01
	Women	+0.78	<0.01
iii) Aboriginal Pupil	Men	+0.66	<0.01
	Women	+0.71	<0.01
iv) Father	Men	+0.56	<0.01
	Women	+0.54	<0.01
v) Australian Pupil	Men	+0.60	<0.01
	Women	+0.66	<0.01
vi) Immigrant Pupil	Men	+0.68	<0.01
	Women	+0.70	<0.01
vii) English Pupil	Men	+0.61	<0.01
	Women	+0.63	<0.01

Table 2
Level of Significance of Difference the Means for Top and Bottom Quartiles of
Acceptance of Self Scale on Semantic Differential Concepts

Concept	High Self <u>Acceptance</u>		Low Self <u>Acceptance</u>		τ	P
	M	σ	M	σ		
Mother	6.04	0.53	5.52	0.75	1.45	ns
Asian Pupil	4.97	0.76	4.40	0.70	3.40	<0.01
Aboriginal Pupil	4.81	0.79	4.30	0.71	2.96	<0.01
Father	6.07	0.58	5.32	0.98	1.51	ns
Australian Pupil	5.00	0.85	4.39	0.81	2.58	<0.01
Immigrant Pupil	4.84	0.97	4.35	0.79	2.69	<0.01
English Pupil	5.88	0.82	5.31	0.68	1.83	ns

In considering the relationship between educational attitudes and acceptance of self and others (Table 3), the array of positive and significant correlations manifests evidence to support the notion that those student teachers who prefer a personalised, less structured approach and teaching context generally evaluate themselves and others significantly more positively than those who espouse a more formal, structured and less personalised teaching approach. The relationship is stronger for female students than for male students when it involves attitudes to self rather than attitudes to others. No significant differences exist between the individual correlations for others suggesting that students respond to all types of others in a similar fashion.

To review the results, it has been demonstrated that a consistent and significant set of relationships exist between expressed attitudes to self as measured by the Acceptance of Self subscale and

- a) expressed attitudes to others in general as indexed by the Acceptance of Others subscale;
- b) expressed attitudes to specific others as measured by the Semantic Differential; and
- c) preferred teaching approaches as measured by the Educational Attitudes Scale.

Table 3
The Correlations of the Educational Attitudes Scale
with Other Scales

Scales	Group	r	p
Educational Attitudes Scale with:			
Acceptance of Self	Men	+0.61	<0.01
	Women	+0.65	<0.01
Acceptance of Others	Men	+0.55	<0.01
	Women	+0.58	<0.01
Semantic differential:			
i) Asian Pupil	Men	+0.59	<0.01
	Women	+0.62	<0.01
ii) Aboriginal Pupil	Men	+0.62	<0.01
	Women	+0.64	<0.01
iii) Australian Pupil	Men	+0.49	<0.01
	Women	+0.54	<0.01
iv) Immigrant Pupil	Men	+0.47	<0.01
	Women	+0.53	<0.01
v) English Pupil	Men	+0.48	<0.01
	Women	+0.60	<0.01

Discussion

This study indicated that the relationship between acceptance of self and of others holds not only towards the generalised other but also towards defined specific others. There is support in these results for those psychotherapists and psychoanalysts who without empirical justification have claimed this relationship as a general principle or result of therapy. Positive relationships with others appears to require the possession of positive self esteem so that the psychic economy is not diverted and drained off simply to deal with intra-personal tensions. The consistency of result across "non-normal" clinical cases as reported by Rogerian therapists and this study's findings among normal non-clinical persons suggests that the relationship is present throughout the whole spectrum. These results promote Rogers' eighteenth proposition which states the relationship in terms of client centred therapy from the level of intuition to the realm of statistical support for the hypothesis, and moreover support his speculation that self rejection could be a major factor in individual hostility, in industrial friction, in intergroup relations, and even in international clashes (Rogers, 1951: 150).

Since some of the others to whom attitudes have been assessed belong to outgroups and ethnic minorities, it is very apparent that self attitudes are closely related to ethnic attitudes. There is a tendency for the correlations to increase as the relationship moves from that between self and the generalised other through that with the ingroup (Parents, Australian Pupil) to that with ethnic outgroup persons. Where specific outgroup ethnic pupils were the stimulus those student teachers with the lower self concepts showed stronger rejection of the stimulus person whereas those student teachers who manifested higher levels of self acceptance produced higher levels of acceptance of the ethnic stimulus. Those subjects with more positive feelings about themselves, it can be surmised, do not regard others who are different as a threat.

But correlations cannot tell us about causation. However, on the basis of theory and research on the development of the self concept self attitudes may be considered to be the primary variable in the relationship. With correlations for the total group ranging from +0.52 to +0.78 for the various interscale relationships the residual variance would range from 48% to 22%. Thus variation in measured self attitude accounts for only a moderate proportion of variation in measured attitudes to others. Child rearing practices appear to be implicated in this relationship since numerous studies, e.g., Coopersmith (1967) have shown that self esteem develops from an interpretation of how parents value the child. The child then responds positively to parents and by generalisation to others also since having learned to regard himself highly there is little expectancy of being reacted to negatively by others. Children with high levels of self acceptance fortified by the parental vote of confidence are willing to engage in social encounters and expect success. Those with low self esteem expect failure and rejection. Culturally induced prejudices and stereotypes act as rationalisations and in concert with the displacement of frustration at feeling inadequate ensure a general lack of positive response to others. Child rearing

practices would thus appear to be antecedent to both attitudes to self and attitudes to others.

The statistically significant relationships between self attitudes and many different kinds of others ranging from the generalised other to specific group others supply psychology with a principle of considerable utility in understanding and explaining the problems of interpersonal relationships and conflict. As Rosenberg (1965: 168) concludes: "The cement of social life does not consist of grand passions or cosmic philosophies. It consists of casual conversations and relationships, small talk, and the sharing of minor enthusiasms". The individual's self concept would appear to play a major role in all this. What a person thinks of himself does not form an encapsulated system having no relevance beyond the boundary of his own being; on the contrary it reaches out to manipulate his relationships with others. The self concept brings to bear a unique perspective for viewing one's relationships with one's social environment.

In that attitudes to self are antecedent to attitudes to others, change in the latter can only come about through changes in attitudes to self. In situations of interpersonal conflict, industrial tension, prejudice, professional friction and the like the most effective way to resolve the conflict might be through modifying the attitudes the persons hold towards themselves rather than concentrating on solutions via external factors.

The great value of the experimental validation of this relationship is that the atmosphere of understanding and acceptance which leads to more positive acceptance of self can lead to a dynamic chain reaction with tremendous potential for the solution of many of the interpersonal, intergroup, and international problems that have plagued mankind and which prognosticate great social upheaval if little is done to promote more positive acceptance of others. A number of programmes do exist to enhance self esteem but few have been evaluated to determine their specific effects. Burns (in press) and Woodhouse *et al.* (1985a; 1985b) report on the positive effects of several programmes they have worked with.

The different approaches to teaching favoured by persons differing in self attitudes and attitudes to others are those theoretically expected to be preferred. A person low in self acceptance will want to reduce the need for personal relationships thereby adopting more traditional and content centred methods. These place the teacher in an unambiguous position with regard to role and status, pursuing task oriented rather than person oriented endeavours. A more child centred, progressive approach to teaching with its more intense personal relationships is threatening to those with low self esteem. But the teacher with a positive self concept has no need to defend; a more unstructured, flexible and personal context offers no threat to esteem. Such a person is able to relate to and accept all pupils, irrespective of their characteristics and behaviours.

Several qualifications must be borne in mind:

- a) the Educational Attitudes Scale tapped preferred practices not actual practices;
- b) the sample was not practising teachers but student teachers nearing the end of their three year course, but who had experienced and tried out a range of

teaching approaches during teaching practice. With such a sample of limited experience, a little indoctrinated in a fairly liberal faculty into the value of child centred approaches, the existence of these strong correlations suggests that even stronger ones might be found among the ranks of practising teachers.

It may be that if governments, education administrators, or principals wish to develop educational systems based on particular teaching approaches then it is necessary for the teachers involved to possess the required self attitudes and other attitudes needed for their adoption of the approach in both spirit and practice. The basic educational philosophy of the teachers appears to reside in the attitudes they hold to themselves and towards others. If informal, more personalised less structured teaching approaches are required then those teachers lacking self doubt who think positively about themselves may ensure the functioning of the system far better than those who hold negative beliefs about themselves and others. The latter may be more effective in an instructional sense (but not in a personal relationship sense) in an approach that requires formal teaching of imposed subject matter where teacher talks and students listen or work on class exercises in a classroom where status and role are clear cut. Obviously these dichotomies between types of teacher and types of method are crude but the implication is certainly there. One can surmise that many innovations in teaching method and in the internal organisation of schools have foundered on, amongst other things, the failure of teachers to work the innovations in the way they were meant to because some teachers were unable to adapt (e.g., Baker Lunn, 1970). Different levels of self concept function like lenses limiting the perspectives from which the teachers view their role. Thus constrained the teacher with the low self evaluation would find it difficult to undertake another type of role. A change, for example, from formal to informal style creates a threat to the self esteem since the latter style is more demanding both intellectually and emotionally, exposing personal levels of adequacy and security. A progressive approach to teaching places more demands on the teacher as he/she has to be a better sort of person in all sorts of ways. The effects that three years of teacher training have on the personality of students are perhaps as important as what is learned in the cognitive area.

Overall, this study shows that the facilitator of learning must be a secure person. Little headway can be made in helping, supporting or understanding others by those who are psychologically insecure in themselves. The teacher with low self esteem sees those with whom he/she interacts through the biases and distortions of his/her own needs and fears. Only when the teacher has sufficient self esteem can his/her own needs for power, recognition, status, etc., be reduced so that teaching is based on the needs of the children and not on the needs of the teacher. While more informal child centred education relieves the teacher of the burden of omniscience it adds the burden of fallibility in which the teacher must feel comfortable in saying to the pupils. "I don't know the answer to that question. Let's find out together". Hence more needs to be done to prepare teachers who have positive self attitudes who can view teaching as a human process involving human relationships and human

meaning. Since self attitudes are learned they are teachable and modifiable so personal growth could be incorporated into professional training as a necessary component. Future work too needs to be directed to probing in more detail among practising teachers the self attitudes - teaching strategies relationship, and in evaluating the use of personal growth workshops with serving teachers.

In summary, the data presented in the article, although based on scales that do not probe to any depth into personality dynamics, support in an Australian student group the hypotheses that attitudes to self and attitudes to others are strongly related and that preferred teaching approaches are also strongly related to such attitudes. It is only when self is held with some esteem that the individual is able to relate effectively to others and employ teaching methods that are more likely to generate a warm, interpersonal supportive ethos in the classroom thereby facilitating the psychological and cognitive growth of the pupils.

References

- Adler, A. (1927), *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, New York, Harcourt Brace.
- Baker Lunn, J. C. (1970), *Streaming in the Primary School*, Slough, N.F.E.R.
- Berger, E. M. (1952), "The Relation Between Expressed Acceptance of Self and Expressed Acceptance of Others", *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, 47, 4, pp. 778-782.
- Burns, R. B. (in press), *Personal Development for Professionals*.
- Combs, A. W. (1965), *The Professional Education of Teachers*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon.
- Coopersmith, S. (1967), *The Antecedents of Self Esteem*, San Francisco, Freeman.
- Fromm-Reichmann (1949), *A Study of Interpersonal Relations*, New York, Hermitage Press.
- Kerlinger, F. & Kaya, E. (1959), "The Construction and Factor Analytic Validations of Scales to Measure Attitudes Towards Education", *Education Psychology Measurement*, 19, pp. 13-29.
- Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1957), *The Measurement of Meaning*, Urban, University of Illinois.
- Raimy, V. C. (1948), "Self Reference in Counselling Interviews", *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 12, 3, pp. 153-63.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951), *Client Centred Therapy*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin.
- Rosenberg, M. J. (1965), *Society and the Adolescent Self Image*, Princetown, University of Princetown Press.
- Ryans, D. G. (1961), "Some Relationships Between Pupil Behaviour and Certain Teacher Characteristics", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 52, pp. 82-90.
- Shaw, H. E. & Wright, J. M. (1967), *Scales for the Measurements of Attitudes*, New York, McGraw Hill.

- Sheerer, E. T. (1949), "An Analysis of the Relationship Between Acceptance of a Respect for Self and Acceptance of a Respect for Others", *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 13, pp. 169-75.
- Stock, D. (1949), "An Investigation into the Interrelations Between the Self-concept and Feelings Directed Towards Other Persons and Groups", *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 13, pp. 176-80.
- Trowbridge, N. (1973), "Teacher Self Concept and Teaching Style", in G. Chanan (ed.) *Towards a Science of Teaching*, Slough, N.F.E.R.
- Woodhouse, D., Hall, E. & Wooster, A. (1985a), ""Taking Control of Stress in Teaching", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 55, pp. 119-23.
- Woodhouse, D. Hall, E. & Wooster, A. (1985b), "An Evaluation of In-service Course in Human Relations", *Journal of Inservice Education*, 11, pp. 55-60.