

EXAMINING TEACHERS' EMPATHY

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Keywords: empathy; teacher; questionnaire

Empathy is a multidimensional concept, the meaning of which has gone through several alternations in the last century. Empathy is important in socialization, and as secondary socialization takes place in schools, it is essential that teachers can communicate and understand their students properly, thus empathy is a key quality teachers should have. On the other hand, teachers serve as models for their students, this way students can learn how to behave in society, and how to understand others' feelings and express appropriate responses to them. Several studies (e.g. Swan & Riley, 2012) examine teachers' empathy using both qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Davis (1980), empathy is a multidimensional construct with four dimensions (fantasy, empathic concerns, perspective taking and personal distress), which can be assessed by his Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Based on Eisenberg's (1994) studies, two kinds of empathy can be differentiated: affective and cognitive. For assessing affective components, the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (MDEES; Caruso & Mayer, 1998) is most commonly used, which comprises six subcomponents (empathic suffering, positive sharing, responsive crying, emotional attention, feeling for others and emotional contagion). The purpose of this study was to create instruments appropriate for examining teachers' empathy, and to explore possible connections between empathy and the number of years of teaching, gender or type of workplace. The instrument of the pilot study is a self-made questionnaire based on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index by Davis (1980) and the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). Participants rated each statement on a 5-point Likert-scale. A background questionnaire was also used to collect data about their current position, living conditions, years of practice and family background. The research project is in an early phase, and the interpretation of the results still in progress. Considering teachers' empathy (N=65) no significant differences were found yet either by gender (female: 83%, male: 17%) or the length teaching experience (33% have taught more than 20 years, 33% taught 7-20 years, 13% 3-7 years and 11% had only up to 3 years of teaching experience). The data analysis is still in process, and the findings will be fully presented at the conference.