Primary and secondary teachers – alike or different?

A look at data from the MBTI Australian Data Archive

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Ian Ball delves into the growing body of data in the MBTI Australia Data Archive to examine the type similarities and differences between primary and secondary school teachers.

As fairly sizeable samples are now available in the MBTI Australian Data Archive, the opportunity has arisen to look at the similarities and differences between primary and secondary teachers. The contributing samples came from a variety of sources, comprising both independent schools and publicly funded schools and colleges. There are typically more females than males employed in primary schools, whereas there are roughly similar proportions of the genders in secondary education.

What should we expect, based on other data? In earlier times it seemed fashionable to believe that everyone learned in the same ways, and therefore should respond well to the same teaching methods. Hence it might be suspected that teachers would tend to employed with models of "good teaching" and "effective classroom discipline" in mind, leading to a likelihood of a dominant type selecting entrants to the profession much like themselves, and ignoring the potential for a mixture of types.

More recently, with stronger recognition of individual differences in education, there appears to have been more scope and respect for teacher differences and their role in enhancing student learning. The *MBTI Manual* (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998), drawing on DiTiberio (1996) and Lawrence (1982), offers some insights into how teachers with different type preferences perceive and act in the teaching situations:

- Teachers who prefer *extraversion* tend to have classrooms with movement and noise, giving students choices and a voice in decisions; whereas teachers with an *introverted* preference will have quieter and more orderly classrooms, with structured learning activities.
- *Sensing* type teachers will tend to emphasise facts and practical information, and want to keep learning centralised. *Intuitive* type teachers will instead wish to emphasise concepts, relationships and the big ideas.
- *Thinking* type teachers will want students to attend to what the teachers are doing and saying, and will give objective comments about performance. *Feeling* type teachers will tend to relate in a different way with both words and body language.
- *Judging* type teachers will on the whole want to work to set schedules and have quiet and orderly classrooms. *Perceiving* type teachers, in contrast, will encourage movement, independent work, open-ended discussion, etc.

There seems to be little published data looking at whether different types are attracted to different levels of education, and so the current project serves a useful purpose in exposing the range and frequencies of the 16 types found at two levels of education: primary and secondary.

Primary school teachers

It is apparent that all 16 types are represented in the sample of 1001 primary school teachers.

Table 1. Type preferences: Primary school teachers

(n = 1001)

ISTJ 11.3%	ISFJ 14.8%	INFJ 5.4%	INTJ 4.8%
ISTP 2.9%	ISFP 4.3%	INFP 7.6%	INTP 3.5%
ESTP 3.2%	ESFP 5.7%	ENFP 7.7%	ENTP 3.4%
ESTJ 10.2%	ESFJ 9.4%	ENFJ 2.6%	ENTJ 3.3%

Some 45% of the sample are SJ types, with ISFJs most frequent (14.8%), followed by ISTJs (11.3%). Following the SJs come ENFPs and INFPs, sharing about 15% fairly evenly between them. The least frequent types are two SP types (ISTP and ESTP) and one NF type (ENFJ).

There are more introverted (54.5%) than extraverted types (45.5%), and more feeling (57.4%) than thinking types (42.7%). There is a preponderance of sensing (61.7%) compared with intuitive types (38.3%), and of judging (61.7%) compared with perceiving types (38.3%).

Taking where the majority sit on these preferences, the profile of the "average" primary school teacher is thus the same as the most frequently occurring type in that field: ISFJ, with introverted, sensing, feeling and judging preferences.

Secondary school teachers

Amongst secondary school teachers the three most frequent types are all SJs: ISTJ, ESTJ and ISFJ. These are followed by a variety of NF and NT combinations. The three least frequent types (less than 3% each) are all SPs: ISFP, ESTP, and ESFP. The modal type is ISTJ.

Table 2. Type preferences: Secondary school teachers

(n = 1083)

ISTJ 14.1%	ISFJ 9.0%	INFJ 7.3%	INTJ 7.4%
ISTP 4.0%	ISFP 3.0%	INFP 7.9%	INTP 5.0%
ESTP 2.8%	ESFP 2.2%	ENFP 7.1%	ENTP 3.7%
ESTJ 10.9%	ESFJ 6.3%	ENFJ 4.6%	ENTJ 4.7%

Some 42% of secondary school teachers prefer extraversion and 58% introversion. 52% show a sensing preference, with the other 48% favouring intuition. There are 53% with a thinking preference and 47% with a feeling preference. A large 64% have a judging preference, and 36% a perceptual preference. The trend is therefore for ISTJ to be the predominant preference pattern.

Differences between primary and secondary

It can be seen that the most frequently occurring types are *ISFJ* amongst primary school teachers, and *ISTJ* amongst secondary school teachers. The distinction is their respective preferences on the thinking-feeling dimension.

There were no significant differences between the two groups on the E-I and the J-P dimensions, but very highly significant differences (both $p < 0.001$) on S-N and T-J. Primary teachers showed a very clear-cut preference for S over N, while secondary teachers were much more evenly divided (although S was still stronger than N). On the TF dimension, primary teachers showed a higher preference for F, and secondary teachers a higher preference for T.

Another way of looking at the differences between the two groups is in terms of the proportions in the four temperaments. Here it is clear that there are significantly *more NTs* in secondary teaching than in primary (20.8% to 15.0%; $p < 0.001$) and *fewer SPs* (12.0% to 16.1%; $p < 0.01$).

There is a smaller difference in the proportions of *SJs* (secondary 40.3%, primary 45.7%; $p < 0.05$), and no significant difference in the proportions of *NFs* (secondary 26.9%, primary 23.3%).

I hope that this information will be useful to MBTI practitioners working in the education area.

References

DiTiberio, J K 1996, 'Education., learning styles, and cognitive styles.' In A L Hammer (ed.) *MBTI applications: A decade of research on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Lawrence, G 1982, *People types and tiger stripes*. Gainesville: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

Myers, I B, McCaulley, M H, Quenk, N L & Hammer, A L 1998. *MBTI manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (3rd edn.). Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Anyone with MBTI data they wish to add to the Australian Data Archive Project may contact the Manager of the Psychological Type Research Unit, Ian L Ball, 03 9878 4794 or *gmagpa@bigpond.net.au*.

IAN BALL (ISTJ) manages the Psychological Type Research Unit, a collaboration between AAPT and Deakin University.

Ian is a retired psychologist with an interest in careers, personality-situation interaction and the use of type concepts in education. At AAPT's 2000 National Conference he will present a paper on two forms of the MBTI and the question of gender differences.

… as long as teaching remains [seen as] a second-best profession how can we, as a society, recruit … the minds of imagination and vision and wisdom and kindness and tolerance that are necessary to fire young minds with a desire for understanding beyond the pages of the prescribed text-books?

– Charmian Clift (1970)

If he is to stay at a Public School, he must aim at becoming *educated*. If he is to be solely a Scientific Specialist, he is wasting his time at a Public School.

– Alan M Turing's headmaster

Don't do so well, please … try to be more ordinary.

– A teacher's advice to Henri Poincaré