

Kimberly Miller

Mr. Jordan

EH 102 901

March 15, 2008

A Look at the Reliability and Validity of the MBTI

For years, students have been taught to conform to teachers' ideas on ways to learn. I believe that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a testing instrument to find out what temperament type you fall into, is an excellent way to teach teachers how to better communicate with their students. The point of the MBTI is to educate us about the different temperaments of each individual. Naomi Quenk is a licensed clinical psychologist who has studied the works of Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers who invented the MBTI. Neither Briggs nor Myers has credentials in psychological test development, but they studied Carl Jung's work for twenty years and devised the MBTI. Quenk says, that they came to the "conclusion that typology could provide a useful way of describing healthy personality differences and, importantly, that such assessments could be put to practical use in peoples lives" (2). Based on research that has been done on the reliability and the validity of the MBTI, I believe it should be used in higher education.

Isabel Briggs Myers states in her book, Introduction to Type, "Each preference identified by the MBTI is a multifaceted aspect of personality and enhances understanding of one's self and others" (7). The MBTI breaks down a user's type into four preferences indicated by a four-letter sequence. For example, I am an ISTJ, (Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging). To understand their preference, users must know about the dichotomies of each preference. A dichotomy is the difference between two contradictory opinions or thoughts. The test gives two

statements forcing the student to choose one or the other, but not both of which is naturally preferred to them. The choices for either statement, is neither right nor wrong.

The first letter in a person's type represents either Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I), the different approaches people take to everyday life. People who are extroverted tend to get out more and enjoy being around other people, while those who are introverted tend to be more into their own little world. The second letter represents Sensing (S) or Intuition (N), which is how people see the world. Sensing best describes people who are observant about specific details in their environment. Intuition refers to people who see the big picture and get all the facts before making a decision. The third letter represents Thinking (T) or Feeling (F). Thinking people look at the logical side of everything when making a decision. Feeling people consider what is important to everyone involved before making a decision. The fourth and final letter represents Judging (J) and Perceiving (P). People who fall into the Judging category tend to live their lives in an organized way. They like to plan out every detail of their day, and if something changes that plan they get agitated because of the change. Those who fall into the Perceiving category are more flexible in their day-to-day lives. These people tend to be more spontaneous, and they do not work well under organized constraints.

The reason the word "preference" is used in type is because the results are what we "prefer" to do, not what we "can" do. For example, people who are right-handed could probably write with their left hand if forced to, but because it is more natural to use their right hand that is what they "prefer" to do. By understanding the different types and the types of the people closest to you, spouse, friends, and co-workers, you can learn to understand them better. There can be less conflict by understanding that people are different and exactly how they are different. In their book, Gifts Differing, Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter Myers explain that by

understanding “with full recognition that the other person is different and has a right to remain different, and with full willingness to concentrate on the virtues of the other’s type rather than the defects” they will be able to understand each other better (123).

It is evident that the MBTI is a reliable source to use in education. Gordon Lawrence and Charles Martin, licensed psychologists who study personality assessments, explain that, “Reliability is how consistently a test measures what it attempts to measure” (118). They go on to mention that, “it should be understood that the MBTI meets and exceeds the standards for psychological instruments in terms of its reliability” (118). In order for this test to work, it must be consistent; no matter how many times it is taken, the end results need to come out the same. For example, I took this test three different times in three different stages in my life, and each time I came out with the same type.

Another thing to consider is whether or not people who re-take the test answer all of the questions exactly as they answered them before. This is called internal consistency reliability and is of special interest to the people who administer these tests. Lawrence and Martin state, “test-retest reliabilities are quite excellent by general test standards” (119). In agreeing with Lawrence, I also find the reliability of the MBTI to be quite amazing given the number of types a person can fall into.

However, Lawrence and Martin say when administering the MBTI to children “in grades three through seven,” the reliabilities were found to be “especially low” (122, 135). When administering personality instruments to children in these age groups, teachers should use the “Murphy-Meisgeier Type Indicator for Children” (MMTIC) instead of the MBTI, because the MMTIC is a temperament type indicator, with questions written for children.

Lawrence and Martin suggest that another point to consider when administering the MBTI is the validity of the instrument. “Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure, and the degree to which the “thing” that the instrument measures has meaning” (123). It is helpful to know that the MBTI is at least ninety percent accurate every time it is administered, thus making it better than other personality type tests (122). Also on retests, respondents came out with the same preferences “seventy-five to ninety percent of the time” (122). If a person’s type changes when he or she is retested, it is usually because the answer choices for the questions were unclear, and the type usually changes by no more than one preference, for example, from Extraversion to Introversion.

When using the MBTI or MMTIC, teachers can learn about their natural strengths and biases, and students can learn about their learning styles, motivations, and needed strategies for success. Scott Anchors has worked with the MBTI since 1970 and has also worked with psychotherapist Judy Provost. Together they have brought a great deal of understanding to the MBTI. They explain that learning whether a student is either Extraverted or Introverted can help a teacher to understand that Extraverts have difficulty reading and sitting for long periods and they work better in small groups whereas Introverts often learn better alone and need time to concentrate, and prefer “lecture based instruction” (127). Knowing “that one’s type does not change, that one functions best when acting in accordance with one’s type,” attempting to change the way they do things would result in a problematic situation (Provost and Anchors 132).

Lawrence and Martin explain that, “Counselors working with students who are pursuing higher education, [can] help students understand the issues their type might face,” and can also help them to build strengths and address weaknesses (135). Teachers often become frustrated because they design lesson plans to reach a group of students, knowing that it may not reach all

students appropriately. I believe that one of the best uses of the MBTI for educational purposes is to help students understand their type, and this can lead them to choose a career that is going to fit their personality. “It should lessen the waste of potential, the loss of opportunity, and the number of dropouts and delinquents. It may even help with the prevention of mental illness” (Myers and Myers 201). Also, “College students reported experiencing their living environment as most supportive when they and their roommates share all four preferences” (Lawrence 138). By figuring out what his or her type is, a student can investigate what he or she should study in college. Studying what is right for one’s personality will result in less dropouts and degree changes.

Administering the MBTI in high school, teachers can help students to understand who they are and possibly lead them to higher education or to the ultimate job they should pursue based on their type. By using the MBTI in education, teachers can consider the learning styles of their students, and hopefully tailor courses accordingly. Using the MBTI in education would greatly improve the learning of all involved.

Works Cited

- Keirsey, David, and Marilyn Bates. Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types. 4th ed. Delmar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis, 1984.
- Lawrence, Gordon, and Charles Martin. Building People, Building Programs: A Practitioner's Guide for Introducing the MBTI to Individuals and Organizations. Gainesville: CAPT, 2001.
- Myers, Isabel Briggs. Introduction to Type. 6th ed. Mountain View: CPP Inc, 1998.
- Myers, Isabel Briggs, and Peter B. Myers. Gifts Differing. 10th ed. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1990.
- Provost, Judith, and Scott Anchors, eds. Using the MBTI Instrument in Colleges and Universities. Gainesville: CAPT, 2003.
- Quenk, Naomi L. Essentials of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Assessment. New York: Wiley, 2000.