

Students and soldiers scoring high on general intelligence tests learned more from the same training programme than persons scoring low on general intelligence. This finding was confirmed by other studies^{21,32} and a meta-analysis.³⁰ Apart from being an unsurpassed predictor of work performance, general intelligence also is the best predictor of training success.

Therefore, one would expect intelligence also to predict success in communication skills training. However, studies investigating whether intelligence predicts success in communication skills training are scarce. Nonetheless, understanding the possible effect of intelligence on the mastery of these skills could help improve training programmes for the acquisition of these skills. Therefore, the focus of this study is on intelligence as predictor of the mastery of communication skills after a basic and advanced training in these skills.

After Spearman's distinction between general intelligence or the *g*-factor and specific intelligence or the *s*-factor,^{33,34} intelligence research primarily has concentrated on tests for general intelligence, because this was thought to be the best indicator of someone's true intelligence.²¹ However, since the second half of the 20th century researchers also attended to more specific abilities, for instance verbal intelligence or spatial intelligence. Specific job demands, e.g. bookkeeping, not only appeal to general intelligence, but also to specific abilities, e.g. numerical intelligence.^{21,24} According to Lubinski²⁴ general intelligence can be divided into three more specific ability domains: verbal, numerical and spatial intelligence. The aggregation of these three separate abilities should give a good impression of someone's general intelligence. In this study we will maintain Lubinski's distinction and investigate verbal, numerical and spatial intelligence as predictors of the mastery of communication skills.

Only a few studies have investigated these relationships. These studies have concentrated mostly on the correlation of verbal intelligence with communication skills. For instance, verbal intelligence admission tests predicted medical students' mastery of communication skills.³⁵ Well-developed verbal intelligence at early age predicts well-developed communication and social skills later on in life.³⁶ Finally, found that students scoring high on verbal intelligence also scored higher on behavioural tests for communication skills.³⁷

Students in this study followed a microcounselling training programme in communication skills, also known as microskills.^{2-5,38} This means that the complex skill of professionally interviewing a client is

unravelling into small meaningful communication skills. Following Ivey and Authier⁴ and Egan,^{39,40} Lang and Van der Molen³⁸ distinguished seven basic communication skills, namely minimal encouragements, asking questions, paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, concreteness, summarizing and situation clarification and five advanced skills, namely advanced accurate empathy, confrontation, positive relabelling, examples of one's own and directness.

These skills fit within Egan's helping model^{39,40} of three stages: (1) problem clarification, (2) gaining new insights and (3) strategies for treatment. The goal of the first stage is to clarify the problem of the client. In this stage helpers mainly use the basic communication skills. During the second stage, gaining new insights, helpers try to have clients gain new insights in their situation, predominantly using the five advanced communication skills. Finally, in the third stage, strategies for treatment, client and helper seek strategies to solve the client's problems.

The basic communication skills are often taught in the first or second bachelor year of a psychology curriculum and the advanced communication skills in consecutive years. Subjects of the present study were psychology students who in their first bachelor year followed a course in basic communication skills and in their second bachelor year a course in advanced communication skills. These courses were built up according to the Cumulative Microtraining (CMT) method.⁴¹ In this method students first receive theoretical instruction about one communication skill (e.g. summarizing) and its function in a professional interview. Next, video clips show examples of inadequate and adequate performance of the skill to the students (modelling). Subsequently, students exercise the skill separately (like 'dry swimming'). For instance, with regard to the basic skill 'asking questions' students have to try to change a closed question ('Do you feel sad?') into an open question ('How do you feel?'), after which they practice the skill in a role-play with another student. Finally, fellow-students and the trainer give feedback on the student's performance in the role-play and the student formulates learning points according to this feedback. While students practice one or two new skills in each session, CMT's ultimate purpose is to integrate the communication skills that have been dealt with up to that moment in the training programme. Both courses aim at increasing the students' adequate application of the (basic or advanced) communication skills.

According to the studies that found positive relationships between verbal intelligence and communication

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