

AN INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION PROGRAM FOR IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

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This article explores the coordination, evolution, and expansion of the Communication in Instruction Master of Arts Program that is taught throughout the state of West Virginia. The article describes the program—its development goals, course offerings and structure, and evaluation techniques used to assess its effectiveness.

For the past 20 years, we have observed and coordinated the development, evolution, and expansion of a Communication in Instruction Master of Arts Program that is taught at sites throughout the state of West Virginia. In addition to teachers from West Virginia, teachers from over twenty other states and three foreign countries have taken classes in the program and received degrees offered through the program. This essay reviews the program—its development, goals, course offerings and structure, and evaluation.

WHY A PROGRAM ON COMMUNICATION IN INSTRUCTION?

In 1972, the senior author was appointed at West Virginia University as Chair of what is now the Communication Studies Department. One of the several tasks assigned him in that role by the Dean of Arts and Sciences and the President who selected him was to modify the approach taken by the department. Specifically, he was directed to change the direction of the programs in the department from a traditional skills orientation to an empirically-based social science orientation. In addition, he was charged with developing research and service programs based on that new orientation.

Since no additional funding was provided to assist in the development of a service program, he sought to develop a program that could be supported by potentially available external funding for off-campus graduate classes. He was authorized by the Deans of Education and Arts and Sciences, the Coordinator of Off-Campus Credit Programs, and the Provost for Extension and Continuing Education to initiate a new communication class designed for elementary and secondary teachers that could be offered at one site in the southern part of the state and one site in the northern part of the state. Such classes could be used to help elementary and secondary teachers fulfill mandatory requirements for periodically renewing their teaching credentials.

The demand for such classes was very high in the state. Many young teachers could not afford to move to a campus to renew their certificates and, due to the

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mountainous terrain, could not commute to the few campuses in the state that offered classes. Hence, classes that would go to the student had many advantages and few disadvantages (Richmond, 1989, 1990a; Richmond & Daly, 1975). In addition, class offerings throughout the state for teachers were very sparse because other colleges and schools refused to offer classes in an outreach fashion.

The department was allowed to offer one instructional class during Summer 1973 in two major population regions of the state. Because of the instructional communication emphasis and the convenient access, the classes were instantly popular with educators. Consequently, permission to add new classes and new teaching locations was readily available. Growth was so rapid that within five years an entire M.A. program emerged. The program was diffused systematically throughout the state by following the classic innovation-decision model developed by Rogers (Rogers with Shoemaker, 1971).

The most serious problem confronted in the development and diffusion of the program was a lack of availability of research and instructional resources in the communication field that applied directly to communication in instruction. Although the establishment of the Instructional Division in the International Communication Association evolved almost simultaneously with the development of this program, virtually every unit of every course had to be developed from scratch. Almost nothing could be drawn from the communication literature that did not need extensive adaptation to meet the needs of teachers. The development of a doctoral program in instructional communication in the department (jointly with the College of Education) was in part a response to the need for greater expertise in applying knowledge about communication to the specific needs of professional educators. This new intellectual territory focused on effective communication between teacher and student in the classroom in contrast to the field's traditional concern with the teaching of speech, *per se*.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM?

The program is designed to provide educators and people in education-related careers with learning experiences leading to a Master of Arts in Communication in Instruction. It is designed for the professional communicator (e.g., elementary and secondary teachers, trainers, and counselors) working in an educational environment. The underlying assumption of the program is that persons who complete the program will be better communicators within their chosen profession, whether that profession be teaching or a related area. While the program focuses on communication in instruction at the elementary and secondary levels, many graduates elect to focus on communication in other related environments after achieving the degree. Although over 90% of the students completing the program have been public school teachers, enrollees have included ministers, nuns, nurses, insurance salespersons, public relations specialists, training and development specialists, public and private college teachers and administrators, and Sunday-school teachers.

The program is not designed to be a substitute for a degree in education or subject matter content areas, such as math, special education, biology, or English. It is not designed to replace any pedagogical path that an educator may have pursued; rather, it is designed to complement the teaching degree that an

individual received as an undergraduate. In addition, the program is not designed to teach people how to teach public speaking, or any other specific course in speech or communication. Speech and communication teachers, however, enroll in the program for the same reason as their colleagues from other disciplines, that is, to learn how to communicate more effectively with their students.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

From the beginning, this was an applied program designed to teach school teachers and administrators how principles of communication could be applied to classroom settings so that student learning might be facilitated and improved (Richmond, 1989, 1990a; Richmond & Daly, 1975). As Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978) stated in the first book written by authors with experience in this program, "There is, indeed, a difference between knowing and teaching, and that difference is communication in the classroom" (p. 3). Hence, the predominant goal was to teach teachers about communication principles in classroom settings to enhance student learning. With this goal in mind, several ancillary goals followed.

First, a significant portion of any instructional program must be dedicated to the cognitive domain of learning, the domain concerned with the acquisition of knowledge concerning a specific field of study. The program is designed to give educators contemporary information from the field of human communication that might be used to improve their teaching methods and approaches with resulting increases in their students' information acquisition.

Second, stemming from the first goal, the program is designed to make teachers more competent consumers of research related to human communication. To that end, the program teaches the differences between adequate versus inadequate studies, reliable versus unreliable research generalizations, and good instructional research versus poor instructional research. There is no attempt to teach all of the methods of data analysis; rather, instruction focuses on general methods of distinguishing between high and low quality studies. A research study is cited, applied to classrooms generally, and then students are asked to apply it in their own classroom. The goal is for teachers to be able to pick up a journal *designed for them*, or articles written with them in mind, and be able to distinguish between good and poor research. Too often, poor research leads to instructional innovations that simply do not work.

Third, while much of the program is directed toward educating the student in the contemporary literature and research in the field of human communication, a very large portion of the time in each course is spent teaching the teachers how to apply the communication principles in their own classroom settings. Hence, a third goal is to teach the application of communication concepts in the classroom environment. Knowledge without application is virtually useless, hence, much attention is directed toward application of the specific content.

The final goal, perhaps the most meaningful one, is to influence teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and values related to affective learning in a positive direction. As Hurt et al. (1978) stated, "Even the best teacher occasionally assumes that a student has really learned if the student exits the class knowing something (s)he did not know prior to attending the class" (p. 29). Although most teachers know

that the majority of information presented is forgotten by the student almost immediately once the pressure to remember it is over, they do not understand the important role of affective learning in overcoming that problem. Consequently, it is stressed throughout this program that communication and affect are inseparable (Richmond, 1990b). The way material is taught communicates affect (positive or negative) for that material. It is stressed that teachers' communication behaviors in large measure determine students' affect for both the teacher and the subject matter.

In conjunction with the final goal, those who teach in the program are strongly encouraged to "practice what is preached." The faculty teach communication concepts, principles, and applications in a positive, affective manner, so as to increase the retention and application of knowledge in the students' own classrooms.

While all the goals are laudatory and probably representative of many programs, the final goal is essential to the underlying (and often unstated) goal of the program: dissemination of positive communication behaviors of teachers into the classrooms of the state. If the students in these classes do not have positive affect for *their* instructor and subject area, they will not take the content back to their classes. Hence, not only is there an attempt to teach teachers cognitively how to communicate positive affect about themselves and their subject matter, but also there is an attempt to model the behavior that is being advocated. The assumption is that if one likes it as a student, she or he is more likely to try it as a teacher.

COURSE OFFERINGS AND STRUCTURE

REQUIREMENTS

A minimum of 33 semester hours of graduate coursework is required, with at least 24 hours in the Department of Communication Studies and up to 9 hours of approved elective coursework. Students must take required communication coursework in the following areas: communication in the classroom, nonverbal communication in the classroom, communication in the educational organization, and advanced study in instructional communication. Students may take elective communication coursework from the following areas: communication problems of children, mass media and the educational context, interpersonal and family communication, persuasion, communication apprehension and avoidance, and intercultural communication. Elective coursework outside the communication curricula can come from the following areas: curriculum and instruction, educational administration, educational foundations, educational psychology, counseling and guidance, reading, physical education, technology education, health education, special education, speech pathology and audiology, and the major content area in which the person teaches (e.g., psychology, geography, math, history, biology, English, chemistry, foreign languages, speech, and theatre). All coursework must be approved by an advisor prior to completion of the program.

Successful completion of the M.A. program involves more than just coursework requirements. At the completion of coursework, students must successfully complete written and oral comprehensive examinations. Written comprehensive exams draw upon broad course concepts from the communication courses

as applied to theoretical and practical problems regarding communication in educational environments. The written exams are offered three times each academic year, corresponding with the three graduation periods offered by West Virginia University. Oral exams are given after the faculty have evaluated the student's written exams. Present university policy allows a graduate student up to eight years to complete all degree requirements.

SCHEDULING OF COURSES

Because of the teachers' schedules, teaching approximately 180 days from late August into early June, it is virtually impossible to offer courses in the evenings or during the day. For most teachers campus is too far away to reach in time to attend late afternoon or evening classes. Even if it were possible, it is very hectic with work and family responsibilities for most teachers to attend on-campus evening classes. Although some other programs in the university offer evening classes, this program does not lend itself to this approach. Experience has determined that intensive instructional formats are much more successful.

The schedules found to work best are those adapted to the periods when teachers generally have the most available time. This includes Saturdays during the regular school term and week-long periods throughout the summer. In order to meet the university's requirement for in-class, teacher-student contact hours, the most opportune times for class offerings are in a nine-to-five format on six Saturdays during the regular school year, and Monday through Saturday in the summers with the nine-to-five format. Each day is equivalent to two and one-half weeks of a regular semester class. Attendance is required and instructors do not grant excuses for absences because it is often impossible to make-up missed exercises, lecture or discussion time, tests, and so on. After termination of the in-class contact time, students are allowed two weeks in which to complete a course paper and mail it to the instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

The emphasis in courses currently being offered is on communication in the instructional environment. However, each course has a specific focus. Following is a brief overview of each class offered by the Department of Communication Studies.

Communication in the Classroom is the introductory course and is designed to give students an overview of how communication influences the instructional process. Specific units in the class include: an overview of the communication process, the role of communication in the classroom, selectivity, student perceptions, teacher's images, expectancies, willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, personality orientations, nonverbal communication, and group communication in the classroom.

Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom is designed to discuss the impact of nonverbal communication behaviors of students, teachers, and teacher/student interaction on student learning. Specific units in the class include: definitional issues, communication and nonverbal behavior, physical appearance, nonverbal messages of dress, kinesic behavior, facial affect, oculosic behavior, vocalic behavior, environmental, olfactive, and chronemic cues, proxemics, haptics, status and control, and immediacy in the classroom.

Communication in the Educational Organization is designed to discuss problems of communication within educational organizations, with an emphasis on elements that impact effective principal or curriculum director (supervisory) and teacher (subordinate) communication. Specific units in the class include: the communication process and its impact in organizations, characteristics of organizations, barriers to effective communication, personality and communication, management orientations, communication styles, employee satisfaction, communication of power, effective planned change, conflict, groupthink, disagreement, and effective supervisory/subordinate relationships.

Advanced Study in Instructional Communication is designed to examine the learning process, the instructional process, and the evaluation process within a communication framework and offer practical suggestions on ways to improve these tasks. Specific units in the class include: a model of instructional communication and outcomes of each phase, students' needs, ways of meeting students' needs, student test anxiety, student classroom anxiety, students' learning styles, classroom management, instructional strategies, student misbehavior, teacher misbehavior, student self-concept, teacher self-concept, instructional learning systems, and teacher burnout.

Communication Problems of Children is designed to discuss the development of communication skills in children, with particular emphasis on developmental problems such as communication anxiety, language acquisition, recognition of communication disorders, and communication competence. Specific units in the course include: overview and acquisition of communication and language, communication development, communication disorders, speech versus communication problems, dysfunctional speech communication behaviors, accent and dialect distinctions, and communication competence.

Media in Communication and Education is designed to discuss the role of media in educational and other communication environments with an emphasis on communication processes and principles relevant to television and film. Specific units in the course include: need for media literacy, media educational planning, limitations of the media, how mass media research can be used in instructional design, and how to become a more critical consumer of the media.

Interpersonal Communication in the Classroom emphasizes theory and research related to how communication impacts interpersonal relationships with specific application to the relationship between student and teacher. Specific units in the course include: characteristics of relationships, stages of relational development, interpersonal needs, exchange of resources in relationships, equity theory, affinity-seeking, loneliness, friendships, relational expectancies, self-disclosure, attribution theory, assertiveness, criticism, death and grieving, jealousy, possessiveness, divorce, working women/men and home/school consequences, dirty fighting, fair fighting, and defensiveness.

Persuasion focuses on the various theories and principles of persuasion with emphasis on contemporary research literature. The course focuses on methods of influencing the attitudes and behaviors of students in the classroom. Specific units in the class include: persuasion foundations, elaboration likelihood model, social judgment theory, ego-involvement, consistency theory, student resistance to teacher, social learning, classical conditioning, reinforcement theory, inoculation theory, and effective instructional influence.

the current staff. This includes serving as a second instructor in the class in which he or she wishes to serve as a lead teacher at a later time.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

Evaluation of any instructional program is always a difficult process. The most significant concerns are *who* will evaluate the program and *how* it will be done. From the beginning of the program, it has been the policy that the persons completing the program should be the primary evaluators of the program and they should be given opportunities to evaluate each class, each instructor, and the entire program. Instructors are strongly encouraged to collect anonymous, written feedback at the end of *every class day*. This permits instructors to make changes when something is not working without waiting for an entire class to be harmed. Each class and each instructor is evaluated by a formal evaluation questionnaire after the final examination. While some instructors may not always prefer the model that allows the student to evaluate the class and instructor, faculty in this program have unanimously agreed this is a necessary method: The students of the program are adult professionals and their positive affective responses are part of the specified desired outcomes of the instruction.

The program, itself, is evaluated by each student when he or she is officially notified that he or she will be graduating. This feedback is given in an oral fashion (only after the student knows he or she is graduating) and is often used to assist in the improvement of classes, modification of the structure of classes, and modification of the program. Approximately three years after graduation, former students are asked anonymously to evaluate the long-term effects of the program.

While the above methods work well for this program, external evaluations also have been performed as a part of regular departmental evaluations and on an *ad hoc* basis. Visits to classes for the purpose of interacting with students and/or observation of the classes themselves have been made by three different people holding the title "Coordinator of Off-Campus Credit Instruction," three different people serving as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, one Provost for Instruction, one Provost for Off-Campus and Continuing Education, two people serving as University President, and one state governor. Special formal evaluations of the program have been performed by a member of the State Department of Instruction and an SCA President. In all cases, the program has received a positive evaluation. As a result of these evaluations, and those of the students themselves, the program has attained such visibility and acceptance in the state that Speech Communication has been approved as one of only four degree-program areas that may be used by *all teachers* for graduate in-field certification requirements for pay increases.

The program now has been developed and refined to the point that it can be introduced at other institutions with only minimal adaptations. In addition to the currently available workbooks and course outlines, textbooks specifically designed for each course are scheduled for publication this year.

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