

# The Development of the Teacher Clarity Short Inventory (TCSI) to Measure Clear Teaching in the Classroom

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*This study presents the Teacher Clarity Short Inventory (TCSI) as an alternative to existing measures of teacher clarity. Though existing scales measure both the clarity of content and classroom processes, they are disproportionate in length when compared to common instructional measures, such as measures of immediacy, student state motivation, and student affect. Analyses revealed a 10 item scale with an acceptable factor structure, acceptable reliability and validity. Furthermore, the instrument measures both the clarity of instructional content and instructional processes.*

Although two recent measures of teacher clarity exist (Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997; & Simonds, 1997), they share a fundamental problem in terms of their use in instructional research. Because they are longer than other instructional measures (of immediacy, affect for instructors and subjects, motivation, and learning), valuable time is spent that could be saved if a shorter instrument with comparable reliability were available. This study presents the Teacher Clarity Short Inventory (TCSI), a 10-item instrument with items related to content and process clarity which can be used with the short measures common in instructional research.

## TEACHER CLARITY

Teacher clarity has been defined as a variable which represents the process by which an instructor is able to effectively stimulate the desired meaning of course content and processes in the minds of students through the use of appropriately-structured verbal and

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nonverbal messages (Chesebro, 1998). This definition is based on research related to clarity from several different but related perspectives. Some research has focused on verbal clarity including qualities such as fluency (Hiller, Fisher, & Kaess, 1969), vagueness (Land, 1979), and verbal mazes (Smith, 1977). Research related to clarity also has focused on the structuring of presentations: organization, discontinuity, the use of advanced organizers (Alexander, Frankiewicz & Williams, 1979; Ausubel, 1963), transitions and internal previews and reviews (Cruickshank & Kennedy, 1986), and explicit instruction (Rosenshine, 1987). The nonverbal element of clarity is related to the use of time spent by instructors covering a topic and as well as their speaking pace. Teacher immediacy also may be an important nonverbal element of teacher clarity in that immediacy functions to gain students' attention, thus "opening the door" for verbal teaching behaviors to function effectively (Murray, 1991; Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997). Recent research on clarity has expanded the construct of clarity to include the clear communication of classroom processes in addition to course content (Civikly, 1992; Kendrick & Darling, 1990; Simonds, 1997). Each of these areas of research are represented in the above definition of clarity and should be considered along with instrument length when measuring clarity in instructional research.

The Teacher Clarity Report (TCR) by Simonds (1997) was created to expand the notion of clarity beyond the realm of content presentation. The scale consists of 20 Likert type items. Ten items are related to the clear communication of course content. Items include "uses examples when presenting content," "uses the board, transparencies, or other visual aids during class," and "gives previews of material to be covered" (Simonds, 1997, p. 289). In addition to collecting items related to the clarity of content presentation, 10 items were added to measure the extent to which teachers are clear in communicating classroom processes. The expanded notion of clarity includes the communication of how assignments should be approached, the relevance of course work to students, and the use of feedback to enhance classroom understanding. The entire TCR has yielded acceptable reliability (.93) as have its subscales which measure content clarity (.89) and process clarity (.88).

Sidelinger and McCroskey (1997) also have presented a measure of teacher clarity. It is an expanded version of the scale used by Powell and Harville (1990) which contains additional items related to the clarity of written communication in the classroom such as syllabi. The scale consists of 22 items. This scale also includes items related to the communication of classroom processes, including "projects assigned for the class have unclear guidelines," "my teacher is not clear when defining guidelines for out of class assignments," and "my teacher is ambiguous when setting guidelines for the class" (Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997, p. 4-5). This scale has yielded acceptable reliability (.95).

Though both the TCR and the clarity scale by Sidelinger and McCroskey have demonstrated their reliability and validity, they are disproportionate to other measures frequently used in instructional research. For example, they are twice as long as the most common measure of immediacy (Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994) which consists of 10 items. The student state motivation measure (Christophel, 1990) consists of 12 items. Measures of affect for instructors and course content each contain 8 items respectively. When existing measures of teacher clarity are used in conjunction with these smaller scales, clarity may predict additional variance simply as a function of the increased precision of the measure relative to that of the other measures. Therefore, results related to clarity may be due more to a measurement artifact than to the actual influence of clarity. With this in mind, the present study seeks to present a measure of teacher clarity which measures clarity of

content and process, is reliable and valid, and is proportionate to other instructional measures in terms of its length.

### SCALE DEVELOPMENT

The Sidelinger and McCroskey (1997) measure was subjected to factor analysis in order to isolate ten acceptable items which would comprise a shorter measure of clarity. This instrument was analyzed because it already was being used in conjunction with a different study (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998). Factor analysis of the 22 item measure revealed a single factor. Ten items highly loaded on the factor were chosen. Six items were worded positively and four were worded negatively. Six items were low inference indicators while four were higher-inference indicators. Of these, three related to process clarity and three related to content clarity. The alpha reliability for these ten items is .92. The items that comprise the TCSI are reported in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1  
Items in the TCSI

Strongly Agree = 5      Agree = 4      Undecided = 3      Disagree = 2      Strongly Disagree = 1

1. My teacher clearly defines major concepts (Explicitly states definitions, corrects partial or incorrect student responses, refines terms to make definitions more clear).
2. \*My teacher's answers to student questions are unclear.
3. In general, I understand my teacher.
4. \*Projects assigned for the class have unclear guidelines.
5. My teacher's objectives for the course are clear.
6. My teacher is straightforward in her or his lecture.
7. \*My teacher is not clear when defining guidelines for out of class assignments.
8. My teacher uses clear and relevant examples (He/she uses interesting, challenging examples that clearly illustrate the point. He/she refines unclear student examples. He/she does not accept incorrect student examples).
9. \*In general, I would say that my teacher's classroom communication is unclear.
10. My teacher is explicit in her or his instruction.

\* Numbers should be reverse coded.

These items then were factor analyzed. Analyses revealed the presence of one strong factor. The factor structure and item correlation with the total scale are printed in Table 1.

### DISCUSSION

The analyses indicate that the 10 item Teacher Clarity Short Inventory can reliably measure content and process clarity in instruction, making it a useful measure of clarity in terms of the definition of the construct. Furthermore, this measure is proportional to other measures of instructional communication, including measures of immediacy, student state motivation, and measures of student affect. Therefore, results obtained using this scale will not contain measurement artifacts as a function of the size of the measure. Most importantly, this scale will save the time of research participants and still will measure clarity with high reliability.

**TABLE 1**  
Factor Structure and Item/Total Correlations

Item	Factor Loading	Item/Total Correlation
1.	.76	.72
2.	.72	.69
3.	.76	.74
4.	.73	.67
5.	.73	.70
6.	.75	.72
7.	.77	.72
8.	.78	.74
9.	.64	.62
10.	.67	.64

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