



DIVISION III

Diverse Perspectives on Communication

Communication: Overview and Framework

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Teachers are professional communicators. Teacher educators are responsible for preparing prospective teachers to enter the profession. To the extent

that teachers enter the profession less than fully competent to communicate with their students, their students' parents, their colleagues, their administrators, and the general public of the communities where they teach, the teacher education program has failed them.

Unfortunately, if we were to judge most of our programs by this standard, failure would be the norm. Even the majority of teacher *educators* have little or no formal training in the field of communication. For elementary and secondary teachers who have had a course in the field, the course they are most likely to have taken is public speaking. While such courses can be useful, they typically do not even introduce the student to the process of human communication as it exists in typical classrooms. As any experienced teacher knows, most teachers do very little public speaking as such, but they are involved in communication virtually all day, every day. In a very real sense, there is no teaching without communication.

While there are those of us who are both instructional communication specialists and teacher educators, we are relatively few in number and our influence, for good or ill, is not widely felt in teacher-education programs across the country. While there are a few books available in this area (for example, McCroskey, 1992; Richmond, 1992; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992), these are not required reading for students in most teacher-education programs. Hence, it came as a very pleasant surprise to us to learn that one of the four sections of this volume was to be devoted to communication and that we were selected to introduce this section and comment on the top papers that were chosen to appear here. ATE's decision to place this emphasis on communication is a very important step toward creating a wider understanding of the important role communication plays in the teaching profession. To facilitate this objective, therefore, let us begin by providing an overview of some of the areas within the study of communication, which may have direct bearing on the teaching profession.

AREAS OF STUDY IN COMMUNICATION

The field of communication is very broad and, depending on how one chooses to define its parameters, includes such vastly divergent concerns as theater, speech, telecommunications, journalism, advertising, television production, packaging, audiology, and insect communication. For our purposes here we can focus on a somewhat smaller range of concerns. The areas that we have identified as highly associated with the teaching profession include general communication theory, nonverbal communication, organizational communication, communication problems of children (and adults), mass-

mediated communication, interpersonal and relational communication, persuasion and social influence, and intercultural communication. We will briefly consider each of these and attempt to indicate how each might provide useful information for teachers, and hence, teacher educators.

General communication theory. This is a broad area of scholarship that draws on both philosophical and empirical scholarship in the pursuit of understanding how the communication process actually occurs, what are the components of the process, what variables operate within the process, how communication happens, and what are its effects. "Instructional" communication theorists seek to apply general communication theory to the specific instructional context in order to generate specific theories relating to instruction. Testing of such theories in actual classrooms permits the refinement and amplification of the theories to the point that they can provide a substantive base for instruction of preservice and in-service teachers.

Nonverbal communication. While most of the emphasis on communication in our educational system is on *verbal* communication, most of the human communication that occurs is *nonverbal* communication. Although many people believe one can "read a person like a book," as was suggested by the title of a popular book, the facts suggest the contrary. Nonverbal communication is an extremely complex process and one that has an important impact in the instructional process. Unfortunately, very few teachers have any formal instruction in this area and most are prone to make mistakes in producing or interpreting one or more of the categories of nonverbal behaviors—eye behavior, facial expression, touch, gesture, movement, interpersonal spacing, use of territory, vocal behavior, use of time, scent, and so on. Understanding intercultural differences in communication behavior is virtually impossible without a firm understanding of the nonverbal aspects of communication. It is these nonverbal differences that are most likely to cause problems between people with different cultural backgrounds.

Organizational communication. It has been said that more teachers leave the profession because of their inability to get along (communicate effectively) with their supervisors than any other reason. Whether that is the case or not, the relationship of a teacher with her or his supervisor has a pervasive impact on that teacher's behavior and success as a professional. The study of organizational communication within the context of the school system helps the teacher understand the source and impact of power in communication with superiors and parents, as well as with his or her own students, the nature of conflict and its management, the formal and informal communication systems, and the

identification of communicative roles and rules in educational systems. Being able to communicate in organizationally sensitive ways can be a teacher's most important survival skill.

Communication problems of children. For several decades, most teacher education programs have introduced prospective teachers to information relating to some of the problems that their students may have with communication, information concerning such common problems as articulation disorders, voice disorders, stuttering, and hearing loss. More recently identified, or at least more commonly recognized, problems have been added to some programs—dyslexia, autism, various reading problems, and problems stemming from various diseases. But most teachers are not exposed to information on the most common communication problem of all, one that has only become widely recognized in the last decade. This is the problem of chronic communication apprehension and avoidance, a problem confronted by one person in five in the United States, both children and adults—including teachers. Research has indicated that most teachers, as a function of their desire to help these children, will do precisely the things that are most *harmful* to them. Much research is needed on how teachers can communicate more effectively with those students with communication problems, and how to help those students overcome their problems.

Mass-mediated communication. Contemporary children live in a mass-media dominated world. The impacts of the media on children have a major impact on how they relate to teachers and the instructional process. Teachers with an understanding of how the media work and how they impact children can use this information to advantage in working with children. Even the commercial media provide many, many opportunities for the astute teacher. But there is still much about how children relate to the media that is unknown, and as the media change, new questions continue to arise for educators. We particularly need research on prosocial uses of the media that can be employed by classroom teachers. Even video games have the potential for prosocial uses.

Interpersonal and relational communication. The study of interpersonal communication involves, among other things, the ways people develop relationships through communication. Positive teacher-student relationships, particularly in the early grades, are critical to student learning. In large measure, students learn what they want to learn, and if they have a positive relationship with a teacher they are more likely to want to learn from the teacher. Research has indicated that when student/teacher relationships are positive, there is a substantial reduction in student misbehaviors and a much greater likelihood of student compliance with teacher requests.

Persuasion and social influence. Concern with persuasion and social influence has an extremely long tradition in the field of communication, stretching back into antiquity. For well over 2,000 years, scholars have sought to identify means by which one person can obtain the cooperation and/or compliance of others through communication. Teachers' concerns with discipline, classroom management, and time-on-task are directly related to the concerns with persuasion and social influence. The classical study of persuasion was motivated by the desire to use communication as a prosocial alternative to coercion of others. As it was then, it is today. Teachers who lack communication competence in the area of persuasion and social influence are often left with nothing but coercive techniques to control student behavior, the use of which will produce no long-term behavior change but will create negative teacher/student relationships. One of the papers that follow is specifically concerned with planning communication in this kind of situation, so we will address this concern again later.

Intercultural communication. The study of communication between people with differing cultural backgrounds is the most rapidly growing area in the field of communication. Teachers today confront intercultural communication problems not even dreamed of by teachers a decade or two ago. Although the norm in the past was a teacher with a group of students from the same cultural background as the teacher, that no longer is the case in many areas of the country. Today it is not uncommon to find a group of students from one culture with a teacher from a very different culture. An even more difficult situation exists in some areas: a classroom with a half-dozen or more cultures represented. We even know of one middle school that has identified thirty-seven distinct cultural groupings within its student body. Since two of the papers that follow relate to intercultural concerns, we will address this concern again later.

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH TRENDS

We do not presume that most teacher educators are going to become major communication researchers as a result of our discussions here. However, many may wish to know what kinds of research efforts have been conducted in the recent past and how to find summaries of that research which may be useful. Thus, this section will be devoted to reviewing some of the areas that have received attention and noting references where additional work can be surveyed.

Conceptualizations of communication. Many people make serious errors in communication simply because they do not understand its basic workings. In our work with teachers we have administered a simple 10-item, true-false test covering some of the most common misconceptions about communication. Less than one-fourth of those tested achieve a passing mark on the test. This is not a consequence of teachers being unintelligent. Rather, it is because they have learned misconceptions that are commonly espoused in our schools and in our society. If one starts off in the wrong direction, it is hard to get where one wants to go. These misconceptions are what lead many otherwise bright and well-intentioned people to make unnecessary communication blunders. Discussion of these conceptual issues is included in many introductory books concerned with communication in instruction (for example, McCroskey, 1992, Chs. 1 and 2).

Teacher/student affinity. "Affinity" is the student's liking for the teacher, the rapport the teacher has with the student. In general, the higher the student's affinity for the teacher, the more likely it is that the student will engage in behaviors recommended by the teacher, that the student will like the subject matter the teacher teaches, and that the student will learn that subject matter. This body of research, as summarized by Daly & Kreiser (1992), represents a direct application of interpersonal communication research to the classroom context. Earlier work identified twenty-five techniques that one person could use to enhance affinity with another in an interpersonal context. The research investigating the applicability of this research to the instructional arena has indicated that many of the same techniques work in this context, but it also identified several that were inappropriate for classroom use. Teachers who use the appropriate affinity-seeking techniques have been found to be better liked by their students, to produce higher motivation in those students, and to increase student learning in both the cognitive and affective domains.

Teacher immediacy and nonverbal behavior. "Immediacy" is produced by communication behaviors that increase a perception of psychological or physical closeness on the part of others. If we perceive a person as immediate, we feel closer to that person. In our summary of this research (McCroskey & Richmond, 1992) we have noted the very strong impacts of teacher immediacy on affective and cognitive learning. Recent research has provided strong indications that such effects are mediated by the impact of immediacy on student motivation. Essentially, teacher immediacy behaviors result in increased student motivation, which produces heightened student learning. Whereas immediacy research has focused primarily on nonverbal behavior, research

related to verbal aspects of immediacy indicates that such behaviors are also associated with positive motivation and learning outcomes.

Teacher power and behavior-alteration techniques. The study of power in human relationships has drawn attention from scholars in most of the social sciences and several of the humanities. Power is a central fact of life in organizations. It is no less so in organizations devoted to teaching. Power is something that is negotiated by the participants in the instructional process—by the teachers and the students. When instruction is at its best, questions of power fade into oblivion. When instruction is at its worst, the battle for power becomes central. Recognizing this, communication researchers have sought to determine what communication approaches lead to teacher effectiveness and reduction of “power wars” between teachers and students. The early research confirmed that the impacts of various bases of power in the instructional environment were not unlike those in other organizational contexts (Richmond & Roach, 1992). That is, use of coercive and assigned power tends to reduce cognitive and affective learning, whereas use of referent and expert power tends to have a positive effect on both cognitive and affective learning.

Subsequent research (Plax & Kearney, 1992) generated a wide variety of specific communication techniques designed to alter the behavior of others. This work was applied to the specific context of teacher/student communication. The results of these efforts indicated that use of several of the techniques had severe negative impacts on students’ affective responses, techniques that were rooted in punishment or the threat of punishment or associated with the presumed authority of the school system to regulate student behavior. In contrast, a substantial number of techniques were found to be usable by teachers without the negative impacts found for the others. These “prosocial” communication techniques, then, were seen as methods for teachers to use to manage student behavior in positive ways leading to student learning.

Student resistance to teachers. As an outgrowth of the above research, efforts have been made to determine what factors tend to lead students to resist the teacher’s efforts at controlling and directing their behavior and what forms this resistance may take (Kearney & Plax, 1992). One of the outcomes of this research has been the realization that teacher immediacy has impact in this area as well as in the more direct ways noted above. It was found that students are much less likely to resist the influence attempts of immediate teachers and, it would seem, the students may not even recognize some of these efforts as being attempts to control their behavior.

Communication apprehension and avoidance. One of the most extensive research efforts in the communication field has been directed toward the problem of communication apprehension and avoidance. As a result, we now know that the impact of apprehension and/or avoidance can be much more severe in the instructional context than was first believed. Even the threat of having to talk in a classroom may substantially retard the learning of many students. Some teaching techniques involving student interaction and/or participation—long thought to be advantageous to all students—now are known to present severe problems for some students. Such popular instructional assignments as show and tell, oral reading, oral book reports, oral current events, group projects, and individual science projects need to be tempered with other alternatives for some students. Since problems of apprehension and avoidance have their roots in both genetic and experiential factors, these problems are very difficult or impossible to overcome in the normal classroom context, although they are amendable to treatment with behavior therapy techniques. Hence, teachers need to be aware of how to be of what help they can to students with these problems without making the problems worse. Two recent books summarize this work and provide guidance for interested teachers and teacher educators (M. Booth-Butterfield & S. Booth-Butterfield, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991).

Teacher images. No verbal or nonverbal message is interpreted apart from its source. In fact, the source/message relationship is so strong that receivers will create a source in their minds if the real source is unknown. Thus, the image of the teacher in the student's mind often determines the effectiveness of that teacher's messages. Factors that influence the images of sources have been studied for over 2,500 years. Recent research has applied the findings of such efforts to the classroom context and learned that the credibility of the teacher helps determine whether students learn the content, the attractiveness of the teacher helps determine whether students are willing to take the teacher's class, and the degree of homophily (similarity) the teacher has with the students sets the tone for the "culture" of that classroom (for example, McCroskey, 1992, Ch. 7). This factor is explored in the context of a multicultural classroom in one of the following papers.

Intercultural instructional communication theory. This final area is identified with an intentional misnomer. There really is no such thing today as intercultural instructional communication theory. The overwhelming majority of instructional communication research and theory is like most communication research and theory and most educational research and theory. It is heavily impacted by the ethnocentric orientations of the dominant culture of this

society. Intercultural tests of the generalizability of our instructional communication theories have only recently begun. We trust this section of future books in this series will be able to note significant advances in this important area.

THREE RESEARCH REPORTS

The three research reports that follow are very different from each other and address very different kinds of issues. The first is an experimental study that examines the complexity of teachers' planning for dealing with student misbehaviors. The second, also an experimental study, investigates the effectiveness of a persuasive effort to increase cultural sensitivity embedded within an undergraduate basic communication course. The third paper is an ethnographic analysis of the teacher/student interaction in a highly successful college-prep program for Hispanic students in a large public high school. Each of these studies addresses different kinds of issues with differing degrees of relevance to communication instruction.

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