CHAPTER 3

The Communication Perspective

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INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION HISTORY

The focus of this book is power. Critical to assessing the evolution of power, from conceptualization to operationalization, is a background understanding of the assumptions that govern investigations of communication in the instructional context. The instructional communication perspective is an integration of the management of communication messages and the facilitation of learning. Frequently, effective instructional communication is a delicate balance of using strategies that control perceptions, that control behavior, and that ultimately maximize students' potential to learn. This chapter is intended to assist the reader in understanding the instructional communication perspective.

Berlo (1960) was one of the first communication scholars to recognize the interrelationship between communication and learning. The general importance of communication in instruction was not widely recognized until the 1972 International Communication Association (ICA) convention focused on communication and learning. The following year, this area of study within the communication discipline was acknowledged by the establishment of the Instructional Division in ICA (amended in 1982 to include developmental communication). In 1977, Communication Yearbook I contained the first attempt by instructional communication scholars to define and explain this complex, and often illusive, component of the
communication discipline (Scott & Wheeless, 1977). From this initial attempt through 1982, the Communication Yearbook "Overviews" continued to explicate the range of instructional communication.

The struggle to define the parameters of instructional communication is still being waged. A paramount obstacle to this explanation was confusion of research on teaching speech (speech or communication education) with research on the role of communication in the instructional process (instructional communication). The initial "Overview" in the Yearbook series (Scott & Wheeless, 1977) attempted to delineate these areas of study by showcasing instructional communication research results that encompass much wider concerns than the "teaching of speech/communication." The categories used to examine data based research were an instructional variation of source, message, channel, and receiver. The authors suggested that the adaptation of psychological and learning theories would provide the foundation for future instructional communication theory.

Not surprisingly, the second Communication Yearbook "Overview" (Lashbrook & Wheeless, 1978) suggested how learning typologies, theories, and strategies may assist instructional communication scholars to explain why communication strategies are effective or ineffective. Once again, there was a prediction that the integration of learning typologies and theories with communication variables and theories would emerge as the driving force behind future understanding of instructional communication.

INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

As we proceed with our look at the evolution of instructional communication, Communication Yearbook 3 (Wheeless & Hurt, 1979) resumes the attempts to distinguish instructional communication from communication/speech education. The authors suggest that "instructional communication and communication education constitute opposite ends of an intellectual continuum representing approaches [in] an attempt to define and utilize the impact of communication on human learning" (p. 525). Specifically, they submit that instructional communication is concerned with the implementation of communication systems that facilitate learning without regard for any specific academic discipline. At the other end, however, communication education focuses on instructional strategies specifically designed to teach the content of the speech communication discipline.

Just as there are major theoretical distinctions among approaches to learning, differences also exist in perspectives taken by scholars who investigate instructional communication and those who concentrate on
3. THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

speech/communication education. These approaches are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, communication scholars would do well to use both approaches in conjunction with each other. Explicitly, instructional communication frames communication strategies for the classroom from the bases of learning paradigms. Instructional communication, for scholars devoted to communication education, proposes applying the principles underlying learning perspectives as a guide for adapting specific instructional strategies to enhance the communication content being taught.

In an attempt to link instructional communication and communication education, the *Communication Yearbook* 3 (Wheless & Hurt, 1979) “Overview” centered on instructional strategies that operate as instructional communication systems. Within these communication systems it was no longer enough to identify the source, message, channel, and receiver. A system was then described as a process. Within that process, instructional strategies were defined according to the action, interaction, and/or transaction model(s) of communication. Consistent with these distinctions and the necessity to integrate communication strategies with learning outcomes, we began to see the emergence of a more receiver-oriented approach to instructional communication. That is, traditional, mediated, and innovative strategies were evaluated by criteria including instructional goals, developmental level of students, cognitive style of students, efficiency and accuracy, and student satisfaction (Brophy & Good, 1986; Gilstrap & Martin, 1975).

One such example is heard whenever there is a comparison of the two systems of higher education in California. That is, proponents of the California State University (CSU) system praise the ability of CSU campuses to offer general education courses without resorting to the large lecture format used at University of California (UC) schools. However, either program could be praised for using the results from educational research wisely.

Regardless of specific content, large-group lecturing, as done in the UC system, is an economical strategy for providing a large number of students with (a) an introduction to a new topic, (b) the integration and synthesis of more information than the individual student could alone, (c) the background information to understand higher level concepts, and (d) the information necessary to master objectives such as comprehension and valuing. The CSU system, by addressing smaller classes in a lecture/discussion approach, is addressing the disadvantages of the large lecture. Again, apart from content, the CSU model attempts to assist students who might endure in a large class but be at a disadvantage because of (a) the inability to listen critically, (b) the ineptitude to process aural information quickly enough, and (c) the incapacity to remain passively on task.

Each system has examined the subject matter to be taught, the instruc-
tional strategies available, and adopted a program that is adapted to the learning needs of different students. Analyses like these are invaluable to counselors and advisors who are making recommendations for higher education. When students' abilities are matched with the appropriate instructional context, students' likelihood of success is increased. From the sound bases of learning theory, we become better able to assess our "audience" and make more effective message choices. Educational generalizations such as these inspired additional research in the instructional context, where application and implementation of strategies could be guided by the principles of communication.

COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

During this same period, publication of the book Communication in the Classroom (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978) permitted more confusion in a discipline that was trying to identify or quantify scholarship representing instructional communication. As a result, members of the communication discipline added "communication in the classroom" to the previously interchangeable "instructional communication" and "communication education." The position was clear, however, that Communication in the Classroom designated instructional scholars by their attention to effective applications of communication principles to any learning environment. As the authors stated in the introduction, "our general purpose was not to teach communication theory to educators, but to show them how principles of communication could be applied to classroom settings, so that student learning might be facilitated and improved" (p. 1).

That purpose was undoubtedly among the reasons some communication scholars decided that Communication in the Classroom was a "how-to" book for the lay community. Many believed that it was not appropriate for those who already understood the complexities of communication theory. Another assertion in the introduction likely created some antagonism from scholars in higher education. Foreshadowing an anti-pedagogy, pro-subject-matter move a decade later, Hurt, et al., (1978) proclaimed their "belief that certification of competence in a particular subject matter is not enough to certify competence in teaching" (p. 3). Furthermore, they concluded that "there is, indeed, a difference between knowing and teaching, and that difference is communication in the classroom" (p. 3). It is not unusual that a community of scholars reared in a liberal arts tradition, who were required to exhibit competence in content and not necessarily in teaching, were skeptical of the distinctions that separate
3. THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Communication in the classroom, instructional communication, and speech/communication education.

The relative absence of any additional attempts to resolve the disparity of meaning commonly ascribed to instructional communication, speech education, and communication in the classroom may be significant. The 1980s was an era of introspection and attempted resolutions at a resolution of our national "identity." As we enter the 1990s, we have adopted a standard of civility, which entails using identity labels that are "politically correct." Therefore, it appears inevitable that communication scholars will soon learn to use the titles that their colleagues prefer. It is our hope that the 1990s will lead to a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between instructional communication and speech/communication education, and that all of us can appreciate the importance of communication in the classroom.

TEACHER'S INFLUENCE ON LEARNING: THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

Communication scholars who examined Communication in the Classroom (Hurt et al., 1978) looking for the information of "how to" teach communication in the classroom were disappointed. What they discovered were some familiar variables associated specifically with the communication process but, in this case, applied to learning in the classroom. Consistent with the previous Communication Yearbook reviews, readers found that there must be a basic understanding of learning that enables teachers to best facilitate learning in the classroom. Therefore, there is a discussion of the learning domains (Hurt et al., 1978, pp. 28-31). Critical to the understanding of the role that teachers have in the classroom is their impact on the affective domain of learning.

Friedrich (1978) posited a possible relationship among the three domains of learning and the direct influence of teachers. He supposed that it is the impact of the teacher's communication on students' affect (liking) that creates students' motivation. There is an assumption that if the teacher is able to create positive affect toward school, subject, and teacher, then the students will spend more time on task, leading to higher achievement in both the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Likewise, a teacher who creates negative affect will influence a decline in students' cognitive and psychomotor learning. If teachers accept this premise, then the focus of their strategies in the classroom begin with affect. Later, the teachers' focus may shift to different approaches that facilitate or challenge cognitive and psychomotor learning while maintaining a positive environment.
Application of this approach with regard to affective learning has stimulated interest in many of the affective variables that are pervasive in the instructional literature. The Andersen (1979) study was fundamental to that evolution. She not only expanded a measure of affective learning (Scott & Wheless, 1975) but also established validity from the observations of nonverbal immediacy and perceptions of solidarity. These choices of variables were particularly important given their conceptual definitions. That is, Mehrabian (1969) referred to immediacy as communication behaviors that "enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (p. 203). Immediacy appears to be one component of solidarity that encompasses the perceived degree of psychological, social, and perhaps physical closeness between people. Brown (1965) and Wheless (1976, 1978) provided a more explicit explanation of the solidarity concept. Together, these variables confirmed the premise that teachers' behaviors and the perceptions of those teachers do have a significant impact on the affective learning domain. Andersen (1979) did not observe a significant relationship between nonverbal immediacy and cognitive learning. This most likely was because the classes studied employed a modified mastery approach. This seminal work inspired an entire genre of research that continues investigating the relationship of communication constructs to affective learning in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSES

Before addressing additional variables that have received the most attention from instructional communication scholars, we will look at the research issues associated with the results reported. Today, many of the issues remain the same as those discussed in Yearbook 4 (Daly & Korinek, 1980) and Yearbook 5 (Van Kleeck & Daly, 1982). What is important to understand is that, no matter which method or analysis is used, there are both advantages and disadvantages to be considered. Therefore, as Van Kleeck and Daly (1982) suggested, "the suitability of any methodological approach lies . . . not in its ideological foundations but rather in its suitability for the research question or questions guiding the investigation" (p. 702).

The selections from these research alternatives involve reader–author agreement or disagreement. It is our hope that differing perspectives will instigate dialogues that will assist us in making future decisions. Whether we agree or not, openness to methodological alternatives provides the most information to assist with future research decisions. The "Overviews" in Yearbook 4 (Daly & Korinek, 1980) and Yearbook 5 (Van Kleeck & Daly,
3. THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

1982) provide summaries of issues that apply as much to our present research as it did to the studies discussed then. Specifically, experimental researchers continue to consider issues such as experimental realism, manipulation validity, and appropriateness of dependent measures. Researchers who use observational techniques focus necessarily on choices of an observational system, multiple categorization, observational frequency, and coding interpretations. Finally, there is a growing body of research that confronts the issues of descriptive-ethnological approaches. Those concerns include sampling representativeness and the degree to which there can be any procedure to investigate validity and reliability of the research project. Investigative approaches are as varied and controversial as they were a decade ago. This evolutionary view of research in the area of instructional communication is a microcosm of the methods and issues that are pervasive in the entire field. We are reminded that each approach to communication research has a longer history in other disciplines. There are no correct answers to how instructional communication should be studied. Decisions are driven by the question and subject to the preferences of the researcher. Scholarly research approaches have been as diverse as the variables and the scholars doing the investigations.

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION/AVOIDANCE

One prime example of the diversity that has been prevalent in instructional communication research is that which addresses constructs variously labeled communication apprehension, shyness, reticence, unwillingness or willingness to communicate, predispositions toward verbal communication, communication avoidance, confidence as a speaker, public speaking anxiety, communication fear, and state anxiety. These concepts are most frequently associated with self-report measures. However, different methodological approaches have been used to investigate these phenomena. Physiological measures have included heart rate, skin conductivity, muscle tension, respiration, skin temperature, and brain wave activity. An additional body of research that focuses on apprehension and anxiety is based on observer perceptions. These perceptions include rating behaviors such as voice quality, verbal fluency, facial expression, gross bodily movement, and hand and arm gestures.

What does not appear to be controversial is agreement on the negative perceptions of students’ apprehensive and avoidant behaviors in U.S. classrooms. Another result that is consistently reported in the literature is the inverse relationship between social-communicative anxiety and self-esteem. This becomes critical to instructional communication scholars when
combined with educational results that invariably report a significant association between low self-esteem and low learning achievement. However, researchers again take divergent approaches as to how anxiety should be remediated.

If the source of the communication dysfunction is attributed to response-inhibition, then systematic desensitization has been reported as effective. However, if the source of the anxiety is targeted as a skill deficit, then skills training would be more likely to have a remediating effect. From a cognitive orientation, there is evidence that cognitive restructuring, which involves replacing negative self-statements with coping statements, also has been effective by reducing communication-bound anxiety. The advantages that this considerable body of research has provided are an opportunity to assess divergent conceptualizations, measures of social-communicative anxiety, and a spectrum of successful remediation techniques. (For a more complete discussion of these research topics, see Avoiding Communication, Daly & McCroskey, 1984.) Teachers' sensitivity to the negative expectancies of highly apprehensive students, instructional practices that create additional stress, and the communication climate in the classroom may increase the potential successes for those students. Understanding the nature of communication disorders that affect students provides teachers with the obligation to wield their power conscientiously in the instructional context.

INTERPERSONAL VARIABLES
IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT

A willingness to try new approaches and examine communication variables under conditions other than traditional interpersonal situations has had a distinct impact on instructional communication. Examination of variables such as homophily (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975), attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974), affinity seeking (Bell & Daly, 1984), and compliance gaining (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1985) has contributed significant information for teachers to use when targeting affective learning. A common characteristic of these variables, along with immediacy and solidarity, is that they represent a continuum. Perceptions of these characteristics range from the positive, reflecting an approach to what we like, to the opposite, where negative perceptions reflect our avoidance of what we don't like.

Fortunately, the effects from a large number of variables reported in the instructional communication literature contribute to a greater repertoire of strategies for anyone who is attempting to manipulate the communication process to maximize potential learning. We can immediately apply what can
3. THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

be learned from selected investigations of the variables just mentioned. First, the attraction literature would lead us to believe that we may enhance positive perceptions of our appearance by choosing to dress appropriately from the student’s perspective. In higher education, this includes younger professors dressing more formally and older teachers choosing attire that at least reflects the present decade. More often than not, attraction is reciprocal; so when we act as though we like to help the students and enjoy spending time with them, we expect an increase in the probability that they will want to work and spend time with us.

The identical principle works with regard to perceptions of homophily. That is, if the students perceive that our attitudes and values are more similar to than different from theirs, the greater probability we have of influencing their attitudes, values, and, ultimately, behavior. In the instructional context, results indicate that teachers have a greater probability of influencing attitudes when students perceive “optimal heterophily” in the student–teacher relationship. Specifically, teachers who are seen as somewhat similar to their students and also perceived as having greater expertise than the students will be more influential. Data about instructional strategies may optimize the teacher’s ability to effectively alter students’ attitudes. Results show clearly that discussion groups are more effective than lecturing when the goal is to change students attitudes. However, control of student perceptions of “similarities” and “differences” constantly requires a delicate balance of messages from the teacher.

For example, a colleague of ours often made a point of using the “F” word at the beginning of the semester. The word he used was, of course, “feminist.” He found that, even knowing his pro-feminist attitudes, very few students took him seriously or even tried to use non sexist language in their assignments. After waging this battle, semester after semester, he decided to simply model the appropriate behavior, mark notes on the students’ papers, and not mention the use of non sexist language until the end of the semester. Much to his amazement, many of the students in his class adopted the non sexist approach on written assignments, and many corrected themselves when speaking. Even more students were affected when he added a midsemester assignment where groups discussed topics such as equal rights, human rights, discrimination, and defining what is “politically correct.” During class discussions, many students revealed that “feminist rhetoric” turned them off. Ultimately, most students agreed that non sexist language was more appropriate—and indeed politically correct.

Students admitted that they would have been more resistant to the change if the professor had “gone on” about his own position.

The reverse is also possible. In-service elementary school teachers constantly report the importance of watching students’ favorite TV programs, going to the “in” movie, or even experiencing the local white water
amusement park so that they have something to talk about that relates to the students' interests. When they use this information in class, they believe that it makes them appear more "real" to their students. Their sharing appears to encourage most students to tell them what it is that they like. When teachers then confirm liking "it" too, students report liking their teachers more.

These strategies regularly impact the students' selectivity processes. The first example given here illustrates withholding information to increase positive perceptions that increase the probability of students' exposure and attention to communication messages. The second example creates the same effect by expressing information rather than withholding it. Manipulation of these affective variables increases the likelihood of students' exposure and attention to messages. Teachers are well aware that, without the exposure and attention, they cannot hope to control or influence students' selective perception and retention.

Effective instructional communication is a combination of manipulating perceptions and/or behaviors by using strategies that maximize learning. This process includes the ability to promote students' generalization from their positive perceptions of their teachers to their perceptions of information, procedures, and the entire instructional environment. Slowly, new teachers' trial-and-error approaches to control in the classroom are becoming less necessary. Teacher education programs are recognizing that application of learning theory is unproductive without concurrent training and awareness of communication variables and strategies.

TEACHER'S INFLUENCE ON LEARNING: CONTROL

Instructional communication has come a long way toward providing guidance for classroom teachers since the 1972 ICA conference. The educational environment continues to be in jeopardy, however; for almost two decades, results of public opinion surveys cite "lack of discipline" as the primary problem confronting our public schools. At the same time, 58% of in-service teachers surveyed reported that chronic student misbehavior was indeed the leading contributor to their job stress (Feitler & Tokar, 1982). Achieving a productive and relatively stress-free learning environment involves more than controlling student misbehavior effectively. All aspects of what happens in the classroom are contingent upon eliciting cooperation from every class member.

In response, instructional communication scholars have been conducting systematic investigations of various factors that enhance teachers' control and maximize student learning. The explorations involving power appear to
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3. THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

offer significant alternatives for teachers who are attempting to gain that cooperation in their classes. To truly understand the impact of this instructional communication research, we will follow one variable—power—as it progresses from the original conceptualization through multidimensional and multimethod approaches. The evolution of the concept of power, its dimensions, and its applications are the subject of this book.

This chapter serves as an introduction and review of the basic foundation that is intrinsic to instructional communication research. The infrastructure outlined is essential to assessing the work reported in the subsequent chapters. A review of this chapter suggests that the instructional communication perspective and successful application relies on understanding:

1. The developmental abilities of students.
2. Which consequences act as reinforcers and which are punishers.
3. How to integrate students' internal cognitive states with desired behavioral outcomes.
4. What the advantages and disadvantages are of the instructional strategies chosen for specific content.
5. Diverse strategies that impact the affective domain of learning.
6. How to manipulate student perceptions in a positive way by using information reported in the instructional communication literature.

**REFERENCES**


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