

EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION: THE PLACE OF QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE AND FEEDBACK IN A LANGUAGE CLASS

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Abstract

Schools are complex, dynamic systems that require effective communication to meet the diverse needs of its stakeholders. Communication is essential to maintain healthy relationships between the students, faculty and parents. This paper discusses the issue of educational act as communication act, the benefit and barriers of effective communication. The paper also highlights essential components of effective communication. An important part of this paper also explores functions of classroom communication and use of questioning technique and feedback in a language class. The major conclusion of the study is that no matter the mode, type, channel and style of communication, the important thing is for a message to be sent through an acceptable channel and for it to be decoded and understood correctly and the expected kind of feedback given. It is only after this that one can boldly say that the communication process has been effective. The paper then recommends that how students think or the mental processes by which they arrive at answers is what the teacher needs to focus on and not the correct answer per se.

Keywords: Effective Classroom Communication, Classroom Communication, Questioning Technique, Feedback and Communication Process.

Introduction

Classroom communication includes face-to-face interactions and the communications necessary between the participants involved in the classroom to ensure that learning takes place (Kogut & Silver, 2009; Kazi, Abdul-Razak, & Mosa, 2012). As Briscoe, Arriaza, and Henze (2009) suggest, it is within these face-to-face interactions that teachers use language to 'communicate expectations to students, faculty, and parents; to discuss policies, praise people, propose changes in curriculum, indicate that they are listening, carry out disciplinary action, and for a host of other actions'. That is

one of the ways why classroom communication differs from normal communication in the community – the main purpose of communication in a classroom is to instruct and inform. In addition, communication in a classroom setting is unique because it has highly regulated patterns of communication between teachers and students, both of whom have a different status (the teacher has the higher status in the classroom if not in society as a whole). The higher status of the teacher allows him or her to conduct the class from beginning to end; he or she can choose the topic, decide how to divide the topic into smaller

units, control who talks, and when and where they do so.

Teachers, whether consciously or not, communicate (usually by using language) in order to orchestrate learning events in their classroom. According to Farrell (2009), teachers use communication in the classrooms in order to accomplish three things: to elicit relevant knowledge from students to respond to things that students say and to describe the classroom experiences that they share with students. It is hoped that by looking at the effective classroom communication, teachers' communication skills will be identified and teachers will become more aware of their communication skills and communication patterns that currently exist in their classrooms and will be able to evaluate whether these patterns provide opportunities for their students to learn. By focusing on more than one features of communication skills that they use when teaching, teachers would be able to practice and monitor their use of communication skills not only as essential input for their students but also to achieve more effective teaching when conducting a lesson.

Education is Communication

The educational act is in itself a communication act. The transmission of information, knowledge, values is being achieved in all educational systems through communication. The classroom environment is an ideal context for communication. In this context, the relations teacher - taught can be enhanced with new dimensions -

methodological, moral, affective, in which, through didactic communication, the teacher becomes mediator and guide in the learning process (Norliza, 2010). The educational process involves ensuring continuous social interaction between the two poles of the educational act. The teacher is the one who designs, projects, transmits information, and his role is to sustain, guide, control, monitor, correct, encourage the student (Kenneth, 2007). The role of the pupil/student is to seek, investigate, discover by himself, and analyze the information transmitted by the teacher: he makes notes, reads, compares, stores, reflects on the received information, and does research work that will turn into the products of his activities. Communication serves as education, education is achieved through communication. At any time, the teacher is a communicator; any verbal or nonverbal behavior in this context is communication (Tyler, 2016). This assertion is, however, subject of scientific and ethical determined limits. Not every communication is a pedagogical act. The school is the organization where the communication process is essential and manifested in all forms. The teacher facilitates and participates in the act of communication which implies that he should become a professional communicator, not only in mastering techniques for transmitting information but especially in approaching the student as a partner of dialogue (Judkins, 2019). According to Norliza (2010) educational communication is a complex interpersonal communication that can be achieved in the following ways:

Verbal communication- the messages are codified and transmitted by words, sentences, phrases, verbally. Verbal communication's essential dimensions are the question and the answer.

Written communication: the information (thoughts, ideas, concepts, graphic representations) are transmitted in the form of written text.

Non-verbal communication- the messages are encoded and transmitted by means of body language, such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, body movements, physical appearance: dress code and so on.

Paraverbal communication- the information is transmitted through voice and prosodic elements that accompany the speech: voice characteristics, particularities of pronunciation, power, volume, intensity, tone, fluency and so on.

The communicative competence of the teacher is part of his psychosocial competences, and refers to his knowledge of a language's syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, to his social knowledge about how and when to use the language but also to his knowledge to select and structure his message by the curriculum requirements, having in view the achievement of the operational objectives (Duta & Rafaila, 2014). Communicative competence involves knowledge and skills in several areas: knowledge of the communicational context and its influence over the content and form of communication; knowledge of the rules of communication and of the impact of paraverbal and nonverbal communication in teaching; knowledge of

human psychology and the ability to relate to students. Teachers should prepare the learners to use the spoken language with fluency and accuracy, and be politically correct with people who have different cultural identities, social values and behaviours. The structuring and presentation of the content, the ability to capture the attention and interest for the discipline, indicating the tasks to be solved, combining theoretical and practical elements are the methods by which the teacher seeks interest in the matter and creates motivational frameworks that will enable the accumulation of new knowledge. The teacher must take into account the individual particularities of age, personality and perception, the nature of the student, must strive to maintain the good climate of the didactic act, and boost motivation for the study of the discipline (Judkins, 2019).

Benefits and Barriers of Effective Communication

Communication is the transmission of information from a source to an audience. Effective communication requires that the audience understand the message in its intended form (Fashiku, 2017). Challenging conversations include elevated emotions, differing points of view, and a resolution valued by at least one participant (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). People communicate both directly and indirectly. Direct communication is intentional, while indirect communication includes expressions, physical behaviours, and speech patterns (Bender, 2015).

Awareness of indirect communication and active listening are essential components of face-to-face conversations (Tyler, 2016). For communication to be effective, we must be mindful of our message and indirect communication, actively listen, and engage in challenging conversations.

Education is continually changing, and effective communication builds the positive school culture required to implement change (Hollingworth, Olsen, AsikinGarmager & Winn, 2017)). The primary relationships in most schools, apart from the teacher-student link, are among staff, administrators, and parents (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). When implementing new programmes or initiatives, these stakeholders' voices disappear without established relationships and effective communication (Safir, 2017). Teachers should welcome change, and change without consultation alienates veteran teachers. Effective communication promotes motivation and builds staff culture, while poor communication creates dissatisfaction (Tyler, 2016). School culture influences how the organization responds to change, and unwillingness to accept change accompanies poor morale (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Leaders who choose to ignore staff feelings of apprehension will spend more time dealing with undesired behaviours (Brown, 2018). Engaging in challenging conversations by using effective communication and listening is necessary to implement changes that enable school improvement (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Communication and relationship with stakeholders are more effective methods

of school improvement than new policies or programmes (Safir, 2017).

The benefits of challenging conversations are clear, yet barriers exist that keep educators and administrators from engaging in these conversations. There is an apprehension of challenging conversations because they can be unpredictable and emotional (Brown, 2018). The prospect of managing upset or aggressive people is one of the most daunting parts of engaging in difficult conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). The cultural norm of being nice hinders our ability to have tough conversations or give honest feedback (Brown, 2018). People often lack clarity in their communications in an attempt to be kind, but a clear message is more kind than an ambiguous message. Leaders often avoid challenging conversations due to fear of damaging relationships, fatigue, misinterpreting the significance of the issue, or lack of confidence in their skills (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). The intent of the communication can be complicated when the participant's lack of skills obscures the intended message (Bender, 2015). It is critical that body language and manner of speaking match the intention and set the desired tone. The absence of tough conversation can lead to passive-aggressive discussions occurring behind the scenes (Brown, 2018), so we must work to overcome the barriers to effective communication.

Essential Components of Effective Communication

Trust is the first of three essential components to build a relationship capable of engaging in challenging conversations effectively (Tyler, 2016). People earn trust through daily interactions that demonstrate they listened and cared, not through grand gestures (Brown, 2018). Building trust is comparable to building interest in a bank account; it takes time and requires commitment (Safir, 2017). Each interaction is a bid for acknowledgment; if the experience is positive, trust grows, but if it is negative, it depletes the previous balance. Staff must believe they are in a safe space, where they will not be ridiculed for making mistakes, in order to engage in difficult conversations (Brown, 2018). If mutual respect, collaboration, and trust in leadership are already the norm, it is much easier to engage in challenging conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). After establishing a trusting relationship, retracting the statement if the other person gets defensive is not necessary (Safir, 2017). The relationship creates an environment for the participants to examine the reaction and express their thinking. Critical conversations, while using the essential components of effective communication, can repair previously damaged school cultures (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Trust is the first critical element needed to build the relationship necessary for effective communication. Transparency underpins trust, because it demonstrates the stakeholder's purpose, goals, and values.

Transparent leadership leads to increased productivity because the employee's focus is in better alignment with leadership goals (Lavoie, 2015). Stakeholders seek transparency in the organization's directives and vision because they have experienced overwhelming changes and lack of focus in the past (Llopis, 2012). Leaders who are open and transparent about their struggles are more relatable to employees. During the low points, honesty encourages stakeholder trust in future decisions (Llopis, 2012). Challenging conversations are most successful when the parties involved have a clear vision and are open about their intent (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Without clear communication with staff, changes feel forced at the last minute (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). In-person communication is more transparent, because people can read indirect communication, and this leads to fewer misunderstandings (Llopis, 2012). Transparency is key to building the earned trust needed for effective communication.

The final essential component of effective communication is listening. There are two types of listening: deep listening wherein the expectation is to hear concerns but not solve the problem, and strategic listening that involves guiding questions and suggestions (Safir, 2017). Strategic listening is active; it requires the listener to ask relevant questions and clarify the message (Bender, 2015). Behaviours that inhibit effective communication include judgment, offering unwarranted advice,

lack of confidentiality, and interrupting the speaker (Brown, 2018). Ineffective communicators often ask whether there are questions but do not leave adequate time for people to respond. Awareness of indirect communication is also essential; gestures or body language can signal to the other person to finish speaking (Brown, 2018). Listening is the foundation for productive responses during difficult conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). When involved in a difficult conversation, it is vital to resist the urge to respond before listening. Another component of effective communication is listening to criticism or feedback, especially when it is difficult to hear (Brown, 2018). The goal should be to create a culture in the classroom and school whereby active listening and engagement in collaborative conversations are expected (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Trust, transparency, and listening the three essential components of effective communication must be present to achieve a collaborative culture in a school.

Functions of Classroom Communication

Communication in our lives or in any profession is meant to serve a set of functions. This paper has identified the following four functions as being relevant for classroom communication. Even so, they are not unique to teaching and learning. According to Norliza (2010) these are:

i) Understanding and insight

Teachers teach in order to assist their learners understand subject content as clearly as possible. The idea that a learner ought to develop deep insights regarding what they study is key. Deep learning is different from surface level learning. In addition to understanding content, teachers and learners need to understand themselves and each other. Teachers use their understanding of learners to deliver content in ways that meet individual needs. Both teachers need to also understand their environment as this understanding is also suitable for effective learning. Using communication to ask questions that foster reflection is useful in promoting understanding.

ii) Persuasion and influence

The whole process of teaching and learning is one of trying to influence another person. Teachers try to persuade learners and every teacher will influence their learners whether they like it or not. The important question then becomes: what do you say or do in your classroom in order to create a positive influence. Persuasion can take the form of direct words used intentionally to get a learner to do work, answer a question, change behaviour and so forth. Learners need to be taught explicitly how they can use communication to influence the teacher, other learners and others in the community. Writing is also a powerful way of influencing others. You may want to think about this: How can your learners write with the intention to persuade and influence (you the teacher) and other relevant audiences? Can you think of how writing influences the examiner when grading tasks?

iii) Promoting learning skills

Traditionally, teaching has been more about the teacher dominating the classroom with teacher talk. Today emphasis is shifting on helping learners become responsible for their

own learning. Learners develop their learning skills when a teacher allows them time to speak more, read texts and discuss in groups as well participate in writing tasks that involve summarizing key ideas from what the teacher says or from their reading. Effective communication is a strong enabling factor for learning so the teacher should promote the communication skills of learners. Modeling the learning behaviour you would want your learners to copy is very important. This is done by how you research for new ideas and how you ask questions that require serious attention from learners.

iv) Initiate and maintain relationships

Classroom teaching is interpersonal as well as social in that learners learn best when they have a strong sense of belonging. The teacher should be interested in using communication to promote a social climate where learners work collaboratively. Every learner should feel valued and respected by the teacher and other learners. One can imagine a classroom where positive human connection was absent. Learning would not occur. Communication in this case should minimize the need for competition and focus on care and support for others. Within this function many educational goals can be supported such as unity, love, cultural diversity, integrity, and so on.

These functions apply in many different areas of human endeavour and as such communication skills are regarded as top on the list of 21st century skills.

Effective Communication in the School

Education contains a variety of unique relationships, each with its own communicative needs and characteristics. The primary relationship in school is at the classroom level. Communication at this level serves two functions: to support

the teacher to meet the learning outcomes and to build a relationship between the participants (Fashiku, 2017). Classrooms must be a place where participants can be vulnerable and know that they will be safe (Brown, 2018). Creating a relationship with students is vital, but that relationship needs to be intellectually based and not focused on building a friendship (Safir, 2017). Adults and students have different roles and levels of status in the school, even with open communication and established relationships. Challenging conversations with students, including honest feedback, often begin with the student perceiving the message negatively (Judkins, 2019). The purpose of the conversation is to encourage the student to develop beyond what they feel is possible. Teachers must be mindful of student non-verbal communication, in order to understand the student's thoughts and feelings (Safir, 2017). Active listening and emotional intelligence are crucial for identifying and understanding students who have experienced trauma. Establishing and maintaining a classroom with effective communication supports teachers to accomplish the goal of meeting the learning outcomes while creating positive connections. A faculty is much like a classroom: there are individuals with various personalities and communication styles that must work toward a common goal. Discussions with colleagues can be intimidating. It is essential to express ideas clearly and not take exception when others do not share points of view (Judkins, 2019). When a colleague's disagreement occurs during a

presentation or meeting, it is acceptable to ask for further discussion in the future. Experienced teachers may view colleagues who support new programmes or initiatives as challenging their experience and methods (Steen, 2017). Colleagues do not require the same deference as administrators or parents, but teachers should still practice effective communication techniques to promote a positive relationship (Bender, 2015). Apathetic colleagues require set deadlines and clear guidelines; it is possible to avoid difficult conversations if everyone in the group is aware of their role and the purpose it serves. Dominant colleagues do not process subtle messages; therefore, they require responses with clear boundaries. The essential elements to remain assertive are knowing the facts, maintaining focus, finding common ground, and staying calm (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). It is advisable to document conversations with authoritative colleagues in e-mail records or meeting minutes (Bender, 2015). Collaboration is necessary for growth, and communication promotes effective collaboration.

Honest conversations between administrators and staff are the prerequisite for growth. Growth occurs through reflection, and effective communication can reveal diversions from the goal in a teacher's practice (Safir, 2017). Both teachers and administrators must learn to listen and reflect on feedback, both positive and negative (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Resistant or under-performing staff needs to engage in difficult conversations with

administrators. Participants should paraphrase the concerns during the discussion, in order to ensure active listening and to clarify the message (Tyler, 2016). This technique also helps the participants to remain mindful and keep them from becoming defensive while receiving feedback (Brown, 2018). Teachers must remember that difficult conversations are part of the administrator's job, and they should avoid venting frustrations to colleagues or creating an adversarial environment (Bender, 2015).

Use of Questioning Technique and Feedback in a Language Class

The quality of the questions asked determines a teacher's level of success with the lesson. Quality questions promote deep learning as learners apply reasoning and analytical approaches to the facts they know. According to Duta and Rafaila (2014), there are two types of questions: closed type and open-ended. Closed questions fall at the bottom of the hierarchy of knowledge and deal more with recall of facts. An effective language teacher uses these questions sparingly and shows greater interest in higher order open-ended questions. Higher order questions challenge students to think critically and creatively. The goal of quality questions is not to come up with one correct answer but to promote multiple ways of thought (Bender, 2015). Thus, the thinking process by which the answer or conclusion is reached becomes more important than the answer itself. Quality questions are aimed at checking for understanding or comprehension and

provide multiple ways for students to respond. These types of questions are known as Socratic questions. The focus of these questions is how students discover answers, how they can comprehensively describe a problem or issue, analyze concepts, probe reasons and predict the implications or consequences given certain scenarios. The method aims at getting learners to be systematic, deep and logical thinkers. This method is learner-centered and concerns itself more with the learners' participation and how they monitor their thinking (metacognition). In this case, the teacher puts on an ignorant mind-set in order to force learners to assume the highest level of knowledge. The teacher gives learners space to correct their thinking and to experiment with alternative courses of action or ideas Domenech and Gomez (2014). In being supported to check how they are thinking, the students learn to distinguish between logical and faulty thinking. Problem-based and project-based are high on the category of quality questions due to their demand for application of complex knowledge, laws, concepts and principles (Glaze, 2014).

Effective questioning techniques take attention from the teacher to the learners and should encourage discussion either in small groups or by the whole class. They reveal teachers level of interest in the learners as well as the subject and by using such questions; teacher gets an opportunity to show them that he value not just what they learn but how they learn it. The process of getting answers to complex questions need not end in class and teacher allows time for

learners to keep reflecting even after the lesson. Students are challenged to look for more ideas on their own and to challenge their current points of view with future thinking. A good teacher therefore is to be judged not by his answers but by the questions he/she asks. The important thing to note here is that a teacher's responsibility is to develop the art of asking quality questions (Glaze, 2014). Students become expert learners by also learning how to ask the right questions themselves.

The way a teacher responds to student answers requires skilful communication. In providing feedback, teacher should encourage learners to talk by responding positively to failure (Gartmeir, Gebhardt & Dotger, 2016), ask them to clarify, respond in ways that fire their curiosity and work with them to look for an answer, probe their answers and guide them towards alternative points of view. Portray the impression that both teachers and students are all learning. Encourage sharing of different perspectives both orally and in writing and relate classroom discussion to the real world. When he gives feedback, it aims at reinforcing certain kinds of student responses and behaviour. Use the learners' names when he asks for feedback. Feedback should be given both verbally and non-verbally and also directly and indirectly (Gartmeir, Gebhardt & Dotger, 2016). Indirect feedback is given to the students in a manner that may not use the learner's name and the teacher directs it to the whole class. Say, 'I can see a good number of you have taken the advice I

gave last time... I am pleased with the way some of you are working on this problem. Have the right resources on the table...Some of you are now asking real good questions.’ This is, of course, in addition to the direct one to a specific learner. Learners can also give feedback to their neighbours. Summary of key points using two sentences can be used from time to time. In the conclusion, ask all learners to make a two sentence summary of what lesson was about.

Feedback is not just for inside the classroom. Teacher can also time feedback and give it outside the class to make a not so well behaved or disengaged student look good to somebody that matters such as another teacher, a parent or the school head. Look for an opportunity to catch them doing something good and surprise them (Steen, 2017). The teacher could say, ‘Peter you surprise me...I didn’t know you are so good with that...’ Learners will work hard if they get feedback for their effort. Remember that just because learners look bored during the class time and does not mean everything on earth bores them. Interview some of those who look bored and work together to make their learning enjoyable. Learners expect positive feedback when they succeed and the teacher should use positive communication that encourages the learner, ‘good’, ‘well done’, ‘try harder’, ‘ooh you surprised me’, ‘let’s work together later and improve on this’ are all motivating to the learner. Negative communication should be avoided at all times and instead, teachers should use poorly done work as opportunity to support learner. May be the teacher can

say, ‘I am available to help you with this’. The teacher needs to use students’ feedback as a way of improving how to teach more effectively. A teacher needs to know what learners think about the way he conducts various aspects of teaching. Few teachers do this, yet, it is one way of showing learners you are interested in ensuring that their needs matter. The teacher should be willing to hear the truth from the learners about how he/she teaches and how he/she can deliver lessons more effectively. The teacher can get feedback through asking openly or sometimes by interviewing some of the students in private. As a teacher, one could also ask for peer evaluation from another teacher. The idea being communicated to your learners is that even teachers still continue to learn. This is a good strategy for building trust and reducing classroom management problems by building rapport. Feedback should help deliver one message: it is not completely wrong to fail. Failure then becomes a means to learn. According to Fashiku (2017) the following guidelines will be useful in regard to asking questions and using feedback:

- a. pose questions that invite a range of perspectives agree/disagree, for/against or call for debate;
- b. engage all learners even those not willing to volunteer;
- c. do not punish for any wrong answer;
- d. build from simple to complex;
- e. take a ‘straw vote’ (answer up if you agree with Jane) and ask a few of those who agree to justify and the same for those who disagree;
- f. frown a bit and ask ‘Are you sure?’;

- g. ask if there is another way to solve the problem and also ask learner to explain the actual process of arriving at an answer;
- h. if a student cannot answer a difficult question, ask a contingency back up question on a lower level;
- i. refuse to accept responses that are not audible to all learners and do not entertain mixed chorus answers;
- j. give praise for partially correct responses as the whole class works towards reaching the correct answer to complicated questions;
- k. do not abandon a question because it is seems hard. Start your learners off with little hints until finally the students themselves give the answer.

Conclusion

Excellence in education stems from high quality stakeholder relationships, and communication is the key to building these relationships. Effective communication creates positive school cultures wherein staff can adapt and embrace change. Increased skill in all components of effective communication decreases the fear associated with challenging conversations. Trust is essential to build strong relationships among stakeholders. Clarity of intent increases transparency and active listening supports people to process feedback and implement changes for growth. These essential characteristics build the strong stakeholder relationships necessary for productive schools focused on improvement. Communication will enable the maintenance of relationships

while delivering honest assessment, challenging colleagues, engaging in difficult conversations, and creating partnerships with families. There are a plethora of languages used in the world. Even within the same language, people have different conceptions of the same word. Of all types of communication, verbal communication allows for the most immediate feedback and clarification of words. However, no matter the mode, type, channel and style of communication, the important thing is for a message to be sent through an acceptable channel and for it to be decoded and understood correctly. It is only after the sender's intended meaning has been correctly decoded by the receiver and the expected kind of feedback given that one can boldly say that the communication process has been effective.

Recommendations

How students think or the mental processes by which they arrive at answers is what the teacher needs to focus on and not the correct answer per se. The term 'metacognition' refers to a great strategy that both teacher and learner can use to promote better thinking. The teacher needs to research more on the term and see how it applies to him as a teacher or as a learner. The teacher must not monopolize the conversation; if he dominates the communication relationship then he will permanently issue unidirectional messages to students, and as a result, the communication between him and the students will lack feedback, in which lies the most important aspect of efficient communication.

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