Students and Teachers

One of the most prominent relationships you have with others is the relationship you develop with those who teach you new concepts and skills. From your earliest teachers—your parents—to your professors in college, the relationship between teachers and students is one of the most pervasive in our lives. This chapter is about the role and function of communication between teachers and students. We'll discuss not only how teachers affect students and their learning through communication but also how students affect teachers and their teaching.

*Instructional communication* is the label researchers have given to the formal study of communication between teachers and students. Specifically, instructional communication is the process by which teachers and students stimulate meanings in the minds of each other using verbal and nonverbal messages. This definition is applicable not only in traditional primary, secondary, and higher education contexts (McCroskey, 1968), but also in nontraditional education contexts, such as corporate training and community education programs (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004). In emphasizing the role of communication in the teaching and learning process, the instructional communication researchers Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978) noted, “Communication is the crucial link between a knowledgeable teacher and a learning student” (p. 3). Teaching and learning cannot occur without communication.

Rhetorical and Relational Approaches to Instructional Communication

The communication discipline has two rich traditions that influence how communication specialists study communication between teachers and students. We'll first discuss the rhetorical tradition and then the relational tradition. Both of these traditions have influenced the study of instructional communication (Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006).

The Rhetorical Approach to Instructional Communication

From a rhetorical perspective, teachers use verbal and nonverbal messages with the intent to influence or persuade students. To persuade is to develop messages that change or reinforce attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors. As noted by McCroskey and Richmond (1996), "The function of rhetorical communication is to get others to do what you want or need them to do and/or think the way you want or need them to think—to persuade them" (p. 234).

The rhetorical function of communication, which draws on classical rhetoric with roots in the 4th century BCE, is source centered, or teacher centered. The focus is on how the source of the message intentionally attempts to achieve a specific outcome. In the case of teachers communicating with students, the desired outcome is learning.

Aristotle's (1991) *The Art of Rhetoric*, written in 333 BCE, continues to be one of communication studies' most influential works and is considered by many communication educators to be the first “textbook” in public speaking. To Aristotle, there are three factors that enhance a person's ability to persuade: (1) ethos (the personal character of the speaker), (2) pathos (the use of emotion), and (3) logos (the logical, rational nature of the message). If teachers are to be successful in their attempts to communicate source-centered meaning to their students, students must first perceive them to be credible or believable (ethos). Teachers must also help
students learn by using verbal and nonverbal messages that stimulate students' affective or emotional responses (pathos). Various instructional message variables that focus primarily on nonverbal messages have been found to influence students' emotions. Finally, teachers must present logical, rational messages using appropriate evidence and reasoning (logos).

The rhetorical approach to instructional communication assumes a “process-product” view of teacher and student communication. Researchers using the process-product paradigm study the teaching and learning process (including the messages teachers and students use to influence each other) and then measure the product of learning. The learning product includes how much students learned, as reflected in test scores, students' own perceptions of how much they learned, as well as students' affective response to the learning process.

The Relational Approach to Instructional Communication

In addition to the rhetorical perspective, a second communication perspective examines instructional communication as a relational process in which both teachers and students mutually create and use verbal and nonverbal messages to establish a relationship with one other. A relationship is an ongoing connection made with another person through communication (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2008). From a relational perspective, rather than focusing exclusively on message content and behavioral outcomes, teachers and students are concerned with the emotions and feelings that are a part of the teaching and learning process. The relational perspective of communication, with its emphasis on affective or emotional responses, draws on contemporary models of communication in which meaning is mutually created and shared between individuals. An additional emphasis of the relational approach to instructional communication is a focus on both teacher and student perceptions of well-being. In essence, the relational approach focuses on how teachers and students perceive and affectively respond to each other, which influences teachers' motivation to teach (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004) and students' motivation to learn (Ellis, 2000, 2004).

A major emphasis of relational communication research is on teachers' and students' use and interpretation of nonverbal messages. Nonverbal messages are those in which behavior, other than written or spoken language, creates meaning for someone (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2008). Nonverbal cues such as eye contact, posture, facial expressions, and gestures stimulate the majority of the emotional or social meaning in messages (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996; Mehrabian, 1972). Teachers who are nonverbally expressive or immediate (by establishing eye contact, smiling, using gestures, and moving closer to students) in the classroom positively influence students' liking for teachers (Frymier, 1994), motivation to learn (Richmond, 1990), and perceived learning (McCroskey & Richmond, 1992).

Although we have compared and contrasted the rhetorical and relational approaches to communication, we don't suggest that these two traditions are polar opposites. Both of these perspectives simply reflect different emphases of the communication process that are evident in teacher and student communication at the same time. To quote Aristotle's (1991) opening sentence in The Art of Rhetoric, "Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic." Rhetorical communication is the counterpart of relational communication. They are the two sides of a coin. Both perspectives have the same goal—to improve the quality and effectiveness of communication. In the instructional context, the goal is to facilitate learning. The rhetorical communication approach is more teacher directed in that the teacher traditionally determines classroom communication channels (by determining who talks and who listens) and outcomes (what the assignments are and what is tested). The relational approach to teacher-student communication is more collaborative: Both teachers and students are involved in creating meaning and making sense out of the communication messages that occur during learning.

Theories About Teacher and Student Communication

According to Kerlinger (1986), a theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that
presents a systematic view of the world. Theories help us explain the world we experience and also assist us in making predictions about what will happen in the future. Theories help us have greater control of our lives because we have a better sense of why things may happen as they do. In addition, a theory helps us organize our experiences into categories (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970). Rather than relying exclusively on theories from other disciplines such as education, psychology, or sociology, instructional communication researchers draw on rhetorical and relational communication theories to explain and predict what makes teaching and learning effective.

As an area of academic study, instructional communication was first developed in the early 1970s, although the origins of investigating how teachers and students communicate extend back as long as there have been teachers and students. Each decade since 1972, when the International Communication Association formed the Instructional Development Division, an article has been published that reviews and summarizes the status of instructional communication theory and research. In 1977, Scott and Wheless’s Communication Yearbook article, titled “Instructional Communication Theory and Research: An Overview,” suggested that instructional communication theory and research were not yet clearly defined. Despite the challenge of identifying specific instructional communication theories, Scott and Wheless reviewed various programs of research that they classified as falling into one of the following six research domains: (1) teachers as sources and receivers, (2) students as sources and receivers, (3) message variables, (4) learning strategies, (5) media, and (6) feedback and reinforcement.

Seven years later, Staton-Spicer and Wulff’s (1984) Communication Education article, titled “Research in Communication and Instruction: Categorization and Synthesis,” developed a slightly different structure to help instructional communication scholars organize instructional communication theory and research. Reviewing research from 1974 to 1982, Staton-Spicer and Wulff’s analysis of theory and research in instructional communication resulted in the following six categories, which are slightly different from those identified in the earlier Scott and Wheless (1977) review: (1) teacher characteristics, (2) student characteristics, (3) teaching strategies, (4) speech criticism and student evaluation, (5) speech content, and (6) speech communication programs. To develop more useful instructional communication theories, Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) suggested that research efforts be more integrated, rather than focusing on unrelated, individual research variables. They further suggested that the various research studies that investigated instructional communication lacked a coherent theory, which would help researchers make more general explanations and predictions about teacher and student communication.

In 2001, Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax’s Communication Yearbook article, titled “Instructional and Developmental Communication Theory and Research in the 1990s: Extending the Agenda for the 21st Century,” commended instructional communication researchers for demonstrating the central role of communication in effective instruction. Yet, although acknowledging the progress, Waldeck and colleagues (2001) suggested that there were “few examples of theoretically grounded or programmatic research” that appear in the literature (p. 208).

Waldeck and colleagues’ (2001) systematic review of the research literature identified 11 categories of theories that had been tested in the instructional context or used to explain the effects and relationships identified in instructional communication research: (1) arousal theory, (2) Keller's ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) model of instructional design, (3) French and Raven’s bases of power, (4) attribution theory, (5) expectancy learning/learned helplessness, (6) arousal valence theory, (7) approach/avoidance, (8) information processing theory, (9) social learning/cognitive theory, (10) cultivation theory, and (11) developmental theories. In the same article, Waldeck and colleagues categorized instructional communication variables and programs of research by identifying the following six categories: (1) student communication, (2) teacher communication, (3) mass media effects on children, (4) pedagogical methods/technology use, (5) classroom management, and (6) teacher-student interaction.
Although each of these three important articles has aided researchers in thinking about instructional communication theory, there is more work to be done to help researchers develop instructional communication theories. One limitation that runs across the three summary articles is that each summary of instructional communication theory and research was descriptive rather than prescriptive. By descriptive, we mean that the researchers simply identified key research and theory themes, rather than suggesting or prescribing new theories.

Rather than generating unique instructional communication theories, instructional communication researchers have had a tendency to either test theories from other communication contexts (such as interpersonal communication) or draw on theories from other disciplines (such as psychology) to explain their findings (Waldeck et al., 2001). Instructional communication theory has been especially influenced by interpersonal communication theory and research (McCroskey, 1998).

**Instructional Communication Research Methods**

For the most part, instructional communication researchers have used quantitative research methods to investigate teacher and student communication and to test instructional communication theory. Quantitative research methods involve testing hypotheses and answering research questions using controlled research experiments, gathering research data through the use of surveys, or interviewing subjects. In an experimental study, one or more research variables are manipulated (such as comparing a teacher using a high level of nonverbal immediacy cues with a teacher who uses few or no nonverbal immediacy cues) and then the effect of use or nonuse of specific behaviors on learning (such as affective or cognitive learning) is measured. Quantitative research methods also include the research technique of asking research subjects questions by using a survey or personal interviews. Subjects could be asked to describe the type of communication their teacher uses and then to answer questions about how much the student perceives that he or she has learned in the class. The researchers then look for patterns, relationships, or trends between the type of teacher communication behaviors used and perceptions of student learning.

Communication researchers have used a variety of models to examine how teacher and student communication works (or doesn't work) in the classroom. Two of the most common research models are experimental and naturalistic.

**The Experimental Model**

The experimental model is often thought of as the most “scientific” and is usually considered the most valid approach to instructional communication research. A well-designed experiment controls and manipulates certain factors in the learning environment that are believed to influence certain instructional outcomes. All other factors in the instructional environment are held constant. For example, if more learning occurred as a result of a teacher using certain communication behaviors that were present in one condition and absent in another condition, then researchers can conclude that these communication behaviors affect student learning. Although this method may seem simple, it's actually quite complex, and researchers are required to follow certain experimental designs and protocols.

One common experimental design used by instructional communication researchers is referred to as the pretest/posttest with a control group design. This design includes two groups and is illustrated in the following manner:
Assume that a researcher is interested in examining the impact that a teacher's use of humor has on students' understanding of a particular concept. **Students** in G1 are in the treatment group. These students take a pretest (01) so that the researcher can measure how much they know about the concept. Then, they listen to the teacher who uses a number of humorous stories (X) in her lecture. Following the lecture, the students take a posttest (02) so that the researcher can measure how much they learned.

Another group of students (who are similar to the students in G1) are in the control group (G2). These students take the same pretest as those in G1, but instead of the same teacher using humorous stories in her lecture, she presents a lecture without humorous stories. Following the lecture, the students take the posttest (02) so that the researcher can measure learning. The researcher hopes that the G1–02 scores (treatment group posttest scores) are significantly higher than the G2–02 scores (control group posttest scores).

Experimental research designs allow instructional communication researchers to show causation, that is, to conclude that students' learning a particular concept was caused by the teacher's use of, for example, humorous stories in her lecturing. Although experimental designs allow researchers to show causation, they're artificial and unnatural. They lack authenticity. For example, most teachers use a variety of communication behaviors when teaching and don't limit their teaching to only using humorous stories while lecturing. To combat this particular weakness, researchers also examine teacher and student communication using naturalistic models.

**The Naturalistic Model**

The naturalistic model of instructional communication research includes researchers examining and studying teacher and student communication in its natural environment—the classroom. Much of the research on instructional communication reported in recent years has focused on the study of instructional communication in regular classes at various levels of instruction. Most of the research in this area of study has used survey methods. A survey or questionnaire is a document that contains a number of questions or scales. **Students** read the questions or scale items and then provide the appropriate response that reflects their feelings, attitudes, or beliefs. Usually, this includes circling a number on a scale or providing a brief response. For example, if a researcher was interested in students' perceptions of their teacher's use of humor, the researcher would include a number of items on the survey assessing student perceptions. A researcher might ask, “How often did you see the teacher telling jokes?” and then ask the student to circle the appropriate number, where 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, and 4 = very often. Surveys usually include several pages with several different instruments. Once the data are collected, researchers enter the data into a computer and then use statistical software to examine the data.

Survey research allows researchers to demonstrate how two variables are related to each other. Rather than concluding that teacher humor causes student learning, survey research allows researchers to conclude that teacher humor is related to student learning. What remains uncertain is the direction of the relationship. It could be that student learning influences students' perceptions of teacher humor behaviors. Put another way, students who learn more may also be more perceptive of teacher humor behaviors.

It's important to understand that experimental and naturalistic models of instructional communication research have strengths and weaknesses. Neither model is perfect. The experimental model allows researchers to show causation (i.e., teacher humor causes increased learning); however, experimental designs are artificial and “not real.” The naturalistic model is more authentic; however, this model doesn't allow researchers the control that
the experimental model allows. What's important is to interpret research findings while also considering the limitations of the research design whether experimental or naturalistic.

**Applications and Conclusions of Instructional Communication Research**

Instructional communication researchers, using both experimental and naturalistic research designs, have identified relationships between several teacher and student communication variables and learning outcomes. These research conclusions have clear applications to both teachers and students. The conclusions support specific advice for helping teachers increase learning and also help students be more aware of how their communication behavior may influence teachers and how teachers evaluate students. Instructional communication research has investigated communication variables that have implications for both rhetorical and relational instructional processes. Rhetorical instructional research variables include teacher credibility, clarity, and humor, to name a few. Research variables that have relational communication applications include immediacy, affinity-seeking, and relational power. Although there are many other instructional communication research variables that have been studied, we review these six research areas to present a general overview of instructional communication research conclusions and applications.

**Credibility**

One of the key sources of rhetorical influence a teacher or student has is credibility. Anchored in Aristotle's concept of ethos, credibility is the perception of character, intelligence, and goodwill that a speaker is perceived to possess. Speakers who are perceived as highly credible are viewed as more persuasive, organized, skilled in responding to questions and are overall perceived as more competent than are speakers who are not perceived to be credible. In the context of the classroom, credibility is the overall perception that someone has toward a speaker in terms of the person being believable, knowledgeable, trustworthy, and dynamic (McCroskey, 1998).

As in other speaking situations, teachers who are perceived as credible have more influence over students than teachers who are not perceived as credible. Although the first research studies investigating credibility were focused on public figures, such as politicians or religious leaders, McCroskey, Holdridge, and Toomb (1974) examined the role and function of credibility in the classroom.

Here are eight research conclusions about and applications of teacher credibility as summarized by Myers and Martin (2006):

1. **Teachers** who have higher perceived credibility are also perceived as more effective teachers.
2. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility are more motivated to learn than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
3. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility report higher cognitive learning than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
4. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility report higher affective learning than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
5. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility are more likely to recommend the course and instructor to their friends than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
6. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility are more likely to participate in class discussions than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
7. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility are more likely to talk to their teacher outside of class than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.
8. **Students** who perceive their teachers as having high credibility are more likely to take another class with the teachers than students who perceive their teachers as having low credibility.

**Clarity**

A teacher's clarity or lack of clarity has been demonstrated to affect how well students learn. To be perceived as clear, research suggests that instructors should speak articulately and audibly, stay on task without wandering
to other topics, and use commonly understood vocabulary (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Land & Smith, 1979). When a teacher is clear, students comprehend the instructor's intended meaning better than when a teacher is not clear (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998, 2001). Research on teacher clarity has focused both on the structure of lecture presentations and on several verbal characteristics of instruction (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998). These two research streams have demonstrated that to be clear, teachers need to explicitly organize their presentations using verbal transitions, signposts, and checkpoints to ensure that their students understand the course content (Cruickshank & Kennedy, 1986). As summarized by Chesebro and Wanzer (2006), here are four research conclusions and applications of research about teacher clarity:

1. Teachers who are perceived as clear are perceived as more effective teachers.
2. Students who perceive their teachers as clear learn more than from teachers who are perceived as not clear.
3. Teachers who are clear reduce students' fear or apprehension of communicating in the classroom.
4. Teachers who are perceived as clear are liked more by their students, and students liked their course content more than that of teachers who are not perceived as clear.

**Humor**

Aristotle noted that pathos or emotion has a rhetorical effect on the communication process. Instructor humor has an effect on the emotional climate of a classroom. Like instructor credibility, humor is another variable that has an effect on an instructor's rhetorical influence on students and the learning environment. There is evidence that teachers at all levels use humor when teaching (Chesebro & Wanzer, 2006). Research by Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that the majority of humor behaviors that teachers use in the classroom were purposeful humor attempts that were directed at students, the class, the university, department, national and world events, the subject matter, and the teacher. Researchers have identified categories of both appropriate and inappropriate humor (Frymier, Wanzer, and Wojtaszczyk, 2008; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Appropriate humor includes humorous statements that are related (or sometimes unrelated) to course material, nonverbal behaviors, self-deprecating humor, humorous props, sarcasm, and unintentional humor. However, the researchers also found that students perceived some of the same kinds of humorous categories as inappropriate humor. It's apparently not the category of humor that makes an attempt at humor appropriate or inappropriate. There are some kinds of humor that were generally perceived as inappropriate: humor at the expense of a student, sexual humor, swearing, humor based on sexual or racial stereotypes, or making light of very serious issues. “Making fun of students” was cited as the most inappropriate type of humor.

Research conclusions about humor in the classroom include the following (Chesebro & Wanzer, 2006):

- Teachers who win awards for their teaching use moderate amounts of humor.
- Students do not prefer teachers who use an excessive amount of humor but do like teachers who use some humor when teaching.
- Students have individual differences and preferences for the amount and type of humor used by instructors.
- High school teachers use the same kinds and types of humor in the classroom as college teachers but not as extensively.

**Immediacy**

Teacher immediacy is one of the most researched instructional communication variables. Immediacy is a perception of physical and psychological closeness. Such closeness, either literal or psychological, has a major effect on the perceived quality of a communication relationship. According to the psychologist Albert Mehrabian (1969), the originator of the immediacy concept, immediacy consists of communication behaviors that “enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another” (p. 213). Perceptions of immediacy expressed through behaviors such as forward body leans, head nods, and eye contact, which enhance relational development (Mehrabian, 1969) in interpersonal communication situations, are also applicable to relationships between
teachers and students. Standing closer to someone, moving from behind barriers, (e.g., a desk or a lectern), as well as leaning toward someone are all immediacy behaviors.

Building on Mehrabian's definition, Andersen (1979) defined teacher immediacy as “the nonverbal behavior manifestations of high affect” (p. 543). Gorham (1988) further expanded the construct to include verbal immediacy messages as well. The use of specific words and phrases (e.g., saying “we” or “our” rather than “me” or “mine”) increases perceived closeness with others. Using students' names is also a verbal immediacy strategy. The immediacy principle can be summarized this way: The more a communicator uses immediacy cues, the more others will like and evaluate highly the communicator. The opposite is also true according to the immediacy principle: The less a communicator uses immediacy cues, the less others will like and evaluate highly the communicator.

Andersen and her colleagues found that teacher immediacy accounted for a major portion of the variance in affect toward the instructor, affect toward the course content, affect toward the behaviors recommended, and the likelihood of enrolling in another course of the same nature (Andersen, 1978, 1979; Andersen & Andersen, 1982). Teachers who use immediacy behaviors resulted in students who have overall a more positive attitude toward the instructor and the course.

Some of the most important findings for teacher immediacy are noted below (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006; Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004):

- Verbal teacher immediacy increases student cognitive learning. Teachers should use immediacy behaviors to help their students learn.
- Verbal teacher immediacy increases student affective learning. Teachers who use verbally immediate language, such as “we,” “us,” and “our,” and call students by name help their students have more positive feelings about both the teacher and the course.
- Nonverbal teacher immediacy increases student cognitive learning and information recall.
- Nonverbal teacher immediacy increases affective learning. Students appear to like the instructor and the course more if teachers use nonverbal immediacy behaviors.
- Nonverbal teacher immediacy increases students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness.
- Nonverbal teacher immediacy plays a mediating role in the reception and effectiveness of teacher control strategies. If, for example, a teacher is trying to encourage students to read their assigned reading (a rhetorical communication strategy), a teacher’s use of immediacy behaviors (a relational communication strategy) will increase the likelihood that students will both comply with the request and have more positive feelings toward the teacher.
- Verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy is significantly and positively related to perceptions of teacher clarity. Teachers who are immediate are perceived as providing more clear instruction than teachers who are not immediate.
- Teacher immediacy produces a reciprocal liking among teachers and students.

Additional evidence supports such findings across many different grade levels (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986) and ethnicities (Powell & Harville, 1990; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990), different course types (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985), and modified or nontraditional classroom structures (Andersen, 1979; Kearney et al., 1985).

The key application of immediacy is this: Teachers who are perceived to be immediate help their students learn. There is also evidence that students who are nonverbally responsive toward their teachers are perceived more favorably than students who are not nonverbally responsive (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004; Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Paulsel, 2005).

**Affinity Seeking**

Affinity means liking. Whether you like someone or not is a key element in determining the nature of the relationship between you and the other person. If you have high affinity toward someone, it means that you
Affinity-seeking behaviors are those verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are used to get others to like you. Evidence suggests that teachers who are liked by their students enhance the learning climate (Frymier & Wanzer, 2006; Gorham and Burroughs, 1989). Gorham and Burroughs (1989) found that teachers' use of affinity-seeking strategies, that is, specific behaviors that cause them to be liked, result in increased student affinity with both the teacher and the subject matter.

Some affinity-seeking behaviors seem to be especially important in helping teachers be liked by their students. Here's a list of teaching strategies that are associated with positive relationships with increased learning, motivation, and an overall positive climate:

- **Facilitating enjoyment**: The teacher purposefully works to increase student enjoyment of classroom activities, lectures, and assignments.
- **Optimism**: The teacher expresses a positive, hopeful, upbeat outlook.
- **Assuming equality**: The teacher minimizes status differences between teacher and students.
- **Conversational rule keeping**: Teachers are polite, don't interrupt students, and treat students with respect.
- **Comfortable self**: The teacher is confident, relaxed, and overall appears comfortable in the classroom.
- **Dynamism**: Teachers are enthusiastic and energetic.
- **Eliciting others' disclosures**: Teachers provide individual attention to students, invite students to talk about themselves, and then use the information they learn from students to compliment the student.
- **Altruism**: Teachers are helpful to students and go beyond expectations to assist students.
- **Listening**: Teachers listen without interrupting a student.
- **Sensitivity**: Teachers express caring, empathy, and warmth toward students.

Several research studies summarized by Frymier and Wanzer (2006) identify applications to teaching and learning:

- **Teachers** who use affinity-seeking strategies are perceived to be more credible—that is more knowledgeable, trustworthy, and dynamic—than teachers who do not use affinity-seeking strategies.
- Teacher use of affinity-seeking strategies is moderately correlated with student motivation to learn.
- **Teachers** who evoke more positive feelings from students enhance the learning climate.
- **Teachers** who consciously use affinity-seeking strategies engender increased affinity with both the teacher and the subject matter.
- **Teachers** who use selected affinity-seeking strategies (e.g., assuming equality, conversational rule keeping, eliciting others' disclosure, facilitating enjoyment, and optimism) enhance student liking toward the teacher.
- **Teachers** of lower grade levels use different affinity-seeking strategies than teachers of higher grade levels.

**Relational Power**

To have power is to have the ability to influence someone. The level and nature of influence with another person is central to determining the quality of the relationship that you have with that person. The source or basis of power depends on the specific nature of the relationship. Sometimes power is granted to someone because of his or her role or position, and at other times, power develops organically as we begin to trust and like someone. People whom we like and respect have greater power to influence us than people whom we don't like and respect.

A series of research studies conducted by Plax and Kearney (1992) and Plax, Kearney, McCroskey and Richmond (1986) explored the influence of what the researchers called behavioral alteration techniques (BATs) and behavioral alteration messages (BAMs) used by teachers to influence students. The researchers documented the types of power messages and techniques that had an effect on student learning. Researchers discovered that certain types of power messages had a more positive impact on learning than did others. The more positive messages teachers use to influence students were called prosocial BATs and BAMs. Some of the more positive or prosocial BATs and BAMs include (a) offering rewards, (b) appealing to enhanced self-
esteem if students would perform certain behaviors (e.g., read the assignment), (c) expressing liking toward
the student, (d) being responsive toward the student, and (e) noting that others have performed the same
behavior and that the teacher has modeled the behavior.

Here are several research conclusions that stem from investigations of power and influence messages in the
classroom (Roach, Richmond, & Mottet, 2006):

- Teacher communication strategies or BATs and BAMs are used by teachers in the classroom to exert power
over students.
- Use of positive or prosocial BATs and BAMs leads to higher student affect toward the instructor.
- Prosocial BATs and BAMs are related to increases in perceived student cognitive and affective learning.
- Teacher power usage is mediated by teacher nonverbal immediacy. Teachers who use antisocial BATs and
BAMs are perceived by students as using prosocial BATs and BAMs if teachers use nonverbal immediacy
behaviors.
- Teacher use of BATs and BAMs affects student motivation toward learning.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theory and research that explains and predicts how teachers and students
communicate with each other. Two traditions influence the study of instructional communication—rhetorical and
relational. From a rhetorical perspective, teachers use verbal and nonverbal messages with the intent to
influence or persuade students. Student learning is achieved through a teacher's influence. From a relational
perspective, teachers and students mutually create and use verbal and nonverbal messages to establish a
relationship with each other. Student learning is achieved through the relationship.

The health of any academic field of study is reflected in its theory generation and in research applications that
allow theories to be tested. A number of researchers have reviewed the development of instructional
communication theory throughout the past three decades. Although these authors note theoretical progress,
they also acknowledge that a unified theory of instructional communication has yet to emerge from the
research. Some senior scholars would probably argue that the lack of a unified theory of instructional
communication is not all that unexpected in a field of study that is only four decades old.

Two models of research currently dominate instructional communication research—experimental and
naturalistic. The experimental model, which is artificial and lacks "realness," allows researchers to control the
variables to demonstrate causation. The naturalistic model—which doesn't allow control, and therefore claims of
causation cannot be made—allows researchers to illustrate how teacher and student communication variables
and learning are related to each other. Both models of research have strengths and weaknesses, and readers
are encouraged to interpret research findings in the context of the limitations.

Finally, a number of teacher and student rhetorical and relational communication variables have been studied:
credibility, clarity, humor, immediacy, affinity-seeking, and relational power. Each of these variables has
produced a number of important applications for teachers and students. When these research conclusions are
applied and used, teachers become better teachers and students become better students.

—Steven A. Beebe
—Timothy P. Mottet

References and Further Readings

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Ocean City, MD.


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