21st Century COMMUNICATION A Reference Handbook

SAGE reference

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** Wheeless'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** Wheeless 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** Wheeless (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:

G1	01	X	02
G2	01		02

G = Group 0 = Test X = Manipulated Communication Behavior

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

like that person. *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

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