

## **Interpersonal Communication - Determinant Factor in Offline and Online Teaching Activity**

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**Abstract.** *The shifting between offline and online communication can contribute to miscommunication between individual from the same institution. Especially in the school setting communication between teachers or teachers and other members of the board can create difficulties. Miscommunication has its roots in people not being able to find the right messages and the right context for delivering their thoughts. Today’s educational setting requires teachers with communication skills that will deliver their messages to their students and colleagues in such a manner that interpretations are avoided. In order to do a proper job teachers must find ways to continually improve communication skills, know what communication barriers are, how to use online communication and online etiquette. This article tries to present the above mentioned elements of proper communication in showing how communication and verbal tools can be used in the correct way.*

**Keywords:** *type of communications, messages, interference, communication barriers, feedback, assertiveness.*

### **Introduction**

Effective communication is the basis of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that teachers need to have a direct and indirect influence on student outcomes. Effective communication is defined as the ability to convey information to others effectively and efficiently. Teachers with good verbal, nonverbal and written communication skills facilitate the exchange of information between people in the school for the benefit of all.

The opportunity to improve and refine the communication strategy must be used at every opportunity. Many issues, in and out of school, can be directly related to the effectiveness of communications within the school - whether or not the information was communicated, what was communicated, how it was communicated, and who communicated it. Allocating time on the content of the message and the manner of transmission will also ensure the maintenance of integrity and professionalism, that of the school, but also of the educational community.

Forms of communication include verbal (oral), written and nonverbal. Verbal communications have the advantage of immediate feedback, are most useful for conveying emotions, and can involve important stories and conversations. Written communications have the advantage of asynchrony, reaching many readers and are best for transmitting information. Both verbal and written communications convey nonverbal messages through tone; verbal communications are also colored by body language, eye contact, facial expression, posture, touch, and space.

Classroom communication is important for students to learn effectively and should be implemented from an early stage of learning. Classroom communication exists in three categories: verbal, nonverbal, and written.

**Verbal communication** is the most recognized type of communication. In the case of this type of communication, what you express comes directly from what

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you speak. Again, this can be formal or informal: with friends and family, in a formal meeting or seminar, at work with colleagues, in the community, during professional presentations, courses, lectures, colloquia, etc.

**Non-verbal communication** is more subtle but much stronger and includes the full range of physical postures and gestures, the tone and rhythm of voice, and the attitude used in communication.

Nonverbal communication can have five roles<sup>1</sup>:

- Repeat: often repeats and reinforces the message you make verbally.
- Contradiction: may contradict the message you are trying to convey, indicating to the listener that you may not be telling the truth.
- Replacement: can replace a verbal message. For example, the expression on your face often conveys a much more vivid message than words can ever.
- Complementary: can add or complete your verbal message.

Written communication, unlike verbal communication, is represented by printed messages. Examples of written communications include notes, proposals, e-mails, letters, instruction manuals, and operating policies. They can be printed on paper, handwritten, or displayed on the screen. Written communication can be developed using various tools over a longer period of time. Written communication is often asynchronous (occurs at different times). That is, the sender can write a message that the receiver can read at any time, as opposed to a real-time conversation. A written communication can also be read by many people (such as all employees in a department).

**The communication skills** of the communicators are necessary in order to have an effective communication and with an impact on the interlocutor. The communicator must know where to pause, where to repeat the sentences, how to say a certain sentence, how to pronounce a word and other important elements in an oral communication. In academia, communication skills are vital for success and performance. At all levels of education, pupils and students must be able to communicate effectively.

**The attitude** of those involved in the communication process must be appropriate and directed in support of maintaining open and free communication. Although most attitudes are determined by affect, behavior and knowledge, there is still variability in this regard between people and between attitudes. Some attitudes are based more on feelings, others are based more on behaviors, and still others are based more on beliefs. Other attitudes may be based more on behavior.

**Knowledge** of the communication process is not related to the educational qualification of the speaker or the number of diplomas he has in his portfolio. Knowledge is actually the clarity of the information that the speaker wants to convey to the receivers. The speech must be well documented, with a complete and in-depth knowledge of the subject in order to be able to find the answers to questions that can arise at any time.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward G. Wertheim, *The Importance of Effective Communication*, London, Northeastern University, College of Business Administration, 2008.

### **The message - the transformation of thoughts into words**

The message appears when thoughts are transformed into words through the process of coding<sup>2</sup>. The encoder (sender / communicator) uses an “environment” to send the message - a phone call, e-mail, text message, face-to-face meeting or other communication tool. The encoder should also consider any “noise” that may interfere with their message, such as other messages, distractions, or external influences.

Transmitting the message in the classroom is important for students to learn effectively and should be implemented from an early stage of learning. The teacher can address a student or the whole class through verbal communication. For example, a teacher may ask a student to stand up to present the prepared project, a process that will be accomplished through verbal communication.

The message means not only the speech used or the information transmitted, but also the changed non-verbal messages, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and body language. Non-verbal behavior can convey additional information about the spoken message. In particular, it can reveal more about the emotional attitudes that may underlie the content of speech.

In order to deliver messages in an effective communication process, some characteristics of efficient messages must be taken into account.

The effective key message has certain attributes<sup>3</sup>, as follows:

- ✓ Concise - each idea expressed will contain a limited number of sentences;
- ✓ Strategic: defining, differentiating and addressing the benefits;
- ✓ Relevant: finding a balance between the need to communicate with what the public needs to know.
- ✓ Convincing: designing meaningful information to stimulate action.
- ✓ Simple: use an easy to understand language; avoiding jargon and acronyms.
- ✓ Memorable: ensuring the structure of the messages so that they are easy to remember and repeat; avoiding sentences that are too long;
- ✓ Real: use active voice, not passive;
- ✓ Adapted: effective communication in various contexts, depending on the target audience, adapting the language and depth of information.

In the educational environment, the message has two relevant and at the same time useful effects in guiding teachers to structure the message. The two identified effects would be the primacy effect and the recency effect<sup>4</sup>.

The primacy effect refers to the fact that the messages that are communicated at the beginning are better retained and have a greater influence on the receivers.

The effect of recency is somewhat at odds with the effect mentioned above, emphasizing the message conveyed at the beginning or end. The way the teacher will dose the information in his lectures will have an influence on the received message.

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<sup>2</sup> Debbie Wetherhead, *Key message development: Building a foundation for effective communications*, New York, Public Relations Society of America, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Ovidiu Pânișoară, *Comunicarea eficientă*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2008, p. 49; Adriana Denisa Manea, „Features of educational activities in the contemporary society,” in *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 255-260.

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John Hasling<sup>5</sup> shows us that there are three types of messages that we send and we must keep in mind when communicating.

Primary messages refer to the intended content, both verbally and nonverbally.<sup>6</sup> These are the words or ways you choose to express and communicate your message. For example, in the classroom we invite a student to come in and take a seat.

Even such a short, seemingly simple and direct message could be misunderstood. „Take a seat” can be much more difficult to understand than „please sit down.”

Secondary messages refer to unintentional content, both verbal and nonverbal. The public forms impressions about the intended messages, whether negative or positive, over which there is no control. Perceptions of age, gender or ethnicity or even simple mannerisms and patterns of speech can unintentionally influence the message. Any clue or object that the sender can present to his / her interlocutor / audience provides clues about the person, even if these gestures are made unintentionally.

Auxiliary messages refer to intentional and unintentional ways of communicating a primary message. This may include vocal flexion, gestures, and posture or speech rate that influence the interpretation or perception of your message. The way we choose to convey the message is very important and should be built considering the person / audience. For this, the manner of expression, the chosen tone of voice, the gestures used must be very well known. In a formal context, the ways of expression are very different from an informal context.

### **Feedback - or how we clarify what we want**

The moment of feedback is a necessary part in the communication process, through which the sender is interested to know the recipient's reaction and is willing to know if the recipient understood the message in the same way as desired, and if there is any deficiency, further negotiation or communication is necessary. At the same time, the recipient could have understood the meaning and intent of the message, but, due to a barrier of some kind, such as a language barrier, he could not convey his reactions properly. In this case, the intent of the message / feedback must be brought to the surface by removing the barriers. An effective feedback process includes the following steps:

- a. Listening to and understanding the message correctly.
- b. Asking questions if the message is not understood correctly and clarifying it.
- c. Understanding the message in the original intended sense.
- d. Sending the reaction to the sender of the message.

Clarifying the message is important when providing correct and relevant feedback. Thus, following a plan for understanding the message would be useful:

✓ acknowledging the misunderstanding of the meaning of the message sent.

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<sup>5</sup> John Hasling, *The audience, the message, the speaker*, Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space? New potential keys of lecture," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 231.

- ✓ request to repeat the message.
- ✓ repetition of the message in your own words.
- ✓ request for specific examples.
- ✓ using open-ended questions where appropriate.
- ✓ questions regarding the correct understanding of the message and acceptance of the correction message.

Teachers often forget to mention when a student has behaved well and instead focus on negative aspects, such as undesirable behavior. This can have significant effects and can demoralize students. Although negative feedback can create positive results by helping students improve, providing positive feedback is a necessary part of promoting effective classroom communication. Students who receive praise are more likely to believe that they can accomplish tasks and be successful in the future and can help build a student's trust, create a good relationship and a safe environment in the classroom. It is also beneficial to encourage students to provide feedback to the teacher, even to colleagues. Allowing them to share feedback on lessons or teaching styles shows they are appreciated for their opinion, and are thus helped to improve learning.

### **Achieving communication**

The communication process is influenced by the context in which it takes place, and an analysis of the situational context in which the interaction takes place, for example in a room, office or perhaps outdoors, must also take into account the social context, e.g. roles, responsibilities and relative status of participants. The emotional climate and expectations of the participants in the interaction will also affect the communication. Communication contexts include intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public and mass communication. Each context has its advantages and disadvantages and its uses have an impact on the communication process.

The channel refers to the physical means by which the message is transferred from one person to another. In a face-to-face context, the channels used are speech and sight, during a telephone conversation, the channel is limited only to speech, in the type of online communication the channel is the written form.

With the transformation of common verbal language, the emphasis of communication has been placed mainly on gathering information from a single channel - words, while a message in its most complete form is often generated by the five channels; face, body, voice, verbal content and verbal style. Fixing to only one channel can endanger the receiver from receiving only part of the message, further increasing the risk of misunderstanding the other person or even being deceived.

There are different types of communication channels, below are some representative examples:

- Face-to-face conversations,
- Video conferencing,
- Audio conferences,
- E-mails,
- Written letters and notes,

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- Chats and messaging,
- Blogs,
- Formal written documents.

### **Barriers in communication**

The communication process has multiple barriers. Intentional communication will often be disturbed and distorted, leading to a condition of misunderstanding and failure of communication. Barriers to effective communication could be of many types, such as linguistic, psychological, emotional, physical and cultural, etc. Some of these would be:

- Emotional barriers and taboos.
- Lack of attention, interest, distractions or irrelevance to the receiver.
- Differences in perception and point of view.
- Physical disabilities, such as hearing problems or speech difficulties.
- Physical barriers to non-verbal communication.
- Failure to follow non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general body language may make communication less effective.
- Phone calls, text messages and other technology-based communication methods are often less effective than face-to-face communication.
- Cultural differences.

Most of the barriers mentioned above can be overcome by a qualified transmitter. Several tools can be used that can be useful to remove barriers in the usual communication process.

Barriers to communication in the classroom make it difficult for students to make the most of their education. Some teachers fail to create engaging lessons and struggle to connect with their students individually. Students with unaddressed language or speech difficulties often have communication problems with their teachers and colleagues. Personality differences and peer pressure add to disruptive factors in classroom communication, making some classroom interactions uncomfortable or forced.

Routine tasks and too much homework create barriers to communication - students do not want to interact with their teachers and will wait for classes to close as soon as possible. Teachers who put energy, enthusiasm and creativity into their lesson plans usually overcome this communication barrier.

Personality differences lead to frustration, unhappiness and a lack of communication between students and teachers. Teachers need to recognize and understand these personality differences and strive to find a healthy balance without showing partiality or favoritism. Peer pressure creates communication problems in the classroom when students respond to teachers by acting funny, cold, or disengaged. Students may refuse to build relationships with their teachers in order to maintain a reputation among their peers.

### **Assertive communication**

Assertive communication involves the proactive response in difficult situations, rather than the passive or aggressive reaction<sup>7</sup>. Assertiveness means expressing one's point of view in a clear and direct way, showing respect for others. Assertive communication helps to:

- minimize conflict;
- anger control;
- maintaining positive relationships with friends, family and others.

Assertiveness is a style of communication that many people strive to put into practice, often due to confusion about exactly what it means.

Being assertive involves taking into account the rights, desires, needs of oneself and others. Assertiveness means encouraging others to be open and honest about their opinions, desires, and feelings so that both parties can act appropriately. Assertive people care about the feelings of others and therefore formulate their demands or respect them in a polite but firm way (Galata, 2019).

Some behaviors that include assertiveness:

- Openness in expressing desires, thoughts and feelings and encouraging others to do the same.
- Listening to the views of others and responding appropriately, whether or not they agree with these views.
- Acceptance of responsibilities and ability to delegate to others.
- Regular expression of appreciation of others for what they have done or are doing.
- Be able to admit mistakes and apologize.
- Maintaining self-control.
- Equal behavior with others.

There are many reasons why people can act and respond in a non-assertive way. When people are not assertive, they may suffer a loss of confidence and self-esteem, which is more likely to make them less assertive in the future. Therefore, it is important to break the cycle and learn to be more assertive, while respecting the opinions and desires of others. The right to free expression of feelings, values and opinions must be accessible to all.

Assertive teachers believe that a classroom in which the teacher is in control is in the students' interest. They believe that students want to have the personal and psychological security they experience when their teacher is extremely competent in directing behavior. Society requires appropriate behavior to be accepted and successful. Therefore, no one benefits when a student is allowed to behave undesirably. Assertive teachers listen carefully to what their students have to say, speak politely to them, and treat them all fairly (not necessarily equally).

### **Offline and online communication**

Communication has changed fundamentally over the years to include not only face-to-face interaction, but also phone calls, email, instant messaging and video conferencing. Age also plays a favorite role, with each generation having its own

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<sup>7</sup> Rakos Richard, *Assertive behavior: Theory, research, and training*, London, Routledge, 1991.

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preferences and it is essential to use the right channels for a proper connection with the right groups - the wrong ones can be ignored, disapproved or even considered rude.

In the online environment, digital communication has no barriers of time and space and is permanently available. Any information can be transmitted online at any time, and the interlocutor will answer when he wants or when he has access to the online connection. The most popular way to communicate online is to use email. Some of the benefits of using email would be:

- Accessibility - e-mail is free for most users. Adopting a paid plan can be a handy solution for most personal users or companies / institutions.
- Responsibility - the record of conversations is at hand permanently, as long as the database allows, in the case of free accounts
- Unlimited expression - character limit is not imposed so the email can include any description, text or image you want
- Speed - email delivery is almost instantaneous
- Personalization - any email can be personalized with a template implemented by the email service provider
- Mobility - e-mail can be sent from any electronic device that allows the installation of an e-mail agent
- Ease of use - most e-mail services have an accessible and intuitive interface, so regardless of age it does not take long to compose and send an e-mail.

E-mail also has some vulnerabilities and disadvantages: the existence of filters makes some e-mails do not reach the recipients, vulnerable - the information sent by e-mail can be discovered and stolen; being a type of written communication it does not have the important elements of speech and may suffer misinterpretations, delayed response.<sup>8</sup>

In order to be effective, e-mails must be constructed in a certain way appropriate to the communication situation. Thus the existence of an online label in e-mails is necessary:

*1. Every email has a classy and concise subject*

Examples of topics include „Dated meeting”, „Quick question about your presentation” or „Suggestions for proposal”.

*2. Use a professional email address*

It is necessary to use the e-mail provided by the institution. If you use a personal email account, the address should be well chosen. The email address will send the name, first name, so that the recipient knows exactly who is sending the email.

*3. Think twice before pressing „Reply to all”.*

Refrain from clicking „Reply to all” unless you think everyone on the list should receive the email.

*4. Include a signature at the end.*

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<sup>8</sup> Adriana Denisa Manea, Cristian Stan, „Online communication,” in *European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences. Conference 2016 - Education, Reflection, Development*, 8 (2016), no. 40, p. 317-323.



Provides the reader with some information about the sender, uses the same font, size and color as the rest of the email.

*5. Using professional greetings.*

Avoid using relaxed, colloquial expressions such as „Greeting”, „Hello” or „Hello, folks”. At the same time, avoid shortening anyone's name. Say „Hello Mihaela”, if you're not sure she prefers to be called „Miha”.

*6. Using exclamation marks*

It is enough to use a single exclamation mark to express enthusiasm, if necessary.

*7. Pay attention to humor*

Humor can easily be lost in translation without the right facial tone or expressions. In a professional exchange, it is better to avoid humor in emails, unless you know the recipient well.

*8. People from different cultures speak and write differently*

Improper communication can easily occur due to cultural differences, especially in written form when we cannot see each other's body language.

*9. Reply to emails - even if the email was not intended for you*

Situations would be when the email was sent to you accidentally, especially if the sender is waiting for a response. An answer is not necessary, but it serves as a good email tag, especially if that person works in the same institution as you.

*10. Correction of each message*

Typing errors will always be noticed by the recipient. A correction of the message before sending is a good practice.

*11. Add the recipient's address after writing the message*

To avoid sending the message incorrectly or without correction.

*12. Double check of the correct recipient*

Pay attention to the selected email address for the recipient.

*13. Keep the classic fonts.*

For official correspondence keeping fonts, colors and class sizes

The purpose of online communication is the same as that of face-to-face communication: building connections; information sharing; the student / teacher to be heard and understood. When and how the teacher communicates in the virtual classroom can promote a sense of community in the classroom which helps students feel connected, both with the teacher and with other colleagues.

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