IMPROVING COLLEGE PROFESSORS’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS INSIDE THE CLASSROOM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines how college professors can improve their communication skills inside the classroom by testing pedagogical issues identified in previous scholarship against current teaching practices. This thesis addresses four main areas related to classroom communication skills that reflect how to build a classroom into a community of equality, open dialogue, and deep learning. The importance of classroom communities and of professors developing engaging deliveries to create compelling oral performances is described as well as issues of active listening and various models and techniques to help facilitate communication better in the classroom. A qualitative study analyzing written interviews completed by 19 college professors in Florida is conducted. Interview responses are then compared to pedagogical issues identified in previous literature to determine if there are similarities or gaps in current research. The interview determined that an interactive classroom with a professor who is consciously aware of
their communication skills can help foster deeper learning with students. This research can help to develop best teaching practices for college professors.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to college professors everywhere. May we all band together and make a commitment not to become complacent with our teaching style inside the classroom. Along with society, the student body is changing, and we must be keen to these changes in order to become the most effective instructors we can be.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Communication is a skill that is used every day in nearly every capacity yet somehow can be overlooked or taken for granted. We discover how to use language from an early age and continue to go deeper down the rabbit hole as we progress through secondary school and into college. But are we really learning how to properly communicate ideas to one another? Much of the communication skills we learn are from watching other people, especially our parents, and then we develop our own styles from everything we see and experience. This is then passed to our children and so on and so forth. This is not to say the modeling technique that has been going on since the beginning of time is not effective or appropriate; however, techniques can evolve and improve. Dr. Patrick James Kennedy of the University of Wisconsin Counseling Center says a person’s communication style is a set of learned behaviors (“Assertive Communication”). While we can learn communication skills from other people we must not forget there are hundreds of theorists and scholars in our world who have dedicated their lives to teaching and researching proper communication skills. Just because someone else does one thing does not mean that same way of acting is appropriate for today’s world. As citizens, we must strive to be the best communicators possible in order to form a better functioning and more ideal society.

There is a place where nearly every capable member of society begins his or her formal education and that is the classroom. Most American students will spend nearly 13 years in secondary school (K-12) and then possibly another 4-8 years in higher education.
That could mean a grand total of 21 years of schooling. Twenty-one years may seem like a very long time, but let’s break this down into hours. According to the United States Department of Education, most schools have on average 180 days with at least 7 hours of schooling ("Listening and Learning Tour"). Thirteen years of school with 180 days a school year is 2,340 days of school. That’s nearly 16,380 hours of sitting in a classroom from kindergarten to senior year of high school.

In higher education, degrees are around 120 credit hours long with master’s and doctorates ranging between 30 to 60 credit hours. Florida Atlantic University’s Degree Program Web site shows most undergraduate degrees of 120 credit hours long (“Degree Programs”). Assuming a person gets their doctoral degree that is another 210 hours of intense study in the classroom. Obviously, this does not include the tremendous amount of hours spent at home studying and digesting the information. In addition to the amount of time students spend in the classroom, the professor also devotes a great amount of time to that environment as well.

Alistair Duff states that an estimation of the number of presentations a university lecturer gives over a typical career is 8,000 (265). This number stands as a driving force for scholars like Duff and Frank E. Dance to research how to improve college teaching. The amount of time spent in a classroom deserves to be looked at, studied, analyzed, and adapted to the times.

Because much of our population spend so much time in the classroom with the role of communication taken for granted, it is important to examine issues about instructor communication. In addition, while current literature identifies important themes about teacher communication, a new generation of college students as well as
new teaching technologies demand a reexamination of this issue. During a personal interview with Elizabeth Kennedy, Associate Director of Retention & Information Systems in the Freshman Academic Advising Division at Florida Atlantic University, she revealed information about this current generation of college students dubbed “the millennials.” Kennedy reveals that the millennials have had more exposure to adult activities than any previous generation and receive rapid exposure to an ever-increasing level of information activity. In addition, the millennials are experiencing higher levels of anxiety and stress and more students are taking part-time employment during college with a commitment to school diminishing. Kennedy also noted that these students have an elevated idea of self-worth and may have been showered with praise and find themselves to be very unique. Furthermore, multitasking is a way of life and staying connected is essential to these students. This is why there is zero tolerance for delays because they are used to a rapid rate of information being presented to them. The millennials are a unique group of students and add to the changing nature of the student body that walks through university doors each year.

It is now time to examine how instructors might have to change to keep up with the millennial students (Kennedy). According to the University of Pittsburgh’s Speaking in the Disciplines Web site, audience adaptation plays a major role in the classroom. When people become audience members in a classroom situation, they bring with them expectations about the professor and lecture topic. Violating audience expectations can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the presentation (“Speaking in the Disciplines”). Professors must become conscious of the fact they are speaking in front of
a new type of audience and some adaptation is necessary. A large part in beginning to adapt begins with the focus of this thesis: communication skills.

Thesis Statement

This thesis addresses the question: what does an instructor need to do from a communication standpoint to be effective? The focus of this research project will be on the higher education classroom, and distance learning will not be addressed in this study. First, I focus on higher education to create realistic parameters for the study. Also, distance learning includes a whole different set of variables that require its own separate study. The college environment is a location where deep learning should flourish. College professors are required to have master’s and doctoral degrees in the field in which they have chosen to research and teach. Many students pay out-of-pocket to be sitting in the classroom, and they expect a certain product in return. Any person can stand at the front of a room and merely read lecture notes and give tests based on those notes. This project will analyze the college classroom experience and find out what instructors can do better to make their information come alive and work toward long-lasting learning. It is a weak goal to have students remember information for a test and then ship them to the next class; that is surface learning at its best. Webster’s dictionary describes surface learning as type of learning where the emphasis is put on the memorization of details without attempting to gain understanding and to provide deeper meaning. Alistair Duff and Frank Dance put it simply when they said that “there is no teaching without communication” (1).

For the purposes of this project, “being effective” is defined as being able to present the information in a way that captures the attention of students, holds it, and
creates avenues for deeper learning. According to the American College Personnel Association, “deep learning” works to apply knowledge to “real life,” integrate and synthesize knowledge with previous learning, and allow students to recall information long after they leave the classroom (“Supporting Deep Approaches to Learning in Student Affairs”).

“Communication competence” is the degree to which a communicator’s goals are achieved through effective and appropriate interaction (“Honors Communication Capstone”). This project posits that a professor must be a competent communicator inside the classroom and can achieve this level by becoming more aware of the major pedagogical issues this thesis will discuss.

Overall, this thesis is meant to improve the classroom experience for all parties involved. As Pamela Cooper and Cheri Simonds conclude,

We have decided that real learning involves a changing of attitude and behavior no less than does real teaching. We have come to believe that teaching is more of a calling forth of wholeness to be a better person than just a jamming in of information, that it must deal with the entire person, not just the mind. Teaching should make students and teachers aware of their sacredness, give them high expectations of themselves, and change their lives. (xv)

Since professors are granted a great amount of power and responsibility in the classroom, it is imperative that they treat the task with utmost respect. In the college classroom, many students expect more from their instructors than in high school. They hold these individuals with a higher regard and expect a certain level of competence and working knowledge of the classroom. Instructors who are equally well-versed in their subject matter and how to present the material will be more effective than those who are only acquainted with one of those areas. Ann Singleton and Kenneth Newman accurately lay out the foundation for a college classroom with the title of one of their journal articles
“Empowering Students to Think Deeply, Discuss Engagingly, and Write Definitively in the University Classroom” (1). Effective communication will allow instructors to engage with their students at new levels so those students can be more prepared to go into the world and affect real change. But it all begins with the instructor because as Dr. Wayne Shamo writes “success or failure of any teacher begins with their ability to communicate” (1). To complete this project, I first provide a review of literature concerning major pedagogical issues, examining previous authors’ findings, and research methods. The literature review reveals themes and issues that help guide this study. I then describe the methodology that will be used in this study, analyze the data gathered, examine the results of the study, and offer conclusions.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the heart of this project is focused on what an instructor needs to do from a communication perspective to be effective in the higher education classroom, the literature review examines pedagogical essays from The English Journal, Communication Education, College English, Journal of Teacher Education, International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Review of Research in Education, and others that are related to the field of education and best communication practices. Each journal has a unique perspective on my topic and encompasses a wide-range of different experiences in the field of teaching.

In addition, a number of books written about communication skills in the classroom are reviewed. The review is an exhaustive look at communication in teaching from primarily contemporary sources, but with an eye out to the past to trace how communication skills in the classroom have changed over time. Authors reviewed include John Daly, Anita Vangelisti, James Chesebro, Pamela Cooper, James McCroskey, and Patrick Miller who have all made a career out of exploring this very concept of effective teaching and communication.

The current literature suggests that there are at least four major pedagogical issues relevant to answering: What makes a professor effective from a communication standpoint? These issues include: (1) how to build a positive community inside the classroom, (2) how to have an interactive and engaging delivery, (3) how to develop a compelling oral presentation, and (4) how to focus on more active listening and less
instructor-dominated talk either in lecture or office hour visits. These issues will be discussed in the literature review and will guide the development of my exploratory qualitative study.

The first issue is classroom environment because it is mentioned most often in scholarly literature on effective teaching. A positive community inside the classroom is important in creating an environment where communication can flourish. This should be a place where students feel comfortable self-disclosing, participating in discussions and interacting with the instructor and fellow classmates. In addition, students should feel motivated and inspired to learn and should not just go through the motions and the process of the education system. College instructors are the de facto head of the community and in being so need to be enthusiastic about their material. If the instructor is not excited about teaching, why on earth would the students be excited to learn?

The second issue addressed in the literature review is on creating an engaging and interactive delivery that includes discussion on nonverbal communication and delivery techniques. This section will deal with developing a dynamic delivery style that engages students and keeps energy levels very high. An instructor with an eye-out for a positive delivery style will be concerned with proper eye contact, posture, dress, body orientation, body language, vocalics, proxemics and kinesics. In addition to the nonverbal aspect of teaching, the verbal aspects come into play as well. Using a variety of techniques like working metaphors, narratives and mnemonic devices will give students all the visuals and tools they need to be successful.

The third issue addressed in the literature review is how nonverbal and verbal communication can affect immediacy and affective learning in the classroom. James C.
McCroskey defines immediacy as behaviors that bring the instructor and the students closer together in terms of perceived distance (53). The goal of an effective college instructor should be to increase the immediacy between themselves and the students. James Chesebro defines affective learning as a student’s positive attitude toward a particular subject (5). This project attempts to discover how appropriate communication skills impact immediacy and affective learning inside the classroom.

The literature review also discusses various communication models that can be applied to the classroom to improve the chances of deeper learning. One of the more unique models is Frank Dance’s helical communication model for the college classroom. Alistair Duff uses Dance’s model in his research and claims that pedagogy should be an interactive experience (259). Dance’s helical or slinky model for communication reflects the fact that communication is always falling back on itself, always moving, and always interactive. In addition, Chesebro discusses the ARCS model (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) and this relates to affective learning. He believes students will perform and respond to material they perceive as personally satisfying. Chesebro believes the ARCS model should be employed to reel students into the material. Finally, Kenneth Bain presents Jeannette Norden’s sandwich model to show how to clearly introduce course material. Briefly, the sandwich model introduces concepts in a simple fashion (the bread) and then slowly integrates in the more difficult concepts (meat and vegetables).

The fourth pedagogical issue important to instructors relates to listening and talking. Active listening skills are discussed because some college instructors spend a great deal of time interacting with students on a one-on-one basis. This may not be the
case in the large lecture style classes, but even these instructors still hold office hours. Students often have many concerns about the class, grades, and personal matters and want to feel some sense of empathy and concern from their instructors. Instructors should be sensitive to the needs of their students and not just look at them as a number. An instructor who is skilled in nonverbal communication and builds his or her classroom into a community will be better able to distinguish between the student who is telling the truth about a concern and the one who is trying to buy extra time. Active listening skills will go a long way to increase immediacy levels between an instructor and a student.

Instructor-dominated talk is also addressed in the current literature. Debra Myhill, Susan Jones, and Rosemary Harper discuss the effects of an instructor-dominated classroom from a conversational aspect and the negative impact it can have on the classroom (57). Talk that is dominated by the professor turns learning into a passive experience and can even harm the interpersonal nature of the instructor-student relationship.

When an instructor has awareness of his or her communication habits it can help foster individual relationships with students to form a classroom community. Each of these four main themes that emerge from the literature are examined in depth in the following sections.

**Building a Positive Community Inside the Classroom**

The first major pedagogical issue is about building a positive community inside the classroom. An ideal community is a place where neighbors are open and honest with each other, know people’s names, and feel pleasant pulling into their driveways each day. Communication flourishes because people enjoy being around each other and do not
hesitate to help those in need. The community leader interacts with every neighbor and there are always plenty of engaging activities planned that bring people together. This can all correlate to a classroom environment where a community exists. That is why this area may be one of the most important duties a college instructor can undertake and constantly monitor as the semester progresses. A community is not just formed and then ignored. It must be maintained, tweaked, and analyzed as an active process.

In addition, when it comes to communicating effectively, there is a certain level of comfort needed when conversing with someone. This will help when a student has a question to ask or wants to make a comment based on what another student or even the instructor has said. Kenneth Bain writes that having a safe and supportive classroom environment can help foster conversations and better communication habits (99). In addition, audience adaptation plays a role in building communities because the instructor must work to get to know their students before any true relationship can begin. The University of Pittsburgh’s Speaking in the Disciplines Web site outlines that a speaker must focus on five steps to properly analyze and adapt to an audience. First, a professor should research information about their students prior to class beginning and then once they arrive. By keeping up with literature on social trends and higher education classrooms (i.e. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*) professors will be better able to get a feel for their students before they walk through the door. Once they are inside the classroom, a simple demographic survey can be given (age, major, classification, etc.) to give the professor even more information. The Speaking in the Disciplines Web site makes it clear that professors need to avoid stereotyping their students based on flawed
reasoning. One of the best ways to avoid this is to find out as much information about their class as possible (1).

There are a few activities that can get students thinking in a “community mindset” when they enter the classroom on day one. Since students will often be working in groups and most likely be around these same students for an entire semester it is often nice to know someone’s name. The same goes for an instructor who can decrease the gap between themselves and the class by personalizing the classroom experience.

In most classrooms, there are overall goals the instructor wants for his or her students in order to pass the class and find success later on. These goals may range from demonstrating an understanding of the core material, knowing the concepts of a great speech and showing them off, or understanding mathematical formulas and using them to solve problems. In any case, schools preach a goal-oriented approach in the classroom to give students something for which to aim. Helenrose Fives and Lisa Looney write about students having shared efficacy and achieving certain attainment levels together (182). What is meant by shared efficacy is the belief in someone’s ability to be successful. While this is important in an individual finding success, imagine a classroom where everyone bonds together so no one gets left behind. If classrooms are turning more toward a goal-oriented approach, it is better to have 21 people working together and believing in each other to find the answers rather than 21 individuals who think they are all in it alone.

Communities typically do not sprout up over night and often have leaders in place to ensure that things are flourishing as planned. The professor plays a central role in organizing the classroom and helping create effective communication practices. Kathleen
Galvin discusses the fact that there is support when it comes to making classrooms into a community and it begins with relationships (5). Students who feel closer to each other and their instructor are more inclined to form relationships. Instructors who do activities that encourage interaction and self-disclosure are more likely to find their students forming positive relationships inside the classroom. It is this type of relationship that forms the foundation for a successful classroom community. She also notes that transactional communication is key in order for classrooms to be most successful (196). Transactional communication goes both ways between a student and a professor. One side does not dominate the conversation, and both share an equal role in where the conversation ventures.

In addition to transactional communication, R.G. Martin encourages instructors to inspire and motivate their students with counseling and understanding to help them to feel successful (419). He insists that if instructors have a knowledge and means of communication they can be harmoniously combined to maximize student achievement. An instructor must do more than just show-up and teach a class, but also be a role model and mentor to all of their students. There is an important responsibility that comes with accepting a teaching position and it is more than merely advancing the field through research. Fives and Looney write that in numerous cases teaching comes second to research in many university departments and this can severely hinder the relationships faculty form with students (187). An article in The Chronicle of Higher Education notes that “teaching is suffering at universities because the institutions prize research success above all other factors in promotions. The job of educating students offers little reward, and instead often carries the derogatory label ‘teaching load’” (“Scientists Fault
Universities as Favoring Research Over Teaching”). Even international sources agree that teaching is not a priority in many universities. According to the Irish Federation of University Teachers, the evidence that the teaching role of academics has been undermined is incontrovertible. Academics are increasingly diverted away from the teaching of undergraduates towards the pursuit of research grants (“Balancing Teaching and Research”). A careful balance should be struck between the two because research is an important aspect of academia and helps foster new knowledge in many fields.

Professor Amy Cheng Vollmer, a professor and researcher at Swarthmore College, discusses how to find balance between teaching and research. She suggests having a ‘You Can’t Do It All Approach’ and encourages instructors to limit and focus their efforts. In addition, professors need to prioritize their responsibilities and not procrastinate on anything. This includes designing lectures and grades. Finally, she encourages instructors not to over-stress by having mentors and not over-extending yourself to do it all (29). Once a professor begins to over-extend him or herself, the student can suffer.

Robert Powell and Dana Caseau write that instructors need to develop sincere acceptance and support for all students that come through their classroom doors (2). They believe this creates a community at its heart because constructing one is all about acceptance, tolerance, openness and understanding. When those qualities thrive it is easier for communication to thrive, new ideas to be born, and a greater understanding of the information being presented to be digested and used later on.

Communities inside the classroom do not just end with forming closer relationships with students because instructors themselves need to band together and
support each other as well. The university community is organized very differently than the secondary school community. In many K-12 schools there are numerous faculty meetings throughout the semesters and other meetings that involve department heads and curriculum guides. There appears to be a lot of interaction among staff members that results in more talk about school issues and student concerns. However, in a university community, faculties often do not come to campus every day and often times work from home. College offices promote an individual environment and often times an instructor, adjunct, or graduate teaching assistant does not have their own classroom or office to personalize and get used to and has to switch between classrooms and buildings each new semester. Vincent Tinto writes about classrooms as communities and documents that there needs to be more contact among university faculty members (288). This contact can be social events, staff training, or even meetings that are organized with a specific focus. This way faculty members can share teaching strategies, voice student concerns, and update any curriculum that may be out-of-date. In addition to department management, higher interaction of faculty members is better for the overall morale of the department.

The theme song for the hit show “Cheers” had it right when Gary Portnoy and Judy Hart Angelo wrote that “sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same, you wanna be where everybody knows your name” (1982).

Author Jon Gordon talks about people developing their purpose and seeing themselves in a larger role in his book The Energy Bus. This can often motivate people to increase their productivity and think about their customers or people they are serving. Instructors need to visualize their greater purpose each time they enter a classroom.
Students have a need to learn, and it is the instructors’ basic job to facilitate that learning through the most effective means possible. Neil Glasgow and Cathy Hicks write about professional development among faculty members and how they urge instructors to work on their comradery (214). This all plays into the simple fact that communities need strong leadership, and just as professors can receive their energy from students, they should also be in tune with other faculty members. A classroom might have 21 individuals working together for a common goal, and a department should have its many instructors working together with shared goals of creating a stronger department and a better experience for everyone’s students. As Bain writes “the best teachers often try to create…a ‘natural critical learning environment.’” This is an environment where learners feel a sense of control over their education and believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly while receiving proper feedback in the process (18).

Communities bring people out of their shells and into the conversation. Author Peter Jarvis thinks that interaction is the key to building classroom communities (36). A delivery style and curriculum that evokes student responses will help to bring students into the material and promote a good, healthy discussion. For example, instructors who give assignments that encourage students to work together to find the solution (collaborative learning) help to promote strong discussion among the students. It also takes the spotlight away from the instructor and decreases the amount of instructor-talk that occurs in the classroom.

A lot depends on the communication skills of the instructor to help facilitate conversation and teach the material appropriately. In addition, a lot depends upon the personality of the instructor and whether the students feel this person is approachable or
likeable. Conversely, does the instructor feel confident enough in his or her own knowledge of the material and communication skills to be effective community/classroom leaders?

In the end, if a college instructor can successfully create a community he or she will see results almost immediately as far as an attentive and engaged class. Tinto believes that shared learning in a positive manner is the best way to get students involved in the material (288). It is the instructor’s job to communicate to the class the importance of the material as well as enable their enthusiasm to shine through any reservations the students may have. This process involves having an interactive delivery to draw students into the material.

**Developing an Interactive and Engaging Delivery**

The second major pedagogical issue identified in the literature is about developing an interactive and engaging delivery. Once the community is up and running and the environment appears ready to flourish with good, solid communication then real teaching can begin. However, it all starts with the words coming from the instructor’s mouth and how well the students receive the message. Louisa Lehman interviewed a secondary school teacher who was very perturbed by their colleagues’ communication skills:

> There are so many teachers that are incredibly bad at communicating. Either they just talk continuously, without paying attention to the needs of the pupils or the fact that they can’t cope with listening for long periods of time. Or they’re just really boring…some teachers just drone on and on, and then wonder why pupils are difficult…it’s like they don’t have any awareness of how they are affecting things. (12)
Awareness is the key when it comes to having a successful delivery in the classroom. Professors should be considered artists and magicians at the same time because not only do they bring textbooks to life inside the minds of students, but they juggle the attention spans of over 25 students sometimes. An instructor needs to become a “self-aware professor in order to truly be effective in the classroom. Even Dr. Patrick Miller, a body language expert for professors and teachers, believes that self-awareness is critical to improving nonverbal communication (79). This comes with the territory of monitoring everything from seating arrangement to where instructors stand, their speaking rate, eye contact with every member of the class and effective gestures. The goal here is to make listening to a lecture less passive and more interactive and visual. The word visual as it relates to the classroom can mean actual pictures and videos, but it can also relate to psychological imagery. Miller believes students should be able to sit in a classroom, see the information clearly and relate it to their own lives. This is not an easy task, and it will take a lot of mental energy to be successful in this area; however, the results can be very rewarding.

Lehman also interviewed numerous students for her book and found that many of them can see through the fake acts professors put on in front of the classroom (13). Students are smart and savvy when it comes to social interaction because many of them have made a short career out of talking and gossiping in their cliques. Miller writes that true feelings are vividly expressed through nonverbal actions. This is to say that if an instructor says one thing and his or her body language communicates another thing, the students are more likely to believe the nonverbal messages. In fact, according to Colleen
McKenna, people will believe the nonverbal aspect of interaction 93 percent of the time (1).

Confidence can go a long way in determining how effective an instructor will be inside the classroom. An instructor’s belief in his or her ability to teach and positively affect the classroom is known as teacher efficacy. This is something instructors need to develop from day one in the classroom to set the tone of how things will run for the rest of the semester. Miller believes that people make judgments the moment they see you based on your nonverbal communication because the body communicates confidence or lack of it long before you utter your first words (2). Students begin sizing up a professor the second they walk into the room and the first moment they begin to address the class. First impressions are forming immediately, and instructors must be able to project confidence to the class with their body language first and then with the verbal message they wish to share. In addition to an interactive delivery, the use of space inside a classroom can also communicate multiple messages to the students.

Use of space

Miller believes that space in the classroom may also serve to indicate status, dominance, and leadership (55). Removing barriers is an important step to increase the immediacy between an instructor and the students. If at any time a podium, desk or table can be removed before a lecture or presentation begins, that can create an ideal situation in the classroom. Something that stands between an instructor and the student automatically works to develop a classroom hierarchy and power structure. Removing barriers is a necessary step to reduce the intimidation students may feel. An instructor who is in front of his or her students with an open body position and nothing blocking
them may invite more questions or conversation during class. Another way instructors can make this type of learning environment is by having a keen awareness of their eye contact with the class.

*Eye contact*

Now that the instructor is in plain sight, it is time to use oculesics, or eye contact, to keep students engaged. Peter Andersen and Janet Andersen believe that professors who use more eye contact can more easily monitor and regulate their classes, and they communicate more warmth and involvement to their students (107). This can easily tie back into the community concept because in a community there is a sense of warmth among members. Warmth invites conversation which in turn can invite a deeper sense of understanding of not only the course material, but other people’s views too. Andersen and Andersen believe that increased eye contact multiplies the opportunities for communication to occur and enables the instructor to respond to the many nonverbal behaviors of students (107). Eye contact can allow an instructor to have a better pulse on his or her classroom and in return react to what they see in front of them. Eye contact also can train an instructor to pick-up on the kinds of issues Andersen and Andersen mentioned. If they notice a lot of the class look spaced-out or lost, they might be able to better adjust their presentation. Miller talks about a common occurrence in the classroom when an instructor may ask a difficult question to the class and then see them avoid making eye contact (30). Either the students do not know the answer, or perhaps they know a general answer but have limited confidence to articulate a response. Here is where an instructor who has good eye contact and a pulse on the class can offer encouraging words to inspire students to speak up even if the answer may be off-base.
But no adjustments can be made if the instructor is simply not looking at the class. Also, a full scan should be done of the classroom in order to meet the eyes of all students, especially those in the back of the room. It is also important not to focus on a particular student because that could lead to someone feeling singled out or uncomfortable, unless they are being disruptive. In that case, Thomas Good and Jere Brophy believe that when students know a professor continuously scans the room, they tend to look at the professor more when they misbehave to see if he or she is watching (169). In the end, as any successful public speaker can attest to, if you have your audiences’ eyes you have a much better shot of attracting their mental attention as well. Students need to see the whole presentation by the professor (eyes, gestures, etc.) to truly understand the information. In addition to eye contact, the way a professor’s body is oriented to the class can have an impact on learning.

Body Language and Gestures

The classroom can to take on many faces during a semester including a learning community and a theater at the same time. Peter Filene describes the classroom as a theater and an instructor’s role in the class as an actor. He explains how an instructor should set an atmosphere and focus the audience’s attention (53). This relates to an instructor exuding a level of confidence and using eye contact to gather students’ attention. Kinesics refers to body movements and what meanings these movements communicate (Miller, 45). Instructors communicate many messages to students by the way they walk, stand, sit, what they do with their shoulders, hands, arms, legs, and the manner in which they position their bodies toward or away from others. As author Julius Fast wrote in her book on body language, “Your body doesn’t know how to lie” (1).
Filene also urges teachers and professors to use gestures to underline ideas (52). However, some authors differ on the amount of gestures that should be used in a presentation as Meyer believes gestures should be used sparingly and only those that are natural to instructors should be used. It’s important to note that the same gesture should not be repeated continuously as this will create a distraction for the students (41). Professors will employ a variety of gestures to make a certain effect on the classroom. Miller believes that gestures are often comprehended more quickly than speech and can either add to or replace words. At the same time, it is important that professors learn how to use natural body movements when talking in front of a class of students (51). As Filene stated, if a professor wants to accent an important lecture point, a gesture is the most common way of doing this.

In addition to lecture and presentation, body language and gestures are important when it comes to the interpersonal side of a student-professor relationship. Miller touches on this subject by adding that we lean forward when we like someone. On the other hand, we lean away from individuals we have negative attitudes toward (47). Many times students will come to instructors before or after class or during office hours, and this is when instructors need to turn-up their self-awareness of their body language. A student may already feel uncomfortable by the fact that they are alone with the person who controls their grade, and the instructor should work to ease the situation. Leaning toward the student with a smile and open body position may demonstrate a willingness to hear and listen to what the student has to say. On the other hand, a body posture that is closed with arms folded and limited eye contact may detour students from really speaking their minds. Also, sometimes we orient our body a certain way unconsciously; maybe it is cold
in the room so we fold our arms or maybe we are checking an e-mail and do not look at the student. The point is that the previous actions may not communicate how the instructor truly feels toward the student, but the student does not know this. They may see the limited eye contact or folded arms and think the instructor does not like them or what they are saying. According to Pauline Rowlson, the stillness factor may be the most appropriate method to ensure comfort during a conversation (93). The less movement made by an instructor, the fewer things can be misinterpreted. Another way to avoid misinterpretation is the use of proper vocalics so the entire class can literally hear what is said in an articulate manner.

**Vocalics**

Chesebro and McCroskey conducted a survey to determine the nonverbal behavior that students liked or disliked most about professors. They found that students felt the monotone voice was the most objectionable behavior of a professor (73), causing students to be less interested in the subject matter being presented. In addition, the authors tell a story about Virginia P. Richmond, an instructor at West Virginia University, who took a class about the philosophy of education when she was an undergraduate student. Her professor droned on and on in a monotone voice for two and half hours every class. Out of the 100 or so people enrolled in the class, most had dozed off. Criticism of this professor was not about his competence but his voice. This is disheartening to hear because a class on the philosophy of education provides important background information for students who wish to pursue education as a career. This is a chance for the field to be celebrated and for enthusiasm to build around the material so the students can take it forward. It would be fascinating to see how many students
decided to switch majors after taking this class. According to Miller, vocal intonation includes projection, variety, timing and rate of speech (31).

He believes projection to be one of the most important aspects of classroom communication because quite simply if students cannot hear the message they will not understand the message (33). A strong voice that includes different pitch changes and tones to accurately reflect the importance of information being presented goes a long way in drawing students into the lecture. It can also tell students a great deal how the instructor feels about the material. Instructors should appear enthusiastic and full of energy when they teach. This enthusiasm comes across through all areas of nonverbal, but especially in vocalics. True meaning comes through with vocal intonations. For example, in 1974, Richard Nixon sent transcripts instead of audiotapes of presidential interviews to the House Judiciary Committee. The committee was considering possible impeachment of the president and trying to determine the truth behind his words. However, they complained that the meaning was not truly communicated because of the absence of voice modifications (36). They needed to hear the pauses, tone, inflections and intonations to get a more accurate picture of what the president actually meant. In addition, they wanted to see if he was speaking very quickly. Speaking rate is linked with projection because if one or both are off, the message can be lost.

Effective vocalics in the college classroom are essential to message comprehension for students, but they can also play a major role in the development of an instructor’s confidence level or perceived confidence by students. According to Miller, the voice should be used to present a sense of confidence and assurance (39). This is especially important if the college instructor is a teaching assistant or new to the
classroom. One way to win over the respect of students is with a strong voice that clearly demonstrates the instructor has competence in the classroom. Another nonverbal area that can help foster communication in a college classroom is seating arrangement.

**Seating Arrangement**

Most college instructors do not have their own classroom that is solely theirs. Instead, they are constantly moving around the campus to wherever their classes have been scheduled. In addition, it is a lot more work for the instructor to have to go into the classroom early to re-arrange chairs and tables before the students arrive especially if there are classes in the room back-to-back. But as Miller explains, classroom layout and aesthetics can directly impact students’ learning. The classroom environment can create moods and establish how much communication takes place (54). Also, Debra Myhill and Susan Jones add that instructors should consider alternative seating patterns to encourage greater participation and to signal that this is a point where there are higher expectations of involvement (63). The authors add that it is important for instructors to realize the traditional lecture arrangement may not always work best for every activity and lecture.

Chesebro and McCroskey outline a few different scenarios for seating arrangement. Modular seating, or grouping desks together, is best for student group interactions. This way each student can look at each other in the eyes, have proper body orientation toward each other, and feel closer and more connected. It also makes it easier for an instructor to come assist groups around the classroom. If the instructor wants to have a lively discussion, the best seating arrangement is the circular or horse-shoe arrangement. This way everyone can see each other and no one is in a position of power,
not even the instructor who should situate himself or herself in with the students and not stand and move around the circle. The main purposes of discussions are for students to take ownership of the material and start to develop some answers and conclusions for themselves. The instructor merely acts as a facilitator or moderator of the discussion. However, if the goal of the day’s lesson is a lecture or presentation, the straight-row seating is most effective for student listening (75). This arrangement does help students pay attention more.

There are a few drawbacks to this arrangement because Miller points out that student interaction is greatest in the front and middle rows (56). These students are almost forced into the lecture because they are closest to the instructor. They must pay attention or they will have an easier time getting caught zoning out. It should be no surprise that the instructor will have the most amount of problems with the students in the back row and the corners. Most instructors concentrate their energy on the front and middle areas of the room and rarely spend enough time making eye contact with the back and corner seats. Also, row seating will limit the amount of eye contact an instructor can make with students. If the instructor is lecturing from the center of the room, they have a row of students directly in front of them. It will be challenging to maintain the eye contact of the students in that row because they are in a straight line. Even if the instructor moves, some students may be blocked by another’s head at a diagonal.

Miller explains how the distance between a professor and students is a critical factor in the communication process (58). Professors do have the freedom to move around the classroom whereas students do not, and they need to take advantage of this. However, this is not to say they should break nonverbal rules by pacing in front of the
classroom because this can be very distracting. Coordinated movement is key to managing all corners of the seating arrangement. Instructors may begin in the center of the room and then slowly transition to the right corner while still orienting themselves to the whole classroom. They may discretely shift back to the center and then follow the left corner. Instructors should also be encouraged to purposefully gesture toward the back of the room to be sure to address those students in the back.

All in all, Miller sums up his section on seating arrangement by making it clear that instructors need to be flexible when it comes to the chairs in the classroom (58). If they are not bolted to floor, then the instructor should move them to encourage maximum communication. An instructor who is well-versed in nonverbal communication has a better pulse on the classroom and will be able to tell when something needs to change and be confident in their abilities as an instructor to make these changes on the fly even if it means temporarily veering off-course. Another aspect of the classroom that can help and hinder perception and communication skills is the appearance of the instructor.

*Appearance*

Miller believes that you are never judged solely on what you do because your clothes and the image you project nonverbally communicate and leave an impression. Appearance is important because it shouts or whispers a vast amount of information about you (61). He believes what you wear and how you look can greatly affect an instructor’s relationship with the students. According to Chesebro and McCroskey, instructors who dress formally are viewed as competent, organized, prepared, and knowledgeable. On the other hand, instructors who dress casually or informally are perceived as friendly, outgoing, receptive, flexible, and fair (70). It’s important to strike a
proper balance between the two and not go to extremes. Those who dress too formally are perceived as less receptive to student needs and less likely to want to communicate. Similarly, instructors who dress too informally are not perceived as competent as their better dressed counterparts.

Chesebro and McCroskey encourage instructors to dress more on the formal side at the beginning of the semester and slowly transition to their own style in order to establish initial credibility (71). Miller does point out that instructors often underestimate the influence they have on students in the classroom without even speaking. Students notice what instructors wear and have been known to judge their competence by how well they dress professionally (65).

Finally, inappropriate clothing can hinder credibility and student perception of the instructor. This can affect how much communication a student wants to have with the instructor. The authors are trying to paint a picture of an instructor who may be wearing revealing clothing, too little clothing, or something that should be worn while sitting around the house as examples of inappropriate attire. Miller adds that instructors should be encouraged to add their own style to their dress as long as it would not be distracting to the students. If clothing is too off-the-wall or revealing, students may focus their energy on the clothing and not the academic material.

**Compelling Oral Presentations**

The third major pedagogical issue is about creating a compelling oral presentation to the class. Miller quotes author Gail Godwin as saying “good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths theater” and to some degree she has a point (65). While proper organization is necessary to have a successful classroom experience, it means very
little if the information does not come out appropriately and in a way that sticks with the
students. Nearly all the authors surveyed for this section said the same thing about
improving college teaching: instruction needs to be interactive. Coupled with an
interactive and compelling delivery was a theme of motivation and inspiration inside the
classroom.

Author Ron Clark describes a science teacher he had in high school that affected
him all the way through to his own teaching job. Her name was Mrs. Owens, and she was
known around school as one of the most demanding teachers. She was often quoted as
saying “I insist that you all succeed! Now apply yourself!” As Clark moved into a
teaching position later in life he realized one important lesson that he gained from Mrs.
Owens: if you are dealing with students you must have passion. She was so fired-up
about her science courses that one year when she was having back problems she came to
school on a stretcher. As she lay flat on her back, she wheeled herself around the room
from chalkboard to chalkboard. She claimed nothing short of death would come between
her students and their education (1). It is apparent that her enthusiasm was infectious, and
that is the first step to succeeding at an oral presentation. In addition, author Leo Meyer
suggests that ability and attitude are just as important as enthusiasm and motivation (4). It
is not all up to the student or all up to the instructor to harvest these factors, but rather it
is the interaction between students and instructors. Students want to feel like their
instructor cares about their learning and whether they succeed or fail.

Chesbro discusses this concept of affective learning, which is a student’s positive
attitude toward a subject. He claims that if the affect of the learner is being ignored, the
instructor is not doing their job (6). Chesbro found that many professors feel like it is
not their job to help students like the material (5). It is a troubling sign that some college
instructors view teaching as a secondary part of their assignment. Peter Seldin claims that
teaching occupies the greatest amount of most professors’ time, but rarely operates at the
highest level of competence (1). Seldin also found that a lot of instructors share the belief
that teachers are born and not made. However, he counters their thinking by reminding
them that potentially great teachers become great teachers by the same route: through
conditioning the mind and through acquiring skills (1). Communication is a learned skill
as the first few pages of this thesis pointed out. There are some who are born more
inclined toward being communicators, but that does not mean that is the sole route to
effective communication. This is a fundamental misconception that many college
instructors should quickly come to terms with. Pedagogical technique can be learned if
the instructor simply chooses to apply him or herself to it.

Communication scholar and trainer Len Millbower discusses some do’s and
don’ts for an instructor to have proper verbal communication inside the classroom. First,
instructors need to be absolutely clear when teaching on a particular subject. Using
concrete language and vivid examples can help to paint a stronger picture of the concept
being taught. Also, internal summaries are necessary to keep reviewing the information
and it’s important to ask the students to summarize at various points in the presentation.
This can help make the classes feel more interactive as well. During class, instructors
should observe their students’ nonverbal responses to what is being taught so they can
better craft their language around the positive or negative response that is given. Lastly,
background noise can have an impact on an instructor’s verbal abilities. This needs to
taken into consideration if windows are open or class is being held outside. While a
change of pace in the classroom setting is pleasant, it can be a severe deterrence if students have difficulty understanding the instructor’s message.

Daly and Vangelisti took a comprehensive look at what makes communicators effective at conveying messages. They claim that in teaching, one of the most important communicative challenges people face is to effectively convey their messages to others in clear and memorable ways. Their aim is to understand how college instructors can ingrain long-lasting and deep learning into the minds of their students. They quickly point out that just because a student is paying attention and hearing the instructor does not mean they are gaining information about the topic. Instructors need to start presenting concepts and ideas in small chunks so they might be reinforced and shaped as the semester progresses. Plus, the brain can only handle so much information at a time. The first major tip they offer is to simply try and make messages interesting. Narratives are a powerful force in aiding both interest and comprehension, and the authors discuss six dimensions that spark interest in stories. Students care about coherence, whether the story has clarity and flows. The same goes for presentations and lectures because the instructor must go to great lengths to be sure ideas and concepts are linked together.

Mariale M. Hardiman, who deals with brain research and dimensions of learning, points out that a basic precept of brain-based research is that learning is best achieved when linked with the learner’s previous knowledge, experience, or understanding of a given concept (52). The more connections an instructor can help a student make to the information, the more it will have a “sticky” quality, as Daly and Vangelisti point out must happen.
Narratives must also have vivid detail, evoke suspense, and show how students
can relate to the story. Many instructors will begin a presentation with a strong story to
rope their students into the material. Louisa Lehman, author of *The Perfect Teacher*,
interviewed a teacher who explained:

I make sure I have a really bold beginning. I need their attention from the start
because pulling them in later on is very tough. I work with really difficult,
unmotivated teenagers and if something doesn’t go well…it’s hard to salvage. But
I have to judge it carefully- I can’t do something so wacky that it will lead to
anarchy…and I MUST know my class and know what presses their buttons. That
is the most essential part.

This teacher is pointing out many of the concepts we have previously discussed as far as
having a pulse on the class and being able to accurately change the climate if
communication strategies are not working. Daly and Vangelisti also point out that
students exposed to narratives are nine times more likely to produce inferences about the
material than if they are exposed only to expository material (881). This means that when
instructors use narratives to explain course material, students are better able to come to
conclusions on their own and reason through the material.

In addition to narratives, making the environment more interactive can be
accomplished by using questions. “Why” questions add to verbal elaboration and get
students to think on a deeper level. Having pre-planned discussion questions will help get
students to talk. In addition, instructors need to make sure the questions are both relevant
to the material and the students’ lives in order to draw them in.

The central core of this project is the improvement of college instructor
communication skills in the classroom, but it is relevant to discuss some learning
strategies that will help the information to have that “sticky” quality.
First, Daly and Vangelisti point out it is important to mention that students can hold information separately in both auditory and visual working memories which can increase storage amounts (883). Mnemonics devices are a powerful way to link items to events or keywords in recall. For example, the SOLER method is an example of how a person can improve their interpersonal communication skills. They need to ‘S’ sit squarely, ‘O’ have an open body position, ‘L’ lean toward the speaker, ‘E’ have proper eye contact, and ‘R’ relax their body. The letters SOLER will help in recalling all the information. In addition, students should be encouraged to keep outlines of the lectures and/or take active notes. Instructors are encouraged to present diagrams, pictures, graphs, charts, and other multimedia displays to aid student comprehension.

These methods all boil down to a simple communication concept of teaching clearly. Chesebro points out that “clarity is essential to good teaching” (93). A professor presenting information in a clear and audible way is very much like a student giving a speech in a public speaking class. The instructor should capture the attention of his or her students immediately and then work feverishly to hold that attention and engage with his or her audience. Presentations should be organized with a minimal amount of points that are filled with clear and vivid examples, cited sources, audible transitions that signal a shift to a new concept, and language that is clear and concrete.

The Campus Instructional Consulting Department at Indiana University came out with research aimed at improving lecturing skills that is relevant to this conversation. They point out many pitfalls that are associated with poor lecturers who do not communicate well with students. First, instructors try to cover too much material in one presentation. Eventually students will start complaining that they cannot understand or
keep up with the note taking. Second, a lot of instructors fail to prepare enough for their lecture. This involves using the above tools such as narratives and vivid examples and finding a way to properly integrate them into the lecture instead of reading information that the students can just find in the textbook. Third, some instructors ignore student feedback either nonverbally or even verbally. Students are like any audience in front of a speaker, they are communicating their understanding or lack thereof somehow. Even if they try to hold their confusion in, nonverbal leakage will occur in some fashion. Fourth, a disorganized and disengaged instructor harms the communication process. If the students have no connection to the speaker at all, they are less likely to want to learn. If any learning does occur, it will be surface at best. However, the article makes it very clear that improvement is possible within the same semester as well as over several semesters and years (“Improving Lecturing Skills”). Instructors should not become complacent in their delivery because the type of student changes that walks through their doors each year. Instructors who are competent communicators will recognize that and be ready to adapt to what they see and hear from their students.

In the end, instructors are encouraged to review course material. Chesebro adds that repetition is good for students’ memory and it helps focus students’ attention on the material (99). Instructors should ask students questions that relate to what was previously discussed as this will aid in making the presentation more interactive.

To make the review experience more exciting for students, Tammy Ostrander encourages instructors to use role-playing in the classroom to develop certain skills (2). For example, the instructor breaks the class into groups and assigns them a particular concept the class discussed during the semester. The groups must convince the class that
their group’s concept is more relevant and important. This is an easy way to review the main concepts and get students speaking in front of people.

Models

Part of creating a compelling oral presentation is discovering strategies that will aid in message comprehension. In addition, the literature indicates that there are a few scholarly models that will aid in increasing the interaction levels in the classroom. Many of these models have been field tested and have been implemented in college and secondary classrooms across the country.

Frank E. X. Dance developed a communication model that he believes is absolutely necessary in the college classroom and trumps the current SMCR model (Source/message/channel/receiver). Alistair Duff presented the research on Dance’s model and claims the current SMCR model is too linear and acts as a straight line between sender and receiver. Dance became increasingly frustrated with the current model and even subsequent models that have turned circular or mathematical. Dance believes that both linear and circular renditions of the communication process fail to capture essential characteristics of real-world communication (258). College classrooms need to be designed to prepare students for real-world interactions and deserve a model that accurately reflects contemporary communication situations. Dance developed The Helical Model of the Communication Process because it gives geometrical testimony to the concept that communication, while moving forward, is at the same moment coming back upon itself and being affected by its past behavior (258). In order to better visualize this unique classroom model, picture a slinky toy in a person’s hand. If he or she holds the top of it and releases the other half, the slinky toy will uncoil downward and then
come back into a new shape before uncoiling again. The recoiling process is happening because the toy uncoiled in the first place so the coming curve is affected by the curve from which it emerges. This is much like the grooves in a screw because it can be screwed inward and outward. Dance wants people to believe that pedagogy is an interactive process or a two-way flow. The notion that “The fundamental activity of communication is interaction and without it there is no communication” is central to Dance’s model (259). His theories are grounded in his belief that students are not passive objects in the classroom just sitting there as information is disseminated. Instead, they are active members in the communication process who receive a message and respond both verbally and nonverbally and this in return affects the speaker and forces them to adapt their messages to better suit their classroom audience. Finally, the classroom helix appears to be infinite because it can uncoil and recoil time and time again, whereas the SMCR model has a tendency to lead scholars to believe communication at some point is terminal and has an end. However, the helix makes it clear that ideas continue to affect us even after we leave the sender who supplied the message.

In addition to the Helical Model, Dance supplies additional information on how college teaching can be improved from a communication perspective. Dance believes the lecturer in a classroom is also an orator because what sets good lecturers apart is their ability not only to embrace content, but to justify the enterprise by their skill in projecting both content and presence (265). Dance is a firm believer that an instructor’s public speaking skills are susceptible to improvement; this means that complacency has no place in the college classroom. Instructors need to come to terms with the fact that speaking skills can be taught and learned. In a nutshell, Dance believes effective speaking in a
college classroom includes an absence of fallacies, high-quality visual aids, grammatical correctness, well-organized ideas, smooth transitions between points, and the correct use of deduction and induction. As orators, instructors need to strive for nearly the same environment speakers want outside of the classroom: the illusion of spontaneity. That way it will boost the credibility of the instructor because it will appear they are speaking these grand statements and ideas off the top of their head and correctly doing it. Effective conclusions also need to be drawn. Since attendance is not always mandatory in college classrooms, instructors should leave their students with a sense of wanting more, a hook to get them to keep coming back to class and craving the information that is being discussed and analyzed.

Duff and Dance supply a wealth of information that college instructors can begin to implement immediately. What is so appealing about these theories are that they are practical and can be tested each day in the classroom. Duff ends his article by appropriately stating that “the discipline of speech communication can help to secure a brighter future for higher education as a whole” (268).

Another model that will aid in making classrooms more interactive and help to make content relevant to students is Keller’s ARCS model of motivation. Keller defined relevance in the classroom as perceiving something that is related to our own personal needs. The model stands for attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction (84). Attention is first because before an instructor can make material relevant they have to gain the attention of the classroom. Students must be engaged in the material from the start for deep learning to take place. Next, instructors must work to relate the material to the lives of the individual students in the classroom. Questions for instructors to ask
students to consider include: How does it affect them? Why should they care about the material? Why is it important? What is the greater impact on society? Questions like these will ground the material in relation to the lives of the students. The third step is confidence because instructors need to communicate to the students what is expected of them, but also tell them how they can succeed. Students need to know they are not in this alone. This is a community, and we are all in this together. The final step is satisfaction because students need to feel good and proud about the outcomes of their efforts if they are to be motivated again. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can be given to facilitate the satisfaction angle. Intrinsic rewards include active praise that feels good inside and extrinsic rewards include things like points and grades.

Another model or technique meant to foster communication in the classroom is a solid activity used to review main concepts in the class. Neil Glasgow and Kathy Hicks discuss the jigsaw technique and review a study that was done with seventh and eighth grade classes. The academic benefits of this method include improved reading abilities, systematic reproduction of knowledge, ability to make conclusions, and summarizing. In addition, the jigsaw method is meant to reduce intimidation and communication apprehension inside the classroom. Participants in this method were not afraid to ask questions or scrutinize information given to them from a peer. Communication was able to flourish as it should in a classroom.

The following is an example of the Jigsaw Method being used in a college classroom. Each member of a group is asked to complete some discrete part of an assignment; when every member has completed his or her assigned task, the pieces can be joined together to form a finished project. For example, students in a course in African
geography might be grouped and each assigned a country; individual students in the
group could then be assigned to research the economy, political structure, ethnic makeup,
terrain and climate, or folklore of the assigned country. When each student has completed
his research, he or she goes and forms a new group with other students who have their
same topic (i.e. terrain and climate) except about a different country. Each student
presents their research and learns about each other’s topic. The original group then
reforms to complete a comprehensive report and provide details of what they learned
from other classmates. In a chemistry course each student group could research a
different form of power generation (nuclear, fossil fuel, hydroelectric, etc.). Then the
groups are reformed so that each group has an expert in one form of power generation.
They then tackle the difficult problem of how much emphasis should be placed on each
method. Glasgow and Hicks points out those members of all groups rely on each other for
learning and each can be considered an important group member (9). The jigsaw method
is a great way of reinvesting in the community theory of a classroom. Students want to
find out as much information as they can for their original group so they can have and
share the same knowledge others have about the topic.

The final method discussed focuses on students constructing knowledge rather
than simply absorbing it. Kenneth Bain cites a method called ‘the sandwich approach’
developed by Jeanette Norden (126). Instructors need to figure out ways to slowly
introduce material so students have time to absorb the information and build from it. In
the sandwich approach, the instructor should start with something simple or familiar as it
relates to the concept and gradually add more complexity and then finally the unknown.
This is the same as beginning with the bread, or a good general account of some basic
and fairly broad ideas. Over time, the instructor gradually adds the mayonnaise, meat, lettuce, and tomatoes, until students have developed a more sophisticated understanding (126). Students begin to develop deeper understanding and produce inferences about the material as well.

**Active Listening and Instructor-Dominated Talk**

In addition to the main topics mentioned above, there are a few additional themes about classroom communication in the literature that deserve mention as the final major pedagogical area. I believe the more tools an instructor can have on their belt, the more successful they will be in the classroom and the greater impact they can have on students. The first topic is the concept of active listening in the classroom. Joseph Karmos discusses listening skills in the classroom and outlines some tips that can help instructors. Many times a student will come to office hours or stay after class to discuss a personal matter or a matter related to the class. Karmos believes instructors need to take the time to orient themselves toward the student, give them eye contact, and lean inward to display a listening mentality (43). The student’s feelings should be reflected back to the student and instructors are not to offer advice unless called upon. Karmos discovered that many students wish to be independent and find solutions themselves (44). Some of them just merely need someone to talk to. Karmos believes the greatest pay-off to active listening is the professional relationship that will grow between student and professor (44). This is relevant because not only is it important for instructors to have a good relationship with their class, but with the individual students that come talk to them.

Active listening is pivotal to successful professional relationships in the classroom because no one wants to be dominated in a conversation. A major point in this project is
to discuss the need to downplay hierarchy in the classroom. This is related to the final concept of instructor-dominated talk in the university classroom. According to Goods and Brophy, professors are the principal actors in 84 percent of classroom communication episodes (28). Vincent Tinto also points out that the university seems to perpetuate a faculty-dominated classroom (287). Many times, as Good and Brophy point out, instructors may not even notice they are hogging the conversation with long-winded explanations (28). They are so used to lecturing to students and drawing out points that they cannot help but do the same in conversations before or after class with students. At the same time, there should not be a complete shift so that professors are spending the whole time asking fact-based questions to students and just getting answers the whole time. Instead, a careful balance should be struck between who is talking, especially in post-class conversations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review shows the importance of communication skills in the higher education classroom as demonstrated by multiple scholarly perspectives. It shows how even though an instructor may be an expert in a certain area that should not automatically qualify him or her to teach students. Instructors need an active awareness of their communication skills in order to be most effective in the classroom.

The literature review revealed four major pedagogical areas that make a college professor effective inside the classroom from a communication perspective. First, professors are encouraged to build positive communities inside the classroom because this will help communication to flourish among students and between instructors and students. Everyone is encouraged to work together to achieve classroom goals. Second, I
analyzed the mechanical aspect of instructors’ delivery to help give them confidence to teach any number of students in a class. Sub-sections of this area included: use of space when lecturing, eye contact, body language and gestures, vocalics, seating arrangement and the instructor’s appearance. Third, developing a compelling oral delivery shows how the style of instructors’ presentations will aid them in keeping students interested in course material and develop deep learning. Finally, I discussed various communication models that can aid in making course material more interesting and relevant to students.

Some of the literature reviewed here is well over 10 years old, and some theories and practices discussed predate internet technology and its growing role in higher education as well as the changing character of college students. This study should reveal how current college instructors present their material and whether this correlates to what scholars in the field have previously recommended. The study may also find gaps in existing research, in terms of identifying the most important themes in instructor communication.

Finally, current findings need to be updated, and data needs to be gathered about actual current teaching practices. I will add to the current research with a qualitative exploratory study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter describes the methodology and research instrument used as well as the results of the study.

A qualitative approach is best suited to an exploratory research project like this one. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is explained by Babbie as “essentially the distinction between numerical and nonnumerical data” (2010). Babbie also defines an exploratory study as a type of research that helps determine the best design, data collection method and selection of subjects. It should draw definitive conclusions only with extreme caution (2010). This study uses a written interview to explore how current teaching practices compare to the relevant themes discussed in previous literature. In this study, the data gathered is nonnumerical. The written interview provides data in the form of the written word. The data is analyzed using open coding. According to Glaser and Strauss, open coding is the process of selecting and naming categories from the analysis of the data. It is the initial stage in data acquisition and relates to describing overall features of the phenomenon under study. Variables involved in the phenomenon are identified, labeled, categorized and related together in an outline form (1961). Lindolf and Taylor both agree that coding is essential to making sense of qualitative data (214). In addition, Lindolf and Taylor say that coding is a link between the data and the categories posited by the researcher. They serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, organize, and compile data (215). The categories and codes are determined by the incoming data.
Responses are organized by questions, and the most common answers appear in the results section. In addition, I look for links between the answers given and the information in the literature review. Furthermore, the written interview responses are examined to determine if additional themes arose that were not mentioned in the previous literature.

The goal is to add to our knowledge about what college instructors today do and should do to be effective communicators. In addition, this study should help determine what areas of research communication and pedagogical scholars need to focus on in the future.

**Research Instrument**

The scope of this exploratory study is limited to college instructors in Florida. The research instrument used is a written interview sent to communication professors at public and private colleges and universities and community colleges in the state of Florida. Communication instructors were chosen as the subjects because of their disciplinary expertise. Their answers to the written interview can serve as a foundation and launching point for future research to study professors’ teaching habits in different academic disciplines. However, this interview was sent out using a Florida Communication Association listserv. The Florida Communication Association is the state association of professionals in the academic discipline of communication. Communication professors and three professors on that list from disciplines outside of communication provided responses.

The interview addresses the issues revealed in the literature reviewed in order to make comparisons between best practices as defined by previous researchers and
communication practices actually used currently by college instructors in their classrooms.

The six questions comprising the written interview are as follows:

1. How often do you think about your communication skills as a professor while you teach? If this applies to you, what do you think about? If not, why?

2. What techniques do you use to make the course material interesting and relevant to your students? In other words, how do you encourage students to care about the material?

3. Do you attempt to decrease the physical and psychological distance between you and your students? If so, in what ways?

4. What type of classroom environment do you find most conducive to good communication? How were the seats arranged? How are the seats typically arranged in the classroom(s) in which you teach?

5. How do you use verbal or nonverbal communication cues to motivate and inspire students to succeed?

6. Are there additional issues related to classroom communication that you would like to address?

In addition, demographic information was gathered about the respondents including the type of college at which the instructor teaches, their professional rank, how many years they have been teaching, region of the state in which they teach, the number of courses taught per year and the average size of their classes.

Demographics
In the written interview, there were three responses from southeast Florida, one from north Florida, five from central Florida, four from north central Florida, three from the Tampa area, two from southwest Florida, and one who did not indicate their location.

For type of school, there were seven responses from both community colleges and universities. In addition, three responses came from private universities and one from a technical university.

The ranks of the respondents included five assistant professors, three associate professors, four instructors, three senior lecturers, one professor, and one adjunct. Two individuals did not respond to this question.

For the average number of courses taught per year, responses ranged from one class taught to as many as 14 per year. A computation found that for this interview, an average of 7.5 courses per year are taught. Also, each respondent teaches about 25 students per class on average.

Finally, responses for years of teaching experience ranged from one year to 44 years, and for this interview, the average professor has about 16 years of teaching experience.

Results

The first goal of completing this written interview was to gain a pulse on the communication habits of current communication professors in the college classroom. It became apparent as the results were coming in that communication professors are very savvy of their habits as they teach. In addition, many of the responses were filled with exclamation marks and wishes of “Good Luck” and “This was fun!” It was obvious that
the people who responded are passionate about what they do; even those with over 20 years of teaching experience.

This section describes the responses to the six interview questions asked of each of the 19 professors who responded. The results have been organized around by question and include similar responses.

**Question 1—How often do you think about your communication skills as a professor while you teach? If this applies to you, what do you think about? If not, why?**

Instructors seemed the most passionate and included longer answers about this question because 18 out of 19 participants responded ‘Yes.’ Answers included such words as everyday, daily, every class, all the time, regularly, and constantly. This makes sense because communication instructors have an academic background in the field and know the nuances and importance of effective communication.

The results indicate that these professors are monitoring their habits (eye contact, body language, vocalics) and those of their students on a daily basis. Many of the responses indicated a desire to sound clear, be effective educators, and most of all present information that is relevant to their students.

In addition, five responses indicated these professors want to become communication models for their students. They figure they need to display effective presentation skills to their students while they teach and even appropriate conversation skills if students come to speak to them before or after class. The instructors who said they wanted to be models for their students all had over 12 years of teaching experience, and three of the five responses came from instructors at their respective community
college. In addition, two professors indicated they willingly seek additional classroom teacher training so they can become more effective educators. Both these instructors have been teaching for over 20 years at a community college. They feel there is no room for complacency inside a higher education classroom.

Question 2--What techniques do you use to make the course material interesting and relevant to your students? In other words, how do you encourage students to care about the material?

One of the first responses to this question was, “I always suspect when someone asks that question what they really mean is ‘what are YOU doing to MAKE students interested’ -- I'm not so sure that is my job.” This came from a linguistics instructor who has been teaching over 20 years. This was the only negative response to the question as the rest of the professors’ responses described their feelings about stories, enthusiasm, humor and relevance.

The two most common responses on how they work to make course material interesting and relevant is through the use of technology (YouTube, music, etc.) and relating the material to topics that interest students. These instructors find a way to make the class material relevant to a younger generation so they can attach themselves better to the concepts. The other common response, related to relevancy of course material to student lives, was a central issue that came up in eight responses. These college instructors try to get students to think about how the material plays a central role in their life from personal relationships to gaining and maintaining employment.

In addition, some professors said they used storytelling and concrete examples to go along with whatever is being discussed that day; they want to paint pictures in their
classes’ minds. The ones who use technology literally want to show pictures and videos to illustrate a point. However, an assistant professor who has been teaching for over twelve years at a small liberal arts college points out that “PowerPoint is a tool, and not a crutch.”

It is still important to make the information come alive with effective speech communication including the above-mentioned stories, examples, and even humor to lighten the mood of the classroom. Humor was cited by four professors who use it daily in their classes. It can range from self-deprecating humor to fist-bumps and instructors trying out modern day student sayings. The intention here appears to be instructors working to keep tension and anxiety out of the classroom as much as possible and to replace it with a calm and friendly environment.

Finally, a few instructors talked about using enthusiasm and high-energy delivery to help make students care more about the material. As one associate professor with over 20 years of experience said, “I also try to project enthusiasm for the topic so that they can see that at least I think it is worth caring about.” This goes along with other responses to question one about certain professors wanting to model good communication habits for their students.

Question 3--How do you use verbal or nonverbal communication cues to motivate and inspire students to succeed?

The results seemed spread out across different ways to use verbal and nonverbal cues to inspire success. These ranged from eye contact and discussions to smiling, nodding and movement. Eye contact was important for three professors who mentioned
using it frequently during student speeches to show their sincere interest in the student’s topic. In addition, it was used during lecture to connect better with students.

Some professors cited using discussion questions if they feel they are losing their students with the material. One associate professor with over 20 years experience said: “I also try to ask questions to encourage them to think.” This shows recognition of the fact that learning is indeed not passive, and I will highlight this later on.

Four professors mentioned that few very simple nonverbal cues to inspire success are smiling and nodding. More responses indicated that smiling is used to put students at ease and create a friendly environment. Nodding is a simple conversation cue a few professors use to demonstrate they are listening to student opinions and concerns. The same associate professor cited in the previous paragraph uses “genuine listening [as] one of the most vital ways to let students know that their input matters.”

**Question 4--What type of classroom environment do you find most conducive to good communication? How were the seats arranged? How are the seats typically arranged in the classroom(s) in which you teach?**

This was another question that brought about spirited answers to the written interview. While nearly all the responses included a favorite seating arrangement to hold class, there was one response that stood out. An instructor at a community college with 23 years teaching experience explains that, “The dean does not like it when we arrange the furniture differently.” The instructor goes on to explain that “If I had my druthers, we would use a horseshoe arrangement with the tables and chairs.” A horseshoe arrangement can be very effective for guided lectures or even discussions because it still puts the instructor at the center of the room but allows the rest of the students to see each other.
In addition to a horseshoe arrangement, the circle proved to be the preferred arrangement according to the interview responses. It is important to remember that room arrangement is a powerful part of nonverbal communication because it influences the communication atmosphere of the room. Students should feel comfortable to participate in the class. Eight instructors claimed they favor the circle arrangement, and it should be noted that three of the eight responses were from instructors with under five years of teaching experience. A community college instructor with four years teaching experience loves the circle arrangement because, “a circle represents a community where we are all equal.” In addition, a 19-year senior lecturer comments that, “Circles are effective because they break down the communication barriers, students cannot hide.”

Not to be lost in the results is the fact that five instructors indicated they prefer a traditional lecture arrangement with rows. A senior lecturer with 20-years experience says that “Circles are obtrusive and I want the instructor at a single point in front of the room.” On the contrary, two other instructors prefer rows because they like to move around during a presentation and find this to be the easiest way. In addition, an assistant professor at a community college feels that rows provide, “A friendly tone to the classroom.”

The results did not indicate much else for classroom arrangement outside of rows and circles. A few professors indicated a desire for the horseshoe design, but did not move past this initial comment. No one mentioned anything about groups or partner desks. However, the commonality among most of the responses was that they wanted an open and friendly design for their students.
Question 5--Do you attempt to decrease the physical and psychological distance between you and your students? If so, in what ways?

A professor with 44-years of teaching experience proudly proclaimed at the beginning of her response that, “An instructor can’t be effective if you don’t try to do this.” Responses did not offer much information past this statement, but indicate a willingness to create a safe environment for discussion.

The dominant response in this section was related to kinesics, or movement. Out of 19 responses, 12 indicated that they use movement to increase immediacy behaviors between themselves and the students. As far as a podium is concerned, three professors made it a point to indicate they do not like to use one. The rest use movement to either sit with students during speeches or guided discussions, or just to walk around the classroom and come into students’ space. An adjunct instructor with one year of teaching experience explained that, “I connect more with students when I come out from behind a podium.”

In addition to movement, a few professors indicated they enjoy socializing and joking with students before or after class. This way they can get to know their students on another level than just ‘student.’

It is important to remember that immediacy behaviors involve decreasing the physical and psychological distance between an instructor and students. Another powerful way to do this is to use appropriate stories and personal narratives to connect with students. A senior lecturer with 19-years experience explained that “I use appropriate amounts of self-disclosure so my students see me as a human and not a talking head.” This is the same instructor who used a lot of exclamation marks and power
words such as “absolutely”, “always”, and “all the time” to describe their communication habits.

Since the typical classroom has a built-in hierarchy with the professor and students, what the class calls their instructor can be labeled an immediacy issue. To show a difference across the experience range, one instructor with four years experience at a community college leaves it up to the students to determine what to call him or her. They claim, “Students can call me by my first name or Mrs. ______.” On the other hand, an instructor with over 10 years experience at a community college prefers students to use the rank of PhD when addressing the instructor. This is the same instructor who openly admits not attempting to change immediacy behaviors inside the classroom. “I really don’t attempt to change immediacy behaviors because I don’t want to fall in line with the dissolution of social order, and I like my space at the front of my room.”

Question 6 in the interview asked the respondents: “Are there additional issues related to classroom communication that you would like to address?”

A professor with 44-years teaching experience summed up a lot of classroom and social issues with a simple quote from the movie Cool Hand Luke, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.” She goes on to say that “Life is all about communication and every problem in a relationship, work, life, and politics is a result of a failure to communicate.”

A variety of issues were discussed in this section that leave room for further research. Some of these issues include getting students to read before class, embracing technology versus not using it as a crutch, balancing when students speak versus when instructors speak, texting during class, and behavior issues.
One instructor with four years of experience at a community college wants to overhaul the entire teaching system to encourage open dialogue and to open the doors to more technology. This was by far the boldest response to any of the questions.
CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

Responses to the written interview revealed a number of correlations between current classroom teaching practices and the pedagogical themes that emerged in the literature review. In addition, respondents raised some rogue issues not addressed in the previous literature. The following is a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interview responses that also appeared in the literature review.

Dance’s Helical Model of Classroom Communication

To reiterate, speech communication scholar Frank E. Dance defined his helix model for classrooms as when communication moves forward it is at the same moment coming back upon itself and being affected by its past behavior. It is a two-way, interactive flow with new messages building upon and being adjusted based on what was just previously said. Multiple interview responses indicated a desire for an interactive classroom that is filled with discussions. In addition, one senior lecturer with 20-years teaching experience said, “How I communicate with students is constantly influenced by how they communicate with me.” This is Dance’s helical model for classroom communication put into practice. Both instructors and students are changing and adapting their communication styles and messages by how the other person is communicating with them. This is to say that in the classroom everyone is connected by the communication process. For example, in that senior lecturer’s classroom, the instructor may alter his or her tone of voice or body language to become more animated if the class is zoning out.
In addition, if students say something remarkable or deep, the instructor may reward them via body language, expressions, and voice.

**Genuine Listening**

This is an area that did not get much attention from the written interview responses. Only one associate professor referred to the use of genuine listening to make sure students know their input matters. As noted in the literature review, Joseph Karmos’s stance on listening is that the student’s feelings should be reflected back to the student (44). The associate professor’s response came under the question of how do instructors use verbal or nonverbal cues to inspire success. This instructor uses listening skills to motivate a student, proving that an instructor does not have to say anything at all to make an impact. The listening section of the literature review was coupled with the subject of instructor-dominated talk. This was done on purpose to show that a professor does not always have to be talking or offering advice, especially if a student comes to the professor during a one-on-one meeting. Sometimes students just want to know someone is there for them and is willing to lend an ear for a few minutes. Genuine listening can pay dividends in developing deeper relationships with individual students.

**Eye Contact**

*The Oxford University Dictionary of Proverbs* indicates that Cicero is thought to have said: “The eyes are the mirror of the soul,” or “The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter.” (“The Eyes are the Window to the Soul”) It is safe to assume that eye contact plays a vital role in the success or failure of the communication process. The written interview responses corroborate this assertion because many instructors decided to highlight eye contact as their favorite nonverbal cue to inspire success or
communicate something to a student. It is one of the simplest ways to reach out to someone and one of the most important. Authors Peter and Janet Andersen believe that professors who use more eye contact can better monitor and regulate their classes, and they communicate more warmth and involvement to their students (107). Communication instructors participating in the interview use eye contact in a variety of ways inside the classroom. Some use it to keep track of discipline problems, others use it to give students positive feedback during speeches, and all seem to use it with a smile to display a warm, friendly demeanor. These instructors truly do believe the eyes are the mirror to the soul.

**Movement**

Author Peter Filene says that instructors communicate many messages to students by the way they walk, stand, sit, what they do with their shoulders, hands, arms, legs, and the manner in which they position their bodies toward or away from others. This was the section that had the most comments with 12 instructors mentioning they use movement to change the immediacy levels between themselves and students. These instructors like to move between rows, lecture from all sides of the room, and get away from the traditional front of the room lecture. However, this was not the case for all the instructors answering this question. There were two instructors (all with 10 plus years of experience) who preferred the instructor be at a single-point in the traditional classroom. However, the literature and most instructors interviewed support the assertion that coordinated movement inside the classroom can be an effective teaching practice.

**Narratives**

John Daly and Anita Vangelisti describe narratives as a powerful force in aiding both interest and comprehension of students. Some responses indicate instructors use
narratives for a two-fold purpose: to develop relationships and to accent main points. The bulk of the responses came under the question of immediacy and how instructors can decrease the gap between themselves and the students. This shows that instructors are using stories to mainly develop relationships and in turn build a stronger community inside the classroom. However, some use stories to make their points more clear and concrete. Students need to be able to attach themselves to a concept, and stories can be a vehicle to do this. With stories, students can visualize the concept in a practical manner and form a connection to it.

As far as developing relationships is concerned, this is an area that should not be overlooked. The one instructor who really provided a lot of details in this area is definitely on to something. A senior lecturer with 19-years experience at a university uses stories to humanize themselves and not just be a talking head in the classroom. If instructors can begin the process of humanizing themselves with the use of appropriate personal narratives, it can help their credibility as the class progresses. As humans, we are typically more likely to follow advice and instructions from someone we perceive as credible, someone we have a connection to and trust. This applies to college instructors. A talking head just critiquing student work and giving information does not allow for a strong connection to form. Students may be less likely to respect instructors who never took the time to humanize themselves.

**Seating Arrangement**

As far as how classrooms should be arranged, Debra Myhill and Susan Jones add that instructors should consider alternative seating patterns to encourage greater participation and to signal that this is a point where there are higher expectations of
involvement (63). On a side note, instructors should arrange their rooms however they feel most comfortable teaching, but should at least consider a different format for certain activities, especially discussions.

The circular arrangement appeared to be the favorite for instructors who participated in this interview. One professor equated a circle to a community as it shows all members are equal. Circles can definitely be effective because no one can hide in the back row or duck behind a student if they do not feel like participating that day. It also takes away the stigmas associated with front and back row students. However, a circle may not work for every class period. There are some instructors who want to lecture from a standing position, and a circle will automatically put some students facing away from the instructor. This is where the horseshoe arrangement comes into play, and some instructors said in the written interview that they used this arrangement. This way there is still some assemblance of equality, but the instructor is at a focal point. It appears to be a nice compromise between the row and circle arrangements that dominate college classrooms.

There were a few instructors who still typically prefer the traditional lecture classroom set-up with rows of desks. These were all veteran instructors with over 20-years of teaching experience. However, these same instructors also used the words “friendly” and “intimate” when describing their classrooms. In addition, while these instructors favored rows, they also favored coordinated movement at the front of the room. They did not mention moving into the students’ area or lecturing from different parts of the room. These veterans just simply prefer the instructor at a semi-fixed point at the front of the classroom. On the contrary, as mentioned briefly in the results section,
some of the respondents who favored the circular format were instructors with under five years of teaching experience. This is a definite difference between veteran instructors and newer instructors on how to arrange a classroom. These newer instructors might feel more comfortable lecturing from inside the circle while sitting alongside students. Is this because many of these newer instructors are younger and still feel close in age to students? Might they change their lecture style as they get older and more experienced in the classroom? These are just a few questions that leave the door open to future research.

Use of space

Dr. Patrick Miller believes that space in the classroom may also serve to indicate status, dominance, and leadership. Removing barriers is an important step to increase the immediacy between an instructor and the students (55). The few instructors who had something to say about this topic all talked about removing barriers when they lecture. These individuals made a point of mentioning podiums as the barrier most often moved aside when they are in front of a classroom. An associate professor with 21-years experience at a community college enjoys sitting on a desk in front of the classroom when presenting certain kinds of information or during class discussion. This way there is nothing between the instructor and the horseshoe or row arrangement of students. Just as students tend to hide when the desks are in rows, the same thing can affect instructors when there is a podium or other barrier like a computer console. Instructors can hide themselves behind it so students cannot get a complete picture of their body language. It is important to remember that body language often complements verbal messages, and in order to understand the complete message the total package must be taken into account.
In some classrooms with computer consoles, instructors are tending to bury themselves behind the large, obtrusive structure. Their eyes may be focused on the computer screen or the projector screen and not on their students. A student may feel that since the instructor is not looking at them, they can give limited feedback and attention to that instructor. Not having a barrier or podium in front of the instructor also allow for greater eye contact to occur between teacher and students. Hopefully, a professor will not look over the class’ heads or down at the ground or at their notes the entire time. This is no different than just looking at a computer or projector screen.

**Other Pedagogical Issues**

The instructors who provided responses to the final question of the interview regarding additional communication issues did not elaborate in detail. These instructors mentioned getting students to read their books more, texting during class, and some behavior issues. The issue mentioned most was about technology. One professor felt instructors leaned on it too much, while another felt students and teachers need to embrace it more. Clearly, research on technology in the classroom and its effect on instructor communication is needed.

These additional issues could lead to future research. Texting in class can distract a student from the presentation and cause them to become disengaged from the instructor. This is an example of a barrier. In addition, instructors can learn specific communication strategies for dealing with behavior issues in class.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The main contributions from performing this study will be revealed in this section followed by the limitations and suggestions for further research.

Contributions of the Study

Instructors may be able to change lives and affect the future every time they step into a classroom. The interview responses as well as my own teaching experiences confirm this. I teach communication courses at a research university and believe the concepts and information presented in these classes can help students grow to be stronger members of society. Public speaking classes can teach students to find their voice and affect change in a world that sorely needs it. Professors never know when a piece of information is going to inspire a student to a different direction. A biology professor never knows when their discussion on cells will convince a student he or she should enter into the medical field. A history professor never knows when a lecture on ancient Egypt will inspire a student to become an archeologist. However, none of this inspiration can happen without college professors who are competent and conscious of their communication habits inside the classroom.

The major findings of this study included discussion on the concept of turning a classroom into a community. In this case, the classroom becomes a place of open communication and a positive communication environment. In addition, the interview responses demonstrated a need to make classrooms more interactive by the use of guided discussions to help students stay engaged in the material. Finally, the literature review
and interview responses showed how a professor with a strong and compelling delivery can better keep their students locked into the material and also model proper communication skills at the same time. However, building open and friendly communication lines was a prominent issue in the interview.

It is truly important to try and build a community mentality in the classroom from day one. Professors should strive for equality and friendship, and not tension in the classroom environment. This study concurs with previous findings that a shift to a more interactive classroom is the current direction in higher education and effective classroom communication. Nearly every piece of scholarly literature reviewed mentioned the importance of making classes interactive and discussion-based, and this was also a popular theme in the written interview responses.

One senior lecturer from a major university mentioned that he or she does not like to lecture anymore, but uses ‘guided discussions’ to move through new material. This person views learning as an engaged activity and not just a passive experience. Running a classroom in this fashion will take an instructor who is well-versed in effective communication habits to manage between 23 and 28 opinions and questions in the room. However, instead of one person (the instructor) giving information and perspective on the concept, now the entire class can chime in to work through the material. Students get to know each other through the discussion process and help each other discover different parts of the concepts being discussed. Students appear to be more comfortable sharing an opinion or asking a question if they are surrounded by people they perceive as trusted acquaintances or friends.
When forming classrooms into communities, the study revealed that a community mentality allows for open communication among all channels in the classroom, especially student to professor. It takes some of the edge off of a typical classroom hierarchy and decreases tensions and barriers on all sides. Open communication can allow for deeper learning to occur and thus help students apply information outside of the classroom. It feels good to walk into a school or a work environment and be able to communicate with people you know, trust, and want to talk to. Faculty members should be urged to have more face-to-face interactions that promote the overall growth of the department and the welfare of the students in the department. It is a fact that some of these students might be the future of the field the instructors are currently dedicating their lives to.

This study also confirmed the importance of professors developing a strong delivery and compelling presentation. Professors need to be fired up and enthusiastic about their material if they want even half of that from their students. Many of the college professors completing the written interview mentioned how they try to act animated in front of the class to draw students into their presentations. These same professors use movement and eye contact along with an animated delivery to keep students engaged. Educators need to remember that research on millennials shows they are used to large amounts of stimulation at one time. Elizabeth Kennedy, Associate Director of Retention & Information Systems in the Freshman Academic Advising Division at Florida Atlantic University, said that millennials receive rapid exposure to an ever-increasing level of information activity (Kennedy). That is to say they need rapid amounts of exposure to stay engaged in an activity. Professors who stand at a podium and lecture from a fixed-
point may find less success in their information getting through to a class versus a professor who chooses a more animated style (different vocal pitches, facial expressions, smiles, strong gestures) and uses coordinated movement during presentations.

A main reason why I chose to spend a large amount of time researching the communication skills of professors is because I want to help usher in new thinking when it comes to the higher education classroom. It is my intention to help younger professors break away from the traditional lecture from a podium at a fixed point. It appears from the research that an active learning environment is more effective. Dynamic and energetic instructors who want to use ‘guided discussions’ and be consciously awareness of their communication habits may find they can develop a more solid repertoire with their students.

Finally, the results of this study indicate that these important pedagogical tools work together to create a constructive classroom community. These issues are all connected because these tools will give the instructor a better feel for his or her classes. This is an instructor who takes time to get to know their students’ names will be able to increase immediacy right away. Dynamic instructors will want to change the classroom seats to reflect the type of presentation that day because they have seen their classes respond positively or negatively to certain seating arrangements. Such instructors are constantly reading the students’ verbal and nonverbal communication to better adjust their teaching. In the end, a successful community can spring to life, and the perception that a college classroom is where students go only to get information poured into their heads can diminish.
It has been my experience that professors are no longer granted automatic respect based on their credentials. Responses from the written survey confirm this. For example, an associate professor with 12-years of experience documented instances of no civility in their classroom. Also, an instructor with 10-years of experience mentions feeling that society is eroding and it is starting in the classroom.

However, the burden of learning does not lie solely with the students to motivate themselves and learn the information. As one professor wrote in the written interview, “I’m not so sure that is my job.” This professor has over 20-years of experience and can easily be labeled as a veteran instructor. The bulk of my research suggests that the instructor is at least partially responsible for motivating students and developing interesting presentations and discussions to aid in deep learning. If students sit in class and constantly just listen and receive information, the instructor is doing nothing to help them discover it for themselves. A guided discussion creates a balance in the classroom where professors are given opportunities to speak about their expertise, but also involves students in the process of uncovering new information. This way students can form connections to the material by adding in their own stories and experiences with the material.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were some limitations to this study. There were only 19 professors responding to the interview, and all but three of them teach communication. The study did not include observation hours or face-to-face interviews, it was only a written interview completed online. The results of this study are not generalizable to the entire college teaching profession because of the small scope and sample size. However, the 19
respondents provided in-depth responses that confirm instructors consider the four main pedagogical themes identified here in their efforts to communicate effectively with their students. The responses also indicate that technology, in relation to classroom communication is another important issue needing further study.

Another limitation is that this study had no way to measure the effectiveness of the teachers responding. Teacher evaluations, teaching awards, and classroom observation would provide some useful information about interview respondents. There were also no follow-up questions after the interview was completed, and no information was received from students. This study raises a number of possibilities for further research.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

An instructor’s use of space was not heavily talked about in the written interview responses, but much research on this subject was found in the literature review. A study designed to monitor different instructors’ use of space inside the classroom in different academic disciplines would be useful. There might be a veteran mathematics instructor who chooses to stay near a chalkboard because that is where a majority of teaching takes place. However, at the same time there could be a young mathematics instructor who has found an alternative to the chalkboard to teach the same lesson and instead uses some movement inside the room to get his or her point across. A study focused on this issue could draw important conclusions.

Another area that calls for further research is the conscious desire to model communication skills by communication instructors. A focused study of pedagogy inside speech communication classrooms would help determine what types of instructors
actively choose to model communication skills to their students. In my study, three
respondents from outside the communication discipline did mention that they monitor
their communication skills, but only the communication instructors used the term “model
the skills” in describing their behavior. These instructors were adamant about being the
most proficient communication instructor they could be. They also expected a lot from
themselves as well as their students. If the instructor is modeling specific communication
skills, then the students are expected to mirror some of those same skills back. A study
designed to observe communication instructors who actively model communication skills
as well as ones who do not could help determine the impact of modeling or non-modeling
on their students.

An additional pedagogical issue that multiple instructors mentioned in their
interview responses was the use or non-use of technology inside the classroom.
Technology is advancing rapidly, both in the college classrooms as well as outside
academia. Some instructors are choosing to embrace it while others are standing tall
against it. Two different professors took the latter view in their response to the sixth
interview question about additional communication issues. An instructor with over 12
years of experience writes that “excessive technology impedes good communication,”
and “PowerPoint is a tool and not a crutch, I rarely use it.” Conversely, an instructor with
four years of experience at a community college answered that professors need to
“embrace technology.” The written interview responses revealed a divide on the
technology issue between newer instructors and veteran instructors. A study devoted to
instructor attitude about and use of technology in the classroom could contribute to our
understanding of this issue.
This is an area that will continue to gain importance, and instructors will not be able to hide from it in the not-so-distant future. As the more and more millennials enter college, they come into class with a greater understanding of technology than most of their older professors. In addition, college classrooms are replacing older technology like overhead projectors and blackboards with new internet technology. This also more or less forces instructors to adapt to internet technology in their teaching. Technology has been an integral part of current students’ lives from birth, and they come to expect it everywhere they go. On the other hand, instructors who might be completely opposed to newer teaching technologies might unintentionally create a large divide between themselves and the students. A psychological barrier can be just as detrimental as a physical barrier. The key here might be a compromise on both sides. A student needs to realize than instructors cannot and should not cater to their every needs, but at the same time instructors need to adapt appropriately to their audience.

The final missing piece that I want to address in this section is the fact that the key word, community, only appeared once in the written interview responses. The person who used it was describing how a circular classroom arrangement can feel like a community inside the classroom with everyone feeling equal. The concept of creating communities inside the classroom was a driving force of this project, and even though the written responses did not explicitly include the term, community, I am confident that each instructor who mentioned ways they decrease the physical and psychological gap between themselves and students are indeed working toward that community goal.

**Final Words**
In the end, communication is a learned skill. Anyone who works hard enough, puts learning into practice, uses trial and error, and is not afraid to examine their own communication practices, can have a long and successful teaching career that may impact thousands of students as they walk out the door to put their stamp on the world. College instructors need to remember that they have a unique opportunity to affect future generations with their actions and words. This is an opportunity that is to be respected, admired, and celebrated.
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