DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 813 CS 505 251

AUTHOR Friedrich, Gustav W.
TITLE Defining Teacher Communication Competence.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Cincinnati, OH, April 17-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; Classroom Communication; *Classroom Observation Techniques; *Communication Research; Educational Trends; Interpersonal Communication; *Research Methodology; Research Needs; Speech Communication; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Instructional communication research may be examined from the perspective of teacher effectiveness research, based on three dominant 20th-century philosophical traditions: logical empiricism, interpretive theories, and critical theory. Since at least 1896, scholars have used empirical research methodology (largely "logical empiricism," modeled after the approach of the natural sciences) to shed light on what it means to be an effective teacher. Approaches have ranged from naturalistic descriptions of teacher classroom behaviors to tightly controlled experiments that manipulate such variables as teacher clarity in order to assess their impact on student learning, and have included examining teacher evaluation rating scales and studying the cognitive processes that mediate instructional stimuli and learning outcomes. As a result of the criticisms against logical empiricism, other researchers are beginning to use interpretive inquiry, that is, observing and analyzing human behavior in natural settings to discover what and how people learn through interacting with others. Finally, the critical inquiry approach takes into account historical-ideological movements. Despite this diversity of approaches, however, the vast majority of instructional communication research has been conducted from within the trait-rating tradition of empirical inquiry. While success in these efforts is important, the usefulness of instructional communication research is likely to be enhanced by encouraging the use of other research methodologies. (HOD)

DEFINING TEACHER COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

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Gustav W. Friedrich
University of Oklahoma

Interest in instructional communication theory and research has never been greater. Ann Staton-Spicer and Don Wulff's 1984 CE review essay was able to locate, categorize, and synthesize 186 empirical studies of communication and instruction that were reported in SCA, ICA, and regional communication journals for the years 1974 through 1982. Since 1982, there have been two conferences devoted to relevant issues. An SCA-sponsored Regional Research Seminar met in Michigan in the fall of 1983 and the spring of 1984 and the results of that conference will be published as a symposium in a future issue of CSSJ. A second conference, the "Summer Conference on Instructional Communication," was organized by Jody Nyquist and held on the University of Washington campus in July of 1985.

Not only is a great deal of research being generated, the quality of these efforts is nigh and much of the work is programmatic in nature. In addition to the voluminous work by McCroskey and his colleagues on communication apprehension, for example, programs of research include those of Jan Andersen on teacher immediacy and nonverbal expressiveness, Jennings Bryant and Jean Civikly on educational humor, Ann Staton-Spicer on teacher communication concerns and teacher socialization, Jon Nussbaum on instructor communication behaviors, Bob Norton on teacher communicator style, Cassandra Book and Joe McCaleb on teacher clarity and instructional explicitness, and Jim McCroskey, Virginia Richmond, Pat Kearney, and Tim Plax on strategies for coping with student misbehavior.

While there is much to be proud of, room for improvement always remains. As Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984, p. 3 4) remind us in the concluding section of their essay:

A great deal of empirical research in the area of "communication and

> instruction" has been generated during the last nine years. The sheer quantity of the research attests in some measure to the widespread importance accorded the area by those in the discipline. . . . There are, however, too many isolated studies that cannot be placed into a coherent framework. Although interesting and perhaps even of practical utility, such research does not build upon a systematic structure or contribute to the development of one. What we need are integrated studies that generate propositions from which we can build theory.

This essay is an attempt to gain perspective on instructional communication research by examining it from within the larger body of teacher effectiveness research. It draws on a framework provided by Soltis (1984) who recently examined pedagogical research from the perspective of roots in three dominant 20th century philosophical traditions: logical empiricism (positivism), interpretive theories (analytical, phenomenological, and hermeneutic), and critical theory (neo-Marxist). Soltis' basic argument is that "empirical (causal), interpretive (meaningful), and critical (normative) dimensions characterize pedagogy and hence all need to be studied if pedagogical research is to be honest to its subject matter" (p. 5). His argument is equally applicable to instructional communication research.

Empirical Inquiry

Since at least 1896, scholars have been using empirical research methodology to shed light on what it means to be an effective teacher. Like their colleagues in other social and behavioral sciences, individuals doing this research have operated largely within the language and logic of logical empiricism--a perspective which Giddens calls "the orthodox consensus." Modeled after the approach of the natural sciences, logical empiricism has produced a variety of strategies for doing teacher effectiveness research ranging, for

example, from naturalistic descriptions of teacher classroom behaviors to tightly controlled experiments which manipulate such variables as teacher clarity in order to assess their impact on student learning. Underlying the many varieties of positivist logic are several assumptions:

1. Reality exists independent of both the researcher and the flux of sensory experiences. The knower and the known are separate entities.
2. There is a deterministic order to reality--for people as well as for natural objects. Reality is neither random nor chosen.
3. The major function of the researcher is to construct general laws or principles which govern the relationship among classes of observable phenomena.
4. The general laws or principles comprising scientific knowledge should be consistent with empirical fact. Scientific investigation is properly concerned with establishing an objective grounding for systematic theory.
5. Through continued empirical assessment of theoretical propositions and their deductions, scientific understanding can progress. Scientific knowledge is cumulative.

Operating from the assumptions of logical empiricism, teacher effectiveness researchers can be said to have, with considerable overlap, produced five major research traditions: trait-rating, trait-observation, structure, process-product, and mediating-process. While each has been a dominant tradition at some point in the history of teacher effectiveness research, all are current contributors to that research. Borrowing from my (Friedrich, 1982, pp. 57-58) earlier description for four of the five traditions, each of the five will be briefly described.

Trait-rating tradition. The earliest attempts to identify effective teaching used students as observers. Kratz (1896), for example, asked large

numbers of students to describe the "best" teachers they ever had and subjected the list to a form of content analysis which yielded lists of characteristics of "good" teachers. Beginning about 1917, researchers began to ask these questions of "experts"--school administrators, professors of education, and others--whose opinions were presumed to have greater validity than those of students. A popular, related approach consisted of examining ratings scales used for teacher evaluation in an attempt to locate elements considered important enough to rate.

Trait-observation tradition. Dissatisfaction with using someone's opinion as a criterion measure of teacher effectiveness came early. The empirical basis for this dissatisfaction was provided by Barr and others as early as 1935 when they demonstrated that correlations between ratings of teachers and mean pupil gains on achievement tests were quite low (ranging from -.15 to +.36, with a mean of +.16). These findings led researchers to explore the possibilities of systematic observation of teachers and they turned to the Child Study Movement of the 1920s for their methodology. Because they were studying children too young to be tested or interviewed and because the most convenient place to work with such children was the classroom, Child Study Movement researchers pioneered the use of direct observation of classroom behaviors. The earliest teacher effectiveness study using this approach (attempting to describe what a teacher does rather than how well he or she does it) was Steven's (1912) study of questioning behavior. Based on 4 years of observation, she discovered, for example, that teachers talk 64% of the time; 80% of classroom talk is devoted to asking, answering, or reacting to questions; and teachers ask 1 to 4 questions per minute, with an average of 2. While a number of factors prevented this research tradition from becoming immediately popular (Medley, 1972), in 1954 Barr was able to devote an entire issue of the Journal of Experimental Education to a review of seventy-five relevant studies

done in Wisconsin under his direction.

Structure tradition. Scholars in the late forties began to focus their attention on ways of structuring the classroom environment in such a fashion as to minimize the impact of teacher differences and maximize student learning. Classroom discussion, for example, was compared with lecturing; programmed instruction with simulation and games.

Process-product tradition. Predictably, in retrospect, because it ignored both the complexity and dynamics of the classroom environment and instructional purpose, a great deal of research failed to discover one approach superior to others for any grade level. Dubin and Traveggia, for example, after reviewing ninety-one studies, suggest: "These data demonstrate clearly and unequivocally that there is no measurable difference among truly distinctive methods of college instruction when evaluated by student performance on final examination' (1968, p. 23). As such evidence continued to accumulate, researchers in the sixties began to isolate and examine elements of teaching behavior which could be used to compare various methodologies (for example, level of question asking is a variable appropriate to both discussion and programmed instruction)--isolating well over one thousand such variables. Such an approach produced an explosion of both descriptive and experimental systematic observation research which centered on identifying linkages between instructional strategies (processes) and learning outcomes (products). While early summaries of research within this tradition were largely negative (e.g., Doyle, 1977: "Reviewers have concluded, with remarkable regularity, that few consistent relationships between teacher variables and effectiveness criteria can be established"), more recent summaries have become optimistic (e.g., Brophy, 1979: "The past several years have been exciting and gratifying for classroom researchers concerned with process-product (outcome) relations,

because a coherent body of knowledge linking teacher behavior to student achievement and (to an extent) attitudes has begun to emerge"). Areas of such research that are both active and promising include classroom organization and management, time usage, direct or active teaching, and teacher expectations. For recent summaries of this work, see Brophy (1979, 1983), Friedrich (1982), Good (1983), and Rosenshine (1983).

Mediating-process tradition. Adapting to the recent cognitive emphasis in other social and behavioral sciences, teacher effectiveness researchers have begun to study the cognitive processes that mediate instructional stimuli and learning outcomes. For these researchers, process-product relationships are of interest primarily as a basis for reasoning about the kinds of student mediating responses that make such relationships possible. While some of this work has focused on teachers' pedagogical judgments, plans, and decisions (Shavelson, 1983), most has focused on student perceptions and information-processing responses. Weinstein (1983) has recently summarized this research under 7 categories: (1) student perceptions of teachers (e.g., perceptions of differential treatment by teachers), (2) student perceptions of peers (e.g., perceptions of abilities of peers), (3) student perceptions of other school personnel (e.g., perceptions of sources of help for problems), (4) student perceptions of the causes of behavior (e.g., use of an attribution framework for studying achievement), (5) student self-perceptions (e.g., development of self-concept), (6) student perceptions of the classroom (e.g., perceived psychosocial climate or learning environment), and (7) student perceptions of school (e.g., perceptions of high school academic climate).

Interpretive Inquiry

Despite the fact that logical empiricism has been and continues to be the most widely espoused and utilized epistemology and methodology in the social

and behavioral sciences, a number of telling criticisms against the position have consistently been advanced. As a result of these criticisms, researchers have begun to develop alternative methodologies which are summarized here under the label of interpretive inquiry. While the language used to describe them varies with orientation, interpretive researchers who focus on the classroom share several assumptions which have been summarized by Green (1983):

1. Face-to-face interaction is a rule-governed phenomenon. Rule-governed means that expectations for performance exist that are culturally determined, and that these expectations guide participation and act to constrain the options for what will or can occur. These expectations do not, of course, predict the exact form of the participation or even the occurrence of participation with certainty.
2. The contexts of interaction are constructed by people as they engage in face-to-face interaction. Thus, contexts are not given in the physical setting (e.g., "doing seatwork"), but are constructed by the participants' actions as part of the interaction.
3. Meaning is context specific. Closely related to the concept of context as constructed, this assumption suggests that how a behavior "means" is determined by considering how it is used, what precedes it, and what follows. All instances of behavior are not considered functionally equivalent.
4. Comprehension is an inferencing process. Meaning is viewed as a process of extracting verbal and nonverbal information so that a person can "make sense" of the evolving events and gain access to the cognitive, social, procedural, contextual, and communicative knowledge provided during face-to-face interaction.
5. Classrooms are communicative environments with teachers as the only native.

Therefore, emphasis needs to be focused on identifying communication strategies that will enable students to adjust to environmental complexity and learn from the classroom.

While interpretive inquiry starts with a different view of what it means to be human (active as opposed to reactive) and while it disagrees with many of the underlying assumptions of logical empiricism, it shares with logical empiricism the view that inquiry should be objective and value-free. Individuals who study classrooms from an interpretive perspective are concerned with collecting and analyzing human behavior in natural settings and in exploring what is learned from and how people learn through interacting with others. In other words, interpretive research is concerned with how people learn language, learn through language use, and learn about language in educational settings. For recent reviews of this literature, see Cazden (1986), Green (1983), and Hamilton (1983).

Critical Inquiry

Critical theorists like Habermas and neo-Marxists like Marcuse, according to Soltis (1984, p. 7), see both empirical inquiry and interpretive inquiry as ideologies which focus our inquiries and lives on finding effective means to get us to educational ends that we take for granted--ends that preserve the status quo and the power of the dominant class. These scholars reject the idea of value-free research into human social, political, and educational phenomena as a myth and stress the need for inquiry that takes into account the historical-ideological moment we live in and the influence it has on us. Critical scholars, in short, are interested in making us aware of and helping us challenge the values that are inherent in the status quo of the educational enterprise.

Having examined the teacher effectiveness literature from the perspective of empirical, interpretive, and critical approaches, it is now possible to review instructional communication research utilizing the same framework. In doing so, it is possible to find representative studies for each and every category. Some research on multicultural education and sexism, for example, falls within a critical inquiry tradition; work on teacher communication concerns and teacher socialization claim an interpretive inquiry foundation; and each of the five sub-categories of empirical inquiry are represented in the instructional communication literature.

Despite this apparent diversity, however, it is striking that the vast majority of instructional communication research has been conducted from within the trait-rating tradition of empirical inquiry--the first approach to be tried by teacher effectiveness researchers. By broadening the definition of learning to include affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes, and by refining definitions of teacher traits to focus on such characteristics as communicator style, immediacy, perceived credibility, homophily, etc., instructional communication researchers have successfully identified a number of teacher characteristics that are associated with student learning. The trait-rating tradition, therefore, is one of proven utility for instructional communication researchers. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned about the role of communication in instructional contexts that is not open to a trait-rating approach. As a result, the argument being advanced here is that instructional communication research has been overly reliant on one approach to doing research and has much to gain from a greater utilization of the process-product and mediating-process traditions of empirical inquiry, and by more work within interpretive and critical frameworks.

In summary, instructional communication is an exciting and active area

of research within the communication discipline which has attracted a core group of scholars who are producing quality, programmatic work. Much of that work has focused on establishing relationships between paper-and-pencil reports of teacher characteristics and student learning. While successes in these efforts are important and to be applauded, the usefulness of instructional communication research is likely to be enhanced by encouraging the utilization of a greater diversity of research traditions.

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