Shared Characteristics of College Faculty Who Are Effective Communicators

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Abstract

This study sought to identify what characteristics faculty who are effective classroom communicators share. Qualitative methods of interviews and observations were used to collect data at two public, comprehensive universities. College faculty with good communication, particularly, immediacy and clarity, were all found to have humanistic views of their students and to be reflective about their teaching and their communication. Those who demonstrated poor communication skills were neither humanistic nor reflective teachers. This would suggest that in order to improve faculty effectiveness, we must consider underlying views and thought processes, rather than teach successful communication techniques in isolation.

Keywords: Effective communication, immediacy, humanistic, reflective faculty.

Mastery teaching literature identifies expert teachers as having strong communication skills in the classroom (Garmston, 1994; Hativa, Barak & Simhi, 1999; Rubin & Feezel, 1986; Rubin & Morreale, 1996). Teachers' communication methods have been noted to influence how the students feel about the learning process as well as their satisfaction and achievement in regard to the class (Cole, Sugioka, & Yamagata-Lynch, 1999; Kerssen-Griep, 2001). Instructional communication qualities of "clarity and understandableness" are among the most important characteristics associated with effective college teaching (Hativa, 1998). Student ratings of strong faculty communication are consistently associated with improved learning outcomes, with reports of increased motivation and with higher ratings of faculty effectiveness (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Christensen and Menzel, 1998; Christophel 1990; Gorham, 1988; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Hativa, 1998; Witt & Wheeless, 2001). While the literature is consistent in demonstrating the value of successful communication in the classroom, little is known about the characteristics of instructors with effective communication skills. This study attempts to identify which, if any, characteristics teachers who are successful classroom communicators have in common.

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Background

In an effort to describe the types of classroom communication which are particularly effective, two instructional communication theories of immediacy and clarity have been put forward. The first instructional communication theory is immediacy which refers to the communication traits that impact the perception of psychological and physical closeness between teacher and student (Frymier, 1994; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996). Communication behaviors that affect the perception of immediacy are commonly divided into verbal and nonverbal categories. Examples of verbal behaviors that increase a sense of immediacy include the use of present tense verbs, speaker self-disclosure, humor, and inclusiveness suggested by word choice, such as the use of "we" instead of "I' or "you." Head nods, smiles, enthusiasm, a relaxed appearance, and eye contact are examples of behaviors that are characterized as increasing nonverbal immediacy (Frymier, 1994; Gorham, 1988; Witt & Wheeless, 2001). Teachers who use a greater number of these communication factors are said to have high immediacy. Immediacy behaviors have been positively associated with improved cognitive and affective learning (Christensen and Menzel, 1998; Christophel 1990; Gorham, 1988; Witt & Wheeless, 2001); with student reports of increased state motivation (Christensen and Menzel, 1998; Christophel 1990; Richmond, 1990); and with more favorable student ratings of faculty (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Frymier, 1994; Moore, Masterson, Christophel & Shea, 1996; Scott & Nussbaum, 1981).

Clarity is the second instructional communication theory and has been defined as the process by which an instructor is able to effectively stimulate the desired meaning of course content in the minds of students through the use of appropriately-structured verbal and nonverbal messages (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Myers & Knox, 2001). Teacher clarity contributes to the ability to stimulate student interest and learning. Clarity suggests that teachers use organizational and presentation techniques to communicate in a way that facilitates the learning process (Hativa, 1998). Examples of instructor behaviors that support the organizational component of clarity include providing advanced lecture organizers, overt identification of main points and the related subordinate points, and lecture summaries (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Myers & Knox, 2001; Titsworth, 2001). Behaviors that increase teacher clarity include soliciting questions from the students, providing examples, and using clear, concise language when introducing material (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Myers & Knox, 2001). Teachers who explicitly communicate to the students which concepts are particularly critical for success in the course (Hativa, 1998) and are able to stay on topic without significant digression also demonstrate good clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). Much like immediacy, teacher clarity in the classroom has been associated with higher student ratings of faculty, greater student satisfaction with instruction, and increased student achievement in the classroom (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Hativa, 1998; Myers & Knox, 2001; Titsworth, 2001).

At this time, the studies have focused exclusively on the perceived immediacy and clarity of a faculty member as assessed by the student. The student's perspective on teacher communication is most critical to the learning process because it is their perception

which will influence their learning outcomes. However, little is known about the characteristics of immediate and clear faculty. Without understanding any underlying qualities of teachers with effective communication, trying to improve the immediacy and clarity of less effective faculty may be a superficial exercise.

Research Question

While it is clearly useful to understand what types of communication strategies increase student learning and satisfaction, it is critical to understand the underlying characteristics which may contribute to the development of these skills if we are to not only understand them better, but are also able to help ourselves and others increase classroom immediacy and clarity. Thus this research asks the question: What, if any, characteristics do immediate and clear faculty share? Further, by comparing faculty with immediacy and clarity to those without, do we identify any of these characteristics as unique to one group?

Methods

Study design

The opportunity to identify the voice of each participant and hear in that voice his or her unique perspective and understanding of the issues of communication in teaching allows us to see a montage unfold. In turn we create meaning of the similarities and differences in the individual stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The teacher communication behaviors that are the focus of the research are observed in the natural context of the classroom. This use of the naturalistic settings to observe behaviors is also particularly compatible with the qualitative approach to research (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Participants

This study was conducted at two public, comprehensive colleges and universities. Faculty volunteers were purposefully chosen in an attempt to have broad disciplinary representation of a typical case sampling (Glesne, 1999). Teachers were chosen from history, English, psychology, and math departments, all of which are commonly represented in liberal arts, undergraduate core curricula. Eleven tenure-track, full-time faculty volunteers from these departments were chosen to represent all four disciplines and a range of years of experience. No teachers who were in their first year of teaching were included in the study. Purposive sampling was used to include faculty who represented a range of ages, native languages, professional ranks, and number of years at their institution. I observed each participant teaching an undergraduate class of my choosing. For each classroom observed, student volunteers were solicited for interviews. Student participants were purposively selected from amongst those who volunteered to represent a range of student backgrounds, experiences and academic success.

Data Collection

Three sources of information were used to provide multiple perspectives and to create triangulation of material (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Classroom observations, the first perspective, allowed me, as an unfamiliar observer, to identify the faculty member's immediacy and clarity using Gorham's (1988) Immediacy Behavior Scale and Hativa's Clarity Questionnaire (1998) as guidelines for noting specific behaviors associated with immediacy and clarity, respectively. The items included on these tools have been demonstrated to be reliable and valid measures of immediacy and clarity, respectively. They were used only as indicators of target behaviors to be observed, not used for quantitative measures.

Interviews were conducted with the instructor in order to add his or her perspective on personal characteristics. Areas of questioning were designed to elicit the perceptions and attitudes of the teacher (Glesne, 1999) including inquiries regarding the teacher's perception of communication in the classroom, how they have developed their communication skills, the relationship perceive between their communication and student learning, and their teaching philosophy. Interviews were also completed with one or two students from each class to provide the perspective of the observer familiar with the faculty member. Student interviews followed the same semi-structured format, and students were asked to describe their teacher's classroom communication, including which aspects of it they felt facilitated or hindered their learning. All data were collected within the course of one semester.

The approach of gathering multiple perspectives of teaching behavior has been specifically validated in previous research (Roche & Marsh, 2000). In comparing general ratings of a teacher by a student to the teacher's own self-concept ratings, self-other agreement was found to be moderate. However, when there was an increase in the specificity of the dimension on which the observation rating was based, self-other agreement increased significantly. The authors concluded that self-other agreement observations and perceptions had high validity when the ratings were based on a specific set of behaviors such as communication techniques.

Data Analysis

I audio recorded each classroom observed and took field notes during the class. The transcriptions of the classes, along with the notes, were used to create an ethnographic record of the classroom (Spradley, 1980). Each individual faculty and student interview was audio recorded and then transcribed in full. In reviewing all data and developing narratives for each teacher. I created rich, thick, detailed descriptions to convey not only the teacher behaviors in the classroom but also details such as the student responses to the behaviors. These descriptions allow the reader to develop an appreciation of "accounts of subjective experiences" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 98) and of the "associations and contexts" (p. 169) of the events and perspectives in the narrative.

I followed Creswell's (1994; 1998) guidelines for the analytic process of data using reduction and interpretation. I used the "progressive process" of sorting, defining, and relating the data through the use of codes to interpret into relevant units to make better sense of their meanings (Glesne, 1999). Initial broad thematic codes, such as the teachers' views of students, and thought processes regarding classroom teaching and communication were considered as data was analyzed. As I began the process of data analysis and grouping, I sorted individual faculty volunteers into two groups, those with generally positive immediacy and clarity or generally poor immediacy and clarity. Immediacy and clarity are grouped together in the analysis as past data has provided extensive evidence that they generally co-exist (Myers & Knox, 2001, Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997). Chesebro & McCroskey (2001) suggest that the collinear relationship immediacy and clarity have with student outcome variables, such as motivation and learning, supports that the two are significantly connected. For the purposes of this study, I made no effort to quantitatively assess levels of immediacy or clarity; rather, the focus is on the overall impression of the teacher immediacy and clarity on me as an unfamiliar observer and the students, the familiar observers.

As the data collection and analysis continued, I identified where individual faculty fell on a continuum of immediacy and clarity. Of the 11 faculty participants I categorized five as having high, three as having medium, and three as having low immediacy and clarity. While sorting faculty by levels of immediacy and clarity, I continued to analyze data regarding faculty views of the students and thoughts regarding teaching and communication. These analyses allowed me to refine codes and relationships further as distinctions emerged between groups of faculty. As I analyzed the codes for patterns and themes, I "linked [them] together" to begin forming theoretical models (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 279).

I based my ratings of faculty immediacy and clarity on my extensive field notes and audiotapes made during the classroom observations, which were guided by the Immediacy Behavior Scale (Gorham, 1988), or the Clarity Questionnaire (Hativa, 1998) items, as well as the feedback I received from students during individual interviews. Interestingly, the student's informal assessment and my own were consistent not only with each other, but also with the professor's self-assessment. This is consistent with Roche and Marsh's (2000) findings that self-other agreement on specific behaviors, such as communication techniques, tend to have good validity.

Five participants are used in the narratives which follow as they represent a range of professional experiences and pedagogical methodologies. A variety of years of teaching experiences as well as tenured and untenured status are represented by the five case studies. The individuals who I chose to describe in case studies also represent various points along the immediacy and clarity continuums. There are three teachers, George, Jim and Dibya, who have good immediacy and clarity, and two, Rich and Jane, who are characterized by their poor immediacy and clarity.

Results

Thematic analysis of the data reveals that teachers who are considered to have good immediacy and clarity share two distinctive traits. These faculty members all hold views of their students which was humanistic in nature. They also all discuss the value of reflection in the development of their teaching in general and in the development of their communication styles in particular. These two themes are significant because not only do all of the faculty who have immediacy and clarity share them, but the faculty who lack immediacy and clarity share neither of them.

Humanistic view of students

Humanism represents a view of education which "places the dignity of each human being ahead of other concerns. . . . The essence of humanism is respect for oneself and respect for others" (Boston Research Center, 2001, paragraph 3). Cranton (2001) describes "The Caring Teacher," which originates in the humanistic tradition, as one who is "concerned with establishing a warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, providing support, encouraging good relationships among students, and makes sure the needs and feelings of each individual are considered" (p. 30). These teachers concern themselves with the comfort and well-being of the students while they are engaged in the learning process. Carl Rogers's advocated that "whole person" learning, which promoted cognitive and affective learning simultaneously, was facilitated by humanistic educators (Rogers, 1974, p. 104). Teachers facilitate this type of learning with what Rogers (1974) termed "realness" (p. 106) or being genuinely yourself in the relationship with learners. The notions of positive regard for the students, a holistic view of them, and engaging in constructive relationships with them are all integral to the concepts of humanistic education. Teachers with high immediacy and clarity demonstrate care and concern for their students. They communicate with their students, explicitly through their words, and implicitly, through their actions, that they have an interest in their well-being. Jim, a Full Professor of History, learned that in order for his students to understand that he wanted them to succeed and meet his high expectations; he had to convey to them that he cared about them as individuals and about their learning success. He notes that "students complain about how tough I am all the time," but he wants them to know that he is "really excited for them when they succeed."

Communicating to his students that he cares about their general well-being, in addition to their performance in his class, is one way he offsets the anxiety that comes from the high academic demands he places on them. Jim's care is genuine as he talks about his students that his feelings are "heartfelt."

> I really like college students. You know, I really do. I think they are fun to talk to. . . . I mean, they [are] interesting people and I get to learn a little bit about their lives. That's what I like. That's kind of a payoff for me in being here.

Many of the teachers who have good immediacy and clarity described the humanistic value of having a positive, mutual learning relationship with their students. George

taught middle school math for 17 years before joining the Math faculty three years ago. He begins his semester by informing the students about his view of the student-teacher relationship. He recalls,

> There was a time where I felt like I had to come into the class and be perfect. You know, that really sets up this kind of "me up and you down" sort of thing. "I know it all and you sit at my feet and listen." But if I am more interested in learning from you, we get kind of more of a level playing field. . . . I begin my class by apologizing to them. . . . I said "You know, if you took this class with me next year, I'd be a better teacher and the reason is because I'm going to learn from you all about what works and what doesn't."

In making this apology, he conveys to his students that he is not the person with all the answers to give to them, but that he is in a mutual learning relationship with them as they all go through the course. The idea that students have valuable contributions to make to the learning process is critical for the learning environment that George wants to have in his classroom. He says "It creates a much nicer community where we can talk and they can feel comfortable sharing with me what they like and what they didn't."

Dibya, an Assistant Professor of History, never fully appreciated the impact of having a relationship with faculty as a student growing up in India. As a college student in that country, she never had reciprocal communication with her faculty, nor did she have an opportunity to interact with them. During her years in higher education there, she sat in the large lecture halls, listened to teachers who came in, delivered lengthy monologues and left the room. Evaluation of learning was limited to one test per year, given at the end of the school year by outside examiners. "There is no real interaction between students and professors because professors are not going to see your paper, nor will he or she grade your paper." This absence of interaction resulted in a lack of personalization of the Indian education process, with no "connection" between teachers and students. Dibya came to the United States for the first time to begin her doctoral education. It was then that she first experienced a teacher asking her "Well, what do you think about this problem?" With eyes wide open and mouth slightly agape, she imitates that look of shock that must have been what she felt at being asked this question. She responded to him, "You know, nobody has ever asked me what I thought." Dibya goes on to explain:

> I found that to be a very significant statement, a very powerful statement because up until then, nobody had asked me how I thought. That was very, very profound for me. . . . That never existed in my educational experience.

This experience in her own education was formative in creating the sense that "good teaching involves a lot of interaction with the students." She reports

> I do involve a lot of personal contact which I think makes students also understand that I'm here to talk with them and they can open up and it's meant to be very interactive. Engagement is the number one ingredient for me in terms of teaching. . . . I found that missing in the Indian educational system. I realized its

importance while doing my Ph.D., realized how it influenced me and helped me succeed in life.

Jim expresses the belief that in order to be effective, a teacher must understand and appreciate who the students are. He refers to this as a "holistic" view of the students.

What I do a lot of is trying to talk to people about their experiences and relate them to historical experiences. . . . It means that I have to think about where they are at. . . . I try to make those kinds of connections to our world . . . or connections to their world.

He learned from one of his own professors to use a framework for the course content that is based on what the students are thinking about in their own lives. His mentor told him "I try to talk about the things that I think that students are most confused about at this stage in their life."

The instructors with good immediacy and clarity express a humanistic, positive regard for their students. These teachers think highly of their students and speak optimistically of their learning. George describes being "blown away" by what his "self-motivated" students create when he gives them "freedom." Jim is thrilled when a student in his class makes an observation that is "just brilliant." He shows his excitement in response to their understanding through his physical energy and encouraging statements such as "That's great!" Enthusiastic responses such as these are reassuring to the students. These teachers are impressed by their students' desire and ability to learn. The level of respect and optimism that these teachers display for their students' learning is evident to the unfamiliar observer and their students alike.

Instructors who are not immediate and clear do not convey a sense of respect, caring or a positive view in regard to their students. Rather than perceiving the students as partners in the teaching and learning relationship, Rich, a cognitive psychology professor, views his students as passive recipients of his knowledge. He describes his model of teaching as a "knowledge transmission model." This model is very consistent with his personality style and his desire to have a high degree of control over the class. He summarizes "It definitely is 'I know these things and I'm going to teach these things to you.'" The result is his students sit passively each class period, rarely asking questions and seldom engaging in any discussions. His style of teaching and his desire to have tight control over the flow of the class have deterred them from interacting with him.

He indicates that his students have expressed their frustration with the "knowledge transmission model" in the past, often asking for a variety of learning activities, such as group discussions. Though he receives these requests every semester, he has not acquiesced. He has little faith in his students' true motivation and suspects ulterior motives behind their requests. Rich feels strongly that

to some extent they falsely believe that these things will help them to learn, but I also think to another extent they don't really care. . . . I definitely question their

> motivation. I definitely question their beliefs. . . . They think that anything that equals fun equals learning and it just doesn't work that way.

In support of his belief that students are not truly interested in learning, he cites an article he read recently in which "they asked education students what are the qualities in a good teacher. . . . These lists had things like 'entertaining,' and what wasn't on the list is 'knowledgeable about the subject.'" He adds to this his observation that "Particularly those who are going into elementary education aren't interested in understanding things."

Jane, who has taught Math for nine years, also holds a largely negative view of her students' motivation. She is frustrated by students she believes generally "don't want to be there." She states "I just have a majority who are not putting a lot into it. . . . It's kind of hard if they don't seem to care if they are passing." Her students' poor efforts and limited interest in the topic are significant contributors, in her mind, to the lack of her own success as a teacher. Her perception of this academic apathy is so wide spread that she notes that even those who have chosen math as a major,

> don't want to be there. . . . They are just not interested and this is what we have to cover and they are not interested in it. It's hard to combat sometimes. You know, you throw in a joke or make it fun, but calculus II is not fun material. I'm sorry, now students want entertainment. Sometimes you've got to learn, but it's not entertaining.

Missing in the low immediacy and clarity instructors' vocabularies are terms that suggest the existence of relationships between themselves and their students. They typically do not describe interactions with the students and there is no reciprocity between themselves and the students. Though both Rich and Jane profess to "like interaction," neither actually attempts to facilitate it.

These teachers generally characterize their students negatively. They believe the students are unmotivated to learn and are simply seeking "entertainment" in lieu of learning. Low immediacy and clarity teachers were not heard to express concern regarding their unsuccessful students, but rather describe exasperation with their lack of interest. Jane goes so far as to make a sweeping summary of her students, saying that "they want to learn as little as possible and get that grade on the piece of paper." As these two professors do not describe a holistic view of their students, they do not express a desire to understand why the students are not succeeding or what each might do, as teachers, to support the students' learning. The lack of faith in their student's desire to learn coincides with limited care about these students. It is possible that the lack of caring for the students and limited interactions with them facilitate the teachers' willingness to dismiss their students as uniformly not interested in learning.

Reflection

Reflection has been described as a critical component of teaching by numerous educators and philosophers. Dewey felt that in order for reflection to be effective, it must be a way

for individuals to make meaning of their experience systematically, in the context of interactions with others (Dewey, 1938). He outlined the steps or phases of the reflective process, which he felt were inherent in systematic reflections which resulted in personal change. These steps included having an experience, instinctively interpreting the experience, identifying the issue associated with the experience, identifying possible explanations for the issue and expanding the explanations into hypotheses, and then testing the hypotheses.

Consistent with Dewey's writing, Maxine Greene notes that reflection is "rooted in experience" (Greene, 1978, p. 17). She identified reflection as the method by which teachers are able to heighten consciousness regarding their own histories, beliefs, and values. It helps to "inform and clarify" our daily life experiences such that we can act upon them purposefully and move towards heightened consciousness regarding our teaching practices. Critical reflection is the means by which we are able to attain the awareness that allows us to function in a mode of being "wide-awake" (p. 43). It is by being in this wide-awake state that teachers are able to not only understand their own course of action, but to be more effectual in fostering critical thinking skills and decision making abilities, as well as the ability to consider multiple perspectives. Teacher reflection also fosters the students' reflection, which "empowers" (p. 48) the students to be wide awake themselves. This facilitates the students' insights into their own learning process and is consistent with the modeling of reflection for students. Schon describes reflection-in-action as vital for the teacher who "must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavor to develop in himself the ability of discovering them" (Schon, 1983, p. 66).

The teachers with good immediacy and clarity are open to these discoveries. These teachers demonstrate reflections on their experience, their knowledge of the learners and the knowledge of the classroom context that allows them to transform their "discipline-based" knowledge into the "art" of the teacher practitioner (Shulman, 1987). Through this process of reflection, the good immediacy and clarity faculty have "struggled" to move from old to new approaches to teaching, or to integrate new perspectives into their practice. The teachers who are immediate and clear discuss their use of reflection in teaching. Many of them outline their reflections on their self-described "struggles" to achieve "balance," on their relationships with students, and on their communication in the classroom.

The difficulty of maintaining "balance" between two perspectives or two characteristics is an issue upon which many immediate and clear teachers reflect. They are trying to refine their teaching such that they encompass the best aspects of potentially conflicting perspectives in order to be effective. For Dibya and George, there is a "struggle to balance" old and new teaching pedagogies. Dibya works to have equilibrium of her "baggage" from Indian educational experience and her American educational experience. She doesn't feel that she has yet "reached that balance."

Dibya relies heavily on the student evaluations that are completed at the end of the semester to "see what the students found to be beneficial and what they found to be less

beneficial." She notes, "I lay a lot [of] emphasis on the student evaluations." When student grades are low, Dibya says

> I ask myself "Why is that happening?" . . . If my class fails on an exam, that tells me, hey, they are not getting it and I can't have my students failing in whatever they are asked to do.

She feels that widespread student failure is also an indicator of her failure. As a result of attending to this feedback, "my teaching strategies have changed over time." In her mind, it is an ongoing process, "a learning experience, I mean you learn every day."

George's previous pedagogy and current teaching methods are divided by an awakening to a new approach to teaching. In recounting his teaching history, he repeatedly refers to the "old way" and the "new way" of teaching. This evolution has a clear delineation based on his exposure to constructivist theories and education during coursework at the Master's degree level. This formal education planted a seed that would later bloom fully after he had been teaching for many years. Before developing "constructivist" teaching methods his feeling was "it's my way or the highway." He describes his "old way" of teaching as heavily lecture based: "I began as that sage on the stage sort of thing, all eyes on me." He told students how to do what they should do. "In the past . . . I would have told them how to solve it and then I would have told them why they needed to know how to do it."

Through workshops and conferences, he began to develop a "huge awareness" of the importance of the process rather than the content of learning. He was "hooked" on this "new way" of teaching and began intentionally changing his teaching methods. Stepping down from the stage was "hard" and "scary." His control of his students' learning process began decreasing, but at the same time "it gave them the freedom and some creativity to do things differently." He realized that he didn't always know what the results of their work would look like, that there would be a great deal of variability from student to student in terms of how they got to their final solutions. He was so intent on becoming this new and improved teacher that despite his inherent nature to try to be a "control freak," he decided to try to let go of his control and trust in his students' abilities.

> I've begun realizing, you know what, a certain amount of students may be successful by following me, but . . . more are going to be successful and I'm going to learn more and I'm going to be happier . . . if I say "okay, let's explore the landscape, stay within site, but let's explore."

As a result of George's reflections on his teaching, he no longer stands at the front of the room for much of the class. His reflections extend to his communication patterns as well. He spends little class time addressing the entire class. "I like to think I don't do a whole lot of talking in the classroom. You know the communication I try to do is much more on a one to one sort of basis." George is reflective about not only how he communicates in the classroom, but also about what he communicates with his students

> I can share with them that I recognize that frustration. I can affirm that frustration. "I know that this is difficult, what you are going through at this point," but also support them and say "I know you can get through here to the other side" and so a lot of times I become the cheerleader.

Through his communication he informs his students that he has reflected on their experience and that he has confidence in their ability to learn.

Jim also identifies the need to find a "balance" between his high standards for the students and the students' need for support. He has thought about the fact that the effort to meet his expectations can be extremely frustrating for the student. He doesn't want students to be deterred from working hard to achieve their goals; therefore, he works to create a supportive learning environment. Jim thinks of the challenge as a "balancing act to be both tough and yet . . . nurturing about it." During his first year of teaching at this institution, he became aware of the need to work on this balance.

> I wasn't real clear sometimes on what it was I wanted from students, that the organization of my classes didn't always flow really well. . . . I am a really tough grader, particularly on writing. . . . A lot of students were really frustrated with me.

During this period, he was dissatisfied with the quality of the teaching and learning experience. He was "feeling frustrated that they were frustrated." He spent time thinking about what the students needed to be successful because he did not want to lower his standards. As a result of his insights into the students' needs during the learning process, he modified his communication style with the students. Jim confesses

> I've really learned that I have to articulate. You know, I just can't think to myself, "Oh, I care about you." You know, I have to write this, literally, on their papers and say, "You know, I want this to be a positive learning experience for you. Don't get discouraged. If you want, give me drafts of this. I'm willing to work with you as much as I possibly can." That sort of stuff, so that they know.

Jim notes, "I pay attention to student evaluations." Reflection on student feedback has shaped his communication with them in the class.

> When students are angry . . . it's just really upsetting because then you sort of think what's going on there, why is that student so frustrated and so alienated? . . . I really need to sell it in a way that is inclusive and not just me saying "You are not good enough." I think that's kind of required, if you expect a lot, that you have to give a lot.

> High immediacy and clarity teachers are reflective about their communication patterns with their students beyond communicating their support of the students. When asked, they provide detailed descriptions of how they communicate in the classroom. They are highly cognizant and reflective of their process of communicating. George

works to convey "affirmations" about their experiences with problem-solving. He maintains open lines of communication with his students by asking if they are "comfortable" with the learning process throughout class. Jim and Dibya encourage one-on-one communication with their students. These teachers are purposeful in developing their communication skills to meet their students' needs. Their reflections on teaching help them form this insight, which has, in turn, positively impacted their classes.

In contrast, the teachers with poor immediacy and clarity engage in very limited reflection. Their reflections tend to be focused primarily on their own behaviors with little connection to the students' needs or intended student outcomes. Rich recognizes that he comes across to the students as aloof and "rigid." He struggles because he wholeheartedly believes in his "knowledge transmission model" of teaching; however, he also senses that he is not an extremely effective teacher. Though he does not give credence to his students' opinions, their evaluations of him have been overwhelmingly and consistently negative, causing him to at least acknowledge that a problem exists. Because of his inherent lack of faith in and lack of respect for his students' insights, Rich generally discounts specific feedback in the course evaluations completed by his students. He explains that

> Students are fickle and . . . these students don't necessarily know what's good and what's bad, so you can only go so far and say "Do my students like me?" I mean sometimes they'll like you for all the wrong reasons and their understanding of what good teaching is and my understanding are different. So I'm definitely not [making changes] just to get [better] evaluations.

Demonstrating some reflection about this conflict, he looks for ways of closing the gap between his current level of teaching effectiveness and where he would like it to be. He consulted his colleagues regarding alternative teaching methods he has observed them using. He gave these alternatives some consideration. He has found information in journals and books about other ways to teach, but "a lot of them seemed gimmicky. So I've learned to discount that."

He is so firmly entrenched in his teaching model that he will not give credence to the advice that he receives from his colleagues or from the professional literature he reads. He will not consider alternative teaching methods, so he is forced to consider only changes that will not require modifications of his current mode of teaching. His reflections have led him to realize that something needs to change, but he has not been able to identify how to make these changes in a manner that is comfortable for him. Rich tries to adopt some of the personality characteristics of his coworker whom he feels is "just naturally a personable guy." Unfortunately, the changes that he tries to implement, such as the use of humor in the class, are uncomfortable for him. As a result, his efforts are not making him more effective or appear more "personable." He has not reflected on why or what to do about it, he just acknowledges that his efforts do not feel "natural."

Jane talks about the fact that she is not good at lecturing and that her speech patterns cause confusion amongst her students. Jane's reflections are fairly specific when it

comes to her ability to identify what she terms as her "clarity" issues. She speaks in verbal mazes which are characterized by incomplete thoughts, interjections of fillers, such as "um" and "whatever," and nonspecific pronouns with no clear referents. She begins to talk about an idea and in mid-sentence changes stream to another related idea. As she continues talking, she remembers what she was originally talking about and switches back to the first topic. She has many false starts to her speech, which disrupt her flow. This maze pattern is evident as she illustrates her perceptions of her communication in the classroom.

> I'll write something different than what I said and usually I'll try to catch myself, but again this would be easier for the student not to have to get that "Not that, but I meant this." . . . If you have a few good students, they'll catch it or at least ask the questions "Did you really mean that word in this context?" but you have to be more straightforward. The words come out wrong sometimes or whatever.

Though she recognizes that her verbal mazes are problematic, she is unable to identify specific behaviors that would improve her teaching. She has vague ideas about what needs to improve, such as needing to "slow down" and to "focus" prior to her lectures, but she hasn't thought about how to implement these changes. Her reflections are limited as she comments "I don't really think about [it] too much. . . . I probably should." For teachers with low immediacy and clarity, it appears that there is a minimal connection between teacher behaviors and student learning. Jane feels that there is not much within her power to influence her students' learning. "There [isn't] really anything I could do . . . . Some people just don't get it."

These two faculty members do not describe reflecting on any relationship between their teaching behaviors and student learning.   They view themselves and their actions as being fairly separate and apart from their students. They do not discuss how their teaching affects the learner. This is evident not only in the lack of language that would indicate a rapport between them, but in their teaching style, which facilitates little interaction between them. Jane does attempt to create opportunities for teaching on a one-to-one basis, but she talks about it from the perspective of her own comfort, not the students' learning. Unfortunately, she has not reflected on how to structure this format more extensively. The result is that in reality she spends only about 10 minutes out of every two hour class working with the students in this way.

Discussion

The faculty in this study who demonstrate good immediacy and clarity as judged by both familiar observers, their students, and an unfamiliar observer, share two specific characteristics. They are all humanistic in their view of teaching and students. These teachers also all use reflection to improve their teaching skills in general and communication skills in particular.

The teachers' with immediacy and clarity communicate their humanism to their students, which facilitates the development of a trusting relationship between teachers and stu-

dents. As they talk about the process of teaching and learning, they use similar words, such as "trust," "respect," "connect" and "engage." The relationships are facilitated by numerous aspects of the teachers' immediacy and clarity such as humor, a relaxed appearance, familiarity with the students' names, individualized attention, and enthusiasm for the subject. Getting the students "engaged" in a relationship helps make them "comfortable" seeking out the support that they may need to be successful in the class. The students develop trust in a classroom where they feel connected to the teacher.

The give and take nature of a relationship extends to the expectations the teachers have for their own learning as well as their students' learning. They see their students as having significant contributions to the learning environment. These teachers explain to the students what they have to learn from them. These faculty all view the classroom as an opportunity for everyone to learn. The learning, much like the relationships, represents a two-way exchange which is intended to be, as Dibya describes it, a "mutual process."

The faculty members whose immediacy and clarity skills are limited have pessimistic opinions of their students. In addition to having low expectations for their learning, they do not regularly express care or concern for their students, nor do they talk about them in holistic terms. These teachers do not frequently express any thoughts regarding the existence of a relationship between themselves and their students outside of the very formal teacher-student roles. Their classroom communication likely conveys these attitudes to their students. Their poor immediacy may be a side effect of the teachers' lack of interest in engaging with their students, or it may be a skill they did not develop due to their limited reflections. Their experience with students who find them unapproachable would foster the belief that their students were unmotivated and support their pessimistic view of the students. This creates a cycle that is difficult to break and enables these faculty members to continue operating under their negative assumptions.

It is through the process of reflection that the teachers with high immediacy and clarity continuously learn from their own experiences and the experiences of their students. In addition to thinking about events from their own perspective, these teachers demonstrate reflection on feedback received from their students, which is a critical component for effective reflection, particularly for teachers (Bandura, 2001; McAlpine & Weston, 2000). Effective faculty are successful in monitoring the relevant cues and interpreting them correctly in order to bring about effective changes in their teaching. The immediate and clear teachers attend to the formal channel of feedback that they get from the course evaluations and to the informal feedback such class responsiveness or individual discussions with their students. This ability to consider the teaching process as it related to the students' learning is one of the critical components for successful reflection by a teacher (Shulman, 1987).

Teachers with poor immediacy and clarity, such as Jane and Rich, are not particularly reflective teachers. They do not express the perception of a relationship between their teaching behaviors or communication and the students' success. They see the learning as a process that happens almost independently of whatever they do. Learning is attributed to the students' innate abilities, being "good students," rather than to what they have done

in the classroom. These teachers discredit the feedback and requests from their students, such as those Rich receives to vary his classroom delivery. He disregards out of hand virtually all teaching methods except his as being "gimmicky," thus ruling them out for reflection regarding their potential value for either himself or his students. Jane has not considered seeking out the perspectives or input of her peers. For these teachers, there are few apparent sources of input worthy of their reflections.

Conclusion

This data gives us insight into some shared characteristics of immediate and clear faculty. The characteristics of being humanistic and reflective appear to have shaped their communication with their students and may actually aid in cultivating these communication traits. For these faculty members, teaching is not merely about being effective in the classroom, but it is about connecting with the students, caring about their learning process and wanting to be successful and engaged in the learning process. They use their communication to facilitate these processes. These teachers are reflective about their teaching, about the students' learning experiences and about how they communicate with their students in the classroom. Their immediacy and clarity has been cultivated by their humanism and reflective process. The immediate and clear teacher is not simply an effective teacher due to his communication skills, but is also effective because of his reflective and humanistic nature.

If we are to improve the communicative effectiveness of our own teaching and that of others, we must look first to the underlying attitudes towards students and the use of the reflective process. The development of programs that improve the underlying humanistic and reflective qualities in university teachers who have limited effectiveness in the classroom may be of more value than address communication strategies alone. This concept likely merits exploration in future research and faculty development programs. Instructing faculty in methods of increasing immediacy and clarity without addressing these characteristics will only result in superficial changes. These may be perceived as "gimmicks." Such changes may be inadequate to significantly improve the overall effectiveness of a college teacher.

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