# The Criticality of Verbal Immediacy in Online Instruction: A Modified Delphi Study

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## Abstract

In this 2011 investigation, a modified Delphi technique was introduced to determine whether an informed group of post-secondary online faculty and students could arrive at a consensus regarding the importance of previously recognized verbal immediacy behaviors. Two expert panels were presented with Gorham's (1988) Verbal Immediacy Scale and tasked with determining those behaviors perceived as being the most important in the online learning venue. The result of the study confirmed that a consensus of opinion between online students and faculty is indeed possible, albeit resulting in a new iteration of Gorham's scale. A discussion of the findings suggests that further consideration for the development of an updated version of a verbal immediacy scale specific to online instructional behaviors may be warranted.

**Keywords:** Online Teaching, Verbal Immediacy, Modified Delphi Study

## Introduction

There should be no doubt that students are attracted to teachers who demonstrate a warm and inviting communicative demeanor as they strive to create an environment that is conducive to learning. In fact, an intensifying body of evidence supports the premise that affirmative communication behavior exhibited by instructors is crucial to attaining successful learning outcomes. Previous studies widely document how enhanced communication between instructors and their students can serve to promote fruitful affective and cognitive gain in a variety of instructional environments. An important component of instruction that has gained increasing attention over the past five decades is that of immediacy. Immediacy, as it was first examined by Mehrabian (1968) through his work in the field of communication theory, embraces those "behaviors which reduce physical and psychological distance between interactants" (p. 43). While the face-to-face experience of a conventional on-ground classroom might provide opportunities to create immediacy through direct, in-person interactions with students, it has been broadly accepted that committed teachers in the online learning environment can also employ tactics that build a sense of immediacy within the virtual classroom.

The purpose of this study was determine whether a consensus in the ranking of behaviors, largely associated with instructor immediacy, could be established by two informed constituent groups: practicing online faculty and seasoned online students. The main research question to be addressed in this study was: Can a group of experienced online faculty and students attain a consensus of opinion concerning the importance of verbal immediacy behaviors demonstrated by faculty teaching in the online setting? The envisioned outcome of this investigation was to determine whether the criticality of select behaviors previously identified as being causal to

instructional immediacy continue to be pertinent in the online environment when viewed by todays online practitioners and consumers.

## Review of Related Literature

The construct of immediacy was defined by Mehrabian (1967) as an affective expression of emotional attachment, feelings of liking, and the degree of perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people. Immediacy refers to communication behaviors based on the principle that individuals tend to approach encounters that they like, and avoid encounters they dislike. In a subsequent writing, Mehrabian (1971) expanded on this premise by adding:

> In response to a remark that appeals to us, we may 'approach' by asking questions or leaning forward. In response to discussion we find uninteresting or objectionable, we may 'avoid' by remaining silent and leaning back, farther away from the speaker. Immediacy behaviors involve an increase in the sensory stimulation between two persons. When we stand close to someone or talk to him [sic] a great deal more stimulation and information are exchanged than if we were to stand farther away or remain silent (pp. 2-4).

Generally viewed as a faculty member's affability with their students, behaviors of immediacy are those that enhance closeness to, and interaction with, others because they reduce the perception of psychological and/or physical distance between communicators, therefore increasing the overall sensory stimulation and arousal, and also promoting liking (Mehrabian, 1971). Ensuing studies in the academic field have determined that instructors can convey behavioral cues (behaviors) of immediacy either verbally, or non-verbally. Gorham (1988) reported that the combination of verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors accounted for a significant amount of change in both affective and cognitive learning.

## Verbal Immediacy

Gorham's investigation established that verbal immediacy can include behaviors such as "humor in class…, as are his/her praise of students' work, actions, or comments and frequency of initiating and/or willingness to become engaged in conversations with students…" (1988, p. 47). Moreover, interactions that include self-disclosure, the asking questions, the provision of feedback, and the use of inclusive pronouns also foster the perception of verbal immediacy. According to Gorham, such behaviors serve to reduce "psychological distance by recognizing individual students and their ideas and viewpoints, by incorporating student input into course and class design, by communicating availability and willingness to engage in one-to-one interactions, and by enhancing their 'humanness' via humor and self-disclosure" (p. 52). Her findings cite communicative cues suggestive of this construct as including addressing students by name, offering personal examples, interjecting humor, asking follow-up questions, initiating side conversations with students, praising student work, encouraging student views, and sentiments of inclusiveness as expressed through the use of such words as "we" and "our" instead of "I' or "you."

A product of Gorham's 1988 study is the Verbal Immediacy Scale (VIS) which was designed to measure behaviors that increase a student's predilection for the instructor (see Appendix A). The 17-item "Likert-type" scale has been commonly used to measure student perceptions of instructor immediacy. The split-half reliability from Gorham's initial use of the scale in the on-ground classroom setting has been reported as .94, with succeeding studies in the conventional setting having recorded high reliability coefficients ranging from .77 to .94 (Christensen & Menzel, 1998). The VIS has been more recently employed to measure perceptions of online instructional immediacy, with ranges from .84 to .90 (Baker, 2004).

## Nonverbal Immediacy

Nonverbal components of immediacy include physical cues such as eye contact, gestures, vocal and facial expressiveness, body positioning, movement, and proximity (Andersen, 1979). Needless to say, in the online classroom environment (where nonverbal cues might be relatively absent), the construct is not as forthright for faculty to exhibit. However, exceptions to such a claim might very well be afforded to synchronous video exchanges between faculty and students.

### Implications of Online Instructional Immediacy

Mehrabian's immediacy theory runs parallel to that of Moore's (1989) theory of transactional distance, as well as Holmberg's (1986) theory of guided didactic conversation in that all three speak to the significance of communication and interaction when learning at a distance. Moore's (1989) theory examined the concept of how "transactional" distance can result in a sense of psychological separation due to a lack of communication and instructional structure between a geographically separated instructor and their student(s). Holmberg's (1986) theory of guided didactic conversation focused on the role of interaction between the teacher and students in distance learning, emphasizing the need for dialogue between the participants to bring about strong rapport, a sense of belonging, as well as a sense of empathy. But what particular behaviors of immediacy that online teachers have at their disposal are of greatest importance toward creating relationships which, in turn, will heighten learning outcomes? Further, is there agreement with regard to the influence of such behaviors between teacher and student?

The task of understanding the various means by which verbal expression can successfully produce a sense of diminished separation between online participants presents both challenges and prospects for the online practitioner. The 2011 investigation reported in this paper sought to affirm those

behaviors associated with online verbal immediacy as perceived by two informed constituent groups--practicing online faculty and online students. It is hoped that the results of the investigation will serve to further authenticate the immediacy behaviors that are prevalent in effective online instructors as collectively viewed by those who are clearly the most involved in the endeavor--the faculty and the students.

## Participants

For this study, a heterogeneous panel of experienced online students and faculty from a single institution of higher learning was seated to review a list of cues that have commonly been attributed to promoting instructional immediacy in the educational setting. Participants for this study were not randomly selected given the investigative design relies on the involvement of informed participants. Toward this end, a student sample demonstrating a minimum equivalency of enrollment in not less than ten online courses, and faculty having demonstrated a minimum of ten online course deliveries were considered eligible candidates for the investigation. Based on this qualification profile, representatives of the administrative staff of the online campus nominated faculty members that met the candidate profile. In addition, campus leadership asked faculty to post an announcement (as provided by the investigator) describing the study within their active course(s). The announcement functioned as an invitation to students meeting the designated qualification profile to participate in the study. Enrollment was closed when the target sample of 20 individuals representing an equally distributed adult group of consenting online faculty and students (10 faculty and 10 students) were pre-qualified.

Ultimately, 18 of the invited candidates (nine students and nine faculty members) advanced by successfully completing the qualifying protocol necessary to be seated as a panel member. Each of

the participants completed all of the three prescribed Delphi rounds. There were 10 male and eight female panel members. They ranged in age from 25 to 52; the mean age of the faculty participants was 47, and the mean age of the student group was 35. All of the student participants related an experience of enrollment in more than the 10 online course minimum to be seated for this investigation. As a whole, the faculty reported more exposure to the online learning environment more than 90% of the faculty members indicating instructional experience in 15 or more online courses, and more than 60% indicated involvement in 20 or more online courses. A majority of the faculty members also revealed previous experience as an online student.

## Method

A modified Delphi technique was adopted for this investigation to define the perceptions of current online faculty and students regarding behaviors associated with online faculty verbal immediacy. Since its development in the 1950s, the Delphi method has been widely used to inform technology, education, and medical fields (Cornish, 1977). It is a method for the "systematic solicitation and collation of judgments on a particular topic through a set of carefully designed sequential questionnaires interspersed with summarized information and feedback of opinions derived from earlier responses" (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975, p.10). The Delphi technique consists of a group process that is used to gather and assemble information among experts through consensus (Masser and Foley, 1987; Miller, 1993). Through a series of inquiries, the process is designed to determine whether a consensus of informed opinion between panelists can be established. The Delphi method "attempts to negotiate a reality that can then be useful in moving a particular field forward ..." (Fish and Busby, 1996).

The modified Delphi technique is quite similar to the Delphi in approach (i.e., a series of

inquiries provided to experts) and intent (i.e., to discover whether the panel can arrive at a consensus). However, the primary difference is that the first round of the modified Delphi begins with panelists being offered a set of items that were heretofore determined. These items are drawn from various sources including the findings of previous studies, reviews of contemporary literature, or pre-interviews with content experts representing the specific field being investigated. The foremost benefit of the modified Delphi technique is that it provides an acknowledged foundation from previous work (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999).

The first Delphi probe was fashioned to solicit the leading immediacy behaviors perceived by the panel as being most important (critical) so as to be attributed to an effective online instructor. The panel was presented with the 17 items included in Gorham's (1988) Verbal Immediacy Scale. Individual participants were asked to rate the level of importance of the items included in the original list of 17 verbal immediacy cues. A comment section was also provided for participants to "write in" additional verbal immediacy behaviors that were believed to be of importance, yet not included in Gorham's established list.

The list of behaviors sustained in the first round, as well as any "write in" behaviors provided by panelists in the comment section, we rated to determine the level of perceived importance. Descriptive statistics, including means, medians, and standard deviations, were calculated for both the online faculty and student groups. In the subsequent rounds of the Delphi probe, participants were provided with the list of immediacy behaviors that were perceived by the panelists to be of importance in Round 1, according to their mean value.

As with similar Delphi studies, the interquartile range (IQR) was selected to determine the level of consensus beginning with Round 2. The IQR, which is the difference between the 1st quartile and 3rd quartile of the data set, is calculated by applying a formula of IQR = Q3 - Q1 (Williams, 2000). The IQR was used to determine the level of consensus and was calculated by first establishing the 1st and 3rd quartiles using the following formulas: Q1 = (n+1)/4 and Q3 = 3(n+1)/4 (Bailie, 2011).

The primary purpose for employing a Delphi approach in a formal investigation "... is to gain consensus or judgment among a group of perceived experts on a topic" (Keeney, Hasson, and McKenna, 2006). For this investigation, a survey was designed to determine whether a consensus relative to the importance of specific online faculty verbal immediacy behaviors could be established between two vested groups of online experts.

## Delphi 1

For the Round 1 survey, participants rank the importance of the 17 behaviors included in Gorham's (1988) Verbal Immediacy Behavior Scale. From this close-ended list, panelists indicated their rating for each behavior based on a "Likert type" scale with "1" representing very unimportant, "2" representing not important, "3" representing important, "4" representing very important. The resulting mean rating and standard deviation from Delphi Round 1 are presented in Table 1. Of the 17 verbal immediacy behaviors included in Gorham's scale, the combined panel identified five to be unimportant based on the mean value of the responses. These five behaviors included: "The instructor gets into discussions based on something a student brings up," "The instructor gets into conversations with individual students before/after class," "The instructor has initiated conversations with me before/after class," "The instructor calls on students to answer questions…,"

and “The instructor is addressed by his/her first name by the students.” These behaviors were then removed from the list to be rated in the following rounds.

Table 1
*Descriptive Statistics of Combined Group Ratings, Delphi Round 1*

| Verbal Immediacy Behaviors | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| The instructor uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he had outside of class | 3.33 | 0.54 |
| The instructor asks questions or encourages students to respond | 3.66 | 0.48 |
| The instructor gets into discussions based on something a student brings up even when this doesn't seem to be part of his/her plan | 2.33 | 0.84 |
| The instructor uses humor in the course | 3.22 | 0.80 |
| The instructor addresses students by name | 3.55 | 0.61 |
| The instructor addresses me by name | 3.61 | 0.60 |
| The instructor gets into conversations with individual students before or after class | 2.22 | 0.87 |
| The instructor has initiated conversations with me before, after or outside of class | 2.22 | 0.94 |
| The instructor refers to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing | 3.33 | 0.59 |
| The instructor provides feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, discussions etc. | 3.77 | 0.42 |
| The instructor calls on students to answer questions even if they have not indicated that they want to talk | 1.94 | 0.63 |
| The instructor asks how students feel about an assignment, due dates, or discussion topics | 3.27 | 0.89 |
| The instructor invites students to telephone or chat sessions outside of class if they have questions or want to discuss something | 3.33 | 0.68 |
| The instructor asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions | 3.61 | 0.50 |
| The instructor praises students' work, actions or comments | 3.66 | 0.48 |
| The instructor will have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students or with the class as a whole | 3.16 | 0.61 |
| The instructor is addressed by his/her first name by the students | 2.44 | 1.04 |

There were five responses offered to the opportunity to "write in" immediacy behaviors that panelists believed to be absent from the list. The five recommended behaviors included: "The instructor telephones each student to personally welcome them to class," "The instructor uses color, emoticons, clip art, and/or media in their communications with students," "The instructor provides regular announcements outlining the learning objectives, solidifying their relevance, and offering guidance for a more efficient and effective mastery," "The instructor offers personal details about themselves, including imagery," and "The instructor invites students to appraise his/her approach to instruction during the active term." The Delphi panel would review and consider these additions in the subsequent round.

## Delphi 2

The second Delphi round directed the two panels to rate the criticality of the verbal immediacy behaviors that were deemed to be of importance in round one, including the five "write in" behaviors offered by panelists. Once all eighteen panelists completed this round, the data were first analyzed to determine the degree of perceived importance (*M*), followed by the determination of whether a consensus was reached among the panel of experts (*IQR*).

For the combined group response of both faculty and students regarding the importance of the behaviors, the mean values indicated that two of the behaviors included in the Round 2 list were perceived as unimportant. "The instructor will have discussions about things unrelated to class with individual students or with the class as a whole" lost favor between Round 1 and 2, and "The instructor telephones each student to personally welcome them to class" was not sustained as an addition to the list. As a result, these two behaviors were eliminated from further consideration,

thereby reducing the list to 15. The remaining data sets were then analyzed for the level of consensus.

Determining a consensus can be accomplished by examining the interquartile range (IQR) of the ratings of each of the items. Rayens and Hahn (2000) maintain that an IQR that is 20% of the rating scale is a conservative and acceptable criterion for determining consensus. For the purposes of this study, consensus was defined as an IQR equal to, or less than, 20% of the rating scale. Therefore, consensus was reached as defined by an IQR equal to or less than 1.0 (less than or equal to 1.0). Table 2 presents the median, standard deviation, and IQR calculations from Delphi Round 2.

When viewed as individual groups, a strong consensus within the faculty panel was recognized with an IQR of 1 for 12 of the behaviors. An absolute consensus of importance within the faculty panel was reached with two of the listed behaviors: "The instructor provides feedback…" and "The instructor provides regular announcements…," as indicated by an IQR of 0. Within the faculty group, there was one behavior that fell above an IQR of 1, as "The instructor used humor…" resulted in an IQR of 2 (albeit rated as important by the majority of faculty participants).

Ten of the behaviors resulted in a consensus of rating within the student group with an IQR of 1, while an absolute consensus was realized in two of the 15 behaviors including: "The instructor used humor…" and "The instructor provides regular announcements…" Three behaviors did not achieve consensus between the student participants, with "The instructor uses personal examples…" and "The instructor invites students to appraise…" resulting in an IQR of 2, and "The instructor uses color, emoticons…" resulting in a 3 (albeit rated as a mean value of 3 by the collective student

participants).

For the combined group response of both faculty and students regarding the perceived importance of the immediacy behaviors, a consensus was established with 13 of the 15 behaviors. A strong consensus of opinion was realized with three of the behaviors: "The instructor uses humor…'" "The instructor provides feedback…'" and "The instructor provides regular announcements…" Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the combined panel ratings of Delphi Round 2. Because the combined group did not achieve a consensus for all of the behaviors, a third round was deemed by the investigator to be appropriate.

Table 2
*Descriptive Statistics of Combined Panel Ratings, Delphi Round 2*

| Verbal Immediacy Behavior | *M* | *SD* | IQR |
|---|---|---|---|
| The instructor uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he had outside of class | 3.22 | 0.80 | 1 |
| The instructor asks questions or encourages students to respond | 3.61 | 0.05 | 1 |
| The instructor uses humor in the course | 2.94 | 0.63 | 0 |
| The instructor addresses students by name | 3.33 | 0.59 | 1 |
| The instructor addresses me by name | 3.55 | 0.61 | 1 |
| The instructor refers to class as "our" class or what "we" are doing | 3.50 | 0.61 | 1 |
| The instructor provides feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, discussions etc. | 3.05 | 0.52 | 0 |
| The instructor asks how students feel about an assignment, due dates, or discussion topics | 2.55 | 0.57 | 2 |
| The instructor invites students to telephone or chat sessions outside of class if they have questions or want to discuss something | 2.61 | 0.61 | 2 |
| The instructor asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions | 3.72 | 0.46 | 1 |
| The instructor praises students' work, actions or comments | 2.77 | 0.64 | 1 |
| The instructor uses color, emoticons, clip art, and/or media in their | 3.27 | 0.80 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|
| communications with students | | | |
| The instructor provides regular announcements outlining the learning objectives, solidifying their relevance, and offering guidance for a more efficient and effective mastery | 3.00 | 0.52 | 0 |
| The instructor offers personal details about themselves, including imagery | 2.77 | 0.64 | 1 |
| The instructor invites students to appraise his/her approach to instruction during the active term | 2.77 | 0.90 | 1 |

*Note*. IQR = interquartile range.

## Delphi 3

For the third-round of the Delphi survey, participants were provided with a summary of the group responses resulting from the second-round survey. The introduction of the cumulative results generated by previous rounds has been historically offered in the final probe of modified Delphi studies to sustain the validation of group consensus (Delbecq, et. al, 1975). In doing so, closure is provided as areas of common ground and any divergence can be more readily identified. With the results revealed, panelists were asked to once again consider the importance of the two behaviors that did not achieve consensus in Round 2. The combined group's response to Delphi Round 3 is presented in Table 3. In Round 3, a shift in the combined group's perception of the levels of importance of the two behaviors not achieving consensus in Round 2 responses elevated the importance rating with greater frequency. However, the faculty rating for the "asks student about assignment, due dates, topics" behavior was reduced to a further degree of unimportance. Still, it was found that the preponderance of the ratings fell within the top two categories of importance. Because the faculty participant reduced the importance rating of this behavior during the third round, a complete consensus was achieved for all but this single behavior.

Table 3
*Descriptive Statistics of Combined Panel Ratings, Delphi Round 3*

| Verbal Immediacy Behavior | *M* | *SD* | IQR |
|---|---|---|---|
| The instructor asks how students feel about an assignment, due dates, or discussion topics | 2.83 | 0.57 | 2 |
| The instructor invites students to telephone or chat sessions outside of class if they have questions or want to discuss something | 2.61 | 0.76 | 1 |

*Note*. IQR = interquartile range.

A three-round modified Delphi probe was conducted for this study. The goal of the first round was to establish a list of verbal immediacy behaviors identified by the panel as being important in the contemporary online learning environment. The list was derived from the panel's review of the behaviors that comprise Gorham's (1988) Verbal Immediacy Scale, as well as additional behaviors proposed by the seated panelists. The Delphi 2 probe found consensus of opinion within the combined group of participants for 13 behaviors when measured against the IQR. A third probe ensued to re-evaluate the importance of two behaviors, yet one continued to be outside of consensus from the combined group's perspective.

The results of this study indicate that the stated research question is affirmed, that a group of experienced online faculty and students can attain a consensus of opinion concerning the importance of verbal immediacy behaviors demonstrated by online faculty. Even though an absolute consensus of both groups of participants was not achieved by the third round (i.e., one behavior persisted outside of the IQR of 1), an otherwise strong consensus across the probes demonstrates a sturdy accord on the 14 immediacy behaviors agreed to be of importance. The resulting 14 behaviors identified by the combined panel did vary from the list of verbal immediacy behaviors that comprised Gorham's 1988 VIS, adding to question whether there is a need for a new

iteration of an immediacy measurement expressly suited for the online environment.

## Discussion

Certain limitations are commonly associated with any research effort, and are worthy of mention. For instance, the student and faculty panelists participating in this investigation represented a single institution of higher learning, and each subject possessed varying levels of background and experience. It is recognized that had the panel been comprised of experts from other institutions, representing other backgrounds, the results may have been different. Also, as the Delphi model adopted for this investigation asked participants to self-report their perceptions, the results can only be considered valid to the degree that the participants in the study accurately reported their perceptions. Consequently, the results of this study are not intended to be generalized to other studies.

A comparison of the results of this study to the findings of previous studies of instructor verbal immediacy finds distinct similarities. For example, interaction has been widely cited as a defining characteristic of successful learning in both traditional and the online learning environments (Picciano, 2002; Swan, 2002; Wanstreet, 2006). However, as Eastmond (1995) asserted, computer-mediated communication is not inherently interactive. Rather, it is dependent on factors including the frequency, timeliness, and nature of the messages that are posted. With this in mind, instructional immediacy within the online classroom was described by Baker and Woods (2004) to be the "pedagogical and administrative actions an instructor takes throughout an online course to increase the students' sense of human interaction, instructor presence, caring, and connectedness" (p.135). Such an focus might very well require online instructors to further distinguish the interpersonal and contextual interaction they demonstrate in the online environment as they seek

to improve the online educational experience.

Based on the results of this investigation, a list of practical, immediacy-grounded strategies can be advanced toward what has been found to be of importance to the online learning endeavor. Those behaviors regarded by the Delphi panel serve to reinforce the influential role of the instructor in creating an online environment that is more conducive to learning. These behaviors largely fall under four general themes (offered in no particular order).

- **Initiate and maintain on-going contact** – Be proactive in communication with students through weekly announcements, individual contact, and engagement. Highlight a sincere personal interest in the learner's success and emphasize an unfettered availability for student contact. Invite students to engage in contact by phone, chat or Web meetings. Keep track of student progress, redirect off-task students, and gently remind students of missed tasks.
- **Adapt communication to various learning styles** – Create technology-enhanced snippets that guide students through the learning process, detailing what is expected, and incorporating added media to provide a feeling of direct instruction, personalized attention, and collective ownership.
- **Create channels for personalization** - Provide social-emotional cues with routine messages that represent a caring and supportive rapport. Reinforce relevance of the learning objectives and guidance toward personal mastery. Judiciously introduce humor, as appropriate. Provide individualized feedback on all graded work. Encourage learners to share their own experiences and views. Praise individual and group student effort.

- **Generate impetus through communication** - Demonstrate a high presence through regular opportunities for interaction. Always address students by their preferred name, and course endeavors in the possessive. Demonstrate a personal interest in each student by asking questions and offering personal examples. Ask learners to appraise how you are doing.

Gorham's Scale has been widely used to measure the influence of immediacy in the on-ground and (more recently the) online classroom environments. Since its development in 1988, the scale has been reviewed for validity on a number of occasions. Wilson & Locker (2004) examined the face and construct validity of the verbal immediacy scale based on factor analysis and prediction of student outcomes and concluded that both verbal and nonverbal items offer valid measures of immediacy. However, they also recommend a new iteration of the immediacy scale, omitting some items and focusing on those most strongly related to immediacy. Others, including Robinson & Richmond (2009) concluded that the scale may not be a valid operationalization of Mehrabian's immediacy construct and recommended that it not be used in communication research prior to a reformulation and subsequent retesting for validity. The expert panel seated for the study presented in this paper deemed seven items from Gorham's Scale as not important in the online environment. In addition, the panel offered additional behaviors, some of which were not in existence in the conventional classroom of 1988 (i.e. emoticons and clipart). Given the changes brought about by the emergence of online learning, it might very well be time to advance the calls for a new instrument explicitly designed to measure immediacy behaviors in the delivery of online instruction.

## Conclusion

A significant body of evidence has documented that positive communication behaviors exhibited by faculty at all levels of instruction are fundamental to the learning process, and serves to encourage

affective and cognitive development in a variety of instructional settings. Previous investigations into the area of instructional communication have supported the long-held premise that verbal and nonverbal messages conveyed by instructors have the potential to influence student learning outcomes. Links between teacher immediacy, student motivation, and affective learning have been well documented. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a panel of online faculty and students could achieve a consensus of opinion relative to the importance of verbal immediacy behaviors. It was found that just such a consensus could be established, albeit only with a revised list of verbal immediacy behaviors perceived by the panel as being important in today's online instructional delivery.

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