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Effective Communication Skills in Teaching-Learning Process

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The Act of Communication and Teaching

Communication is an indispensable factor in the teaching-learning process. It is necessary that the process of communication is understood mutually by the teacher and the student to make the teaching-learning process effective. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word Communication as ‘the act of imparting, especially news’, or ‘the science and practice of transmitting information’. These definitions clearly show the link between ‘teaching’ and ‘communication’. Teachers impart new knowledge constantly, or transmit information to the students. In fact, the reverse also holds good especially in today’s context of enormous materials available to all through the Internet.

Complex Context of Communication

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Hubley J. London: Macmillan; 1993. *Communicating Health*. has demonstrated that communication is a complex process. At any stage of this process things may go wrong, making the communication less effective. For instance, the speaker may not be able to express himself/herself clearly. The external disturbances like the noisy classroom; the drifting noises from the other classrooms; the blaring loud speakers from the neighbourhood streets etc. also compound to the woes. To be effective, teachers have to try to minimize these barriers to communication. This can be done in a number of ways – for example, by making sure that the room is quiet and well-lit; by speaking slowly and clearly; by only using words which the students should be able to understand. However, the most important way to overcome the barriers is two-way communication. Communication does not only take place by means of words; non-verbal communication (or body language) is equally important.

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-Verbal Communication is usually subconscious – we use it without thinking about it; that is why we say that ‘it is difficult to lie in body language’. If teachers really attend to the body language of their students they will know when they are bored or confused. From the body language of their teachers students pick up whether they are confident and enthusiastic.

Non-verbal communication skills can be honed by practice lessons in modulation, intonation, gestures, expressions and gait. The teacher can be the role-model or alternately, by turns, the students could be made to communicate with the class with non-verbal communication skills. The differences in intended and implied meaning can be impressed upon the students through peer-examples. Language drills can be introduced to make effective use of non-verbal communication.

Direct Communication

Direct communication involves Person-to-Person Communication and person-to-persons communication. Some teachers like to talk, and expect their students to write down what they say and to learn it (This style encourages superficial learning - and rapid forgetting!). Other teachers see their role as one of helping the students to learn at a deeper level - to understand new ideas and concepts so well that they can apply them in a work situation. Either way, teachers can be effective if they communicate well with their students.

Teaching Aids

An important element of communication in teaching is the use of teaching aids. We have all heard the saying: ‘What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I know’. Pictures, written posters and practical demonstrations improve communication and we should use them as much as possible. Paper, posters, a chalkboard, or an overhead projector can be put to good use in a language classroom. These can be used to prepare aids for the lessons: summaries of

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important facts, or pictures and diagrams. The overhead projector is particularly useful, because it allows the teacher to continue to face the students while using it. The 45 degree angle shifts to a full 180 degree view enabling the teacher the added advantage of holding the attention of the students.

A Two-Way Process

Communication is a two-way process. The teacher not only helps the students to improve their communication but also needs to be assured that his/her own communication skills are effective. Gauging one's own communication skills is possible in different ways. Communication is a skill – and teachers can improve their skills by getting feedback on the way they perform. They can get such feedback by asking an experienced colleague to sit in their class while teaching, and to give them feedback. They can also ask someone to record them on a videotape as they teach which they can later inspect critically.

Feedback

The students are also a good source of feedback. Monthly feedback from the students ensures that problems areas are nipped in the bud. The best feedback is, however, the teacher himself/herself. Introspection and the urge for continual improvement go a long way in enabling the teachers to improve their own communication skills. In any case the feedback will be better if a checklist is used to judge individual performance.

Materials

Teachers communicate by speaking and also by writing. The hand-outs that almost all teachers prepare for their students reflect the communication skills and can aid as a tool in imparting communication skills to the students in class.

A hand-out is not to be mistaken for a photocopy of a journal article, or of some pages out of a textbook. Rather, it is a document which the teacher writes himself/ herself. It may be a summary of important points to be learnt; or a guide to students on work they have to do, or references they have to look up. Teachers may use hand-outs for students to refer to during a lesson, and students will definitely use them in their self-study time. As hand-outs are such an important way of communicating with students, they must communicate effectively.

Need to Communicate Well – What It Involves?

In the present context, all that the student needs is to communicate well if he/she is to do the work well. Unfortunately, many are never taught how to do this. Teachers, therefore, also have to teach their students to be better communicators.

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The art of communication involves listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. Teachers need to be highly skilled in all these areas to excel in their profession. Proficient communicators receive information, understand and synthesize it and express themselves at a high level. They make excellent teachers because they are able to transmit knowledge, skills and values at the same time they communicate their concern for the students entrusted to their care. They help motivate students to learn.

Communication is both receptive and expressive. Teachers must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present the material. They must be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to transmit to their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students regardless of ability or learning style. They should be able to "read" their students and adapt to the needs of the individual. Effective communication includes transforming the boring into the interesting and having good presentation skills.

Consultation with Colleagues

Although teaching is often done in the isolation of a classroom without the presence of other adults, good teaching involves consultation with colleagues. Colleges that see themselves as professional learning communities encourage teachers to plan lessons together and learn from one another. They take a team approach when problem-solving is needed, especially for difficult students. All this requires excellent communication. Teachers stay abreast of new developments in education by reading journals, listening to new ideas from their administrators and consultants, and sharing and discussing these ideas with colleagues.

A Comprehensive View of Communication Skills

Communication skills include many things – using the target language effectively, our body language including facial expressions, pitch and tone of our voice, interpersonal skills and a lot of other things. Effective communication skills are now required in each and every aspect of our life. Teachers of English are expected to have good command over the language and possess excellent communication skills. For a teacher, it is not just important to give a quality lecture but it is more important for the presentation of a lesson or lecture in class. A teacher with communication skills can enhance the learning process of students.

Effective communication skills can also be imbibed by observing communication skills of people who are effective communicators. While communication skills are personal and unique, we can learn a lot by seeing how others communicate. Effective teaching is teaching that explores ways to engage the student mind with different strategies and approaches. To find these skills and glean ways to be an effective teacher, the teacher must stay alert for community opportunities and make new contacts as in a seminar or conference. Effective communication

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skills start from the convincing technique. This technique helps the teacher to transplant ideas inside the student's mind.

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