

Improving Classroom Communication

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The Importance of Classroom Communication



Focusing on instructional goals & objectives

- Communication is central to group learning
 - ◆ “face to face”
 - ◆ “computer to computer”
- Addressing communication needs can be seen as too time consuming. Is it really worth the time and effort?

Focusing on instructional goals & objectives

- Students who feel a sense of belonging often focus better on course goals and contribute to other students' achievement of those goals.
- Students who feel left out of communication, for whatever reasons, may focus more on their exclusion than on course goals and objectives.

Influences of faculty pedagogy on classroom communication



The continuum of “pedagogy”

- Teacher/content-focused (traditional pedagogy)
- Adult learner-focused (andragogy)
- Highly self-directed (heutagogy)



Teacher/content focus



- Can lead to teacher-centered communication
- Student communication is receptive more than expressive
- Student expression is “giving the content back” to show what was learned.

Adult learner focus



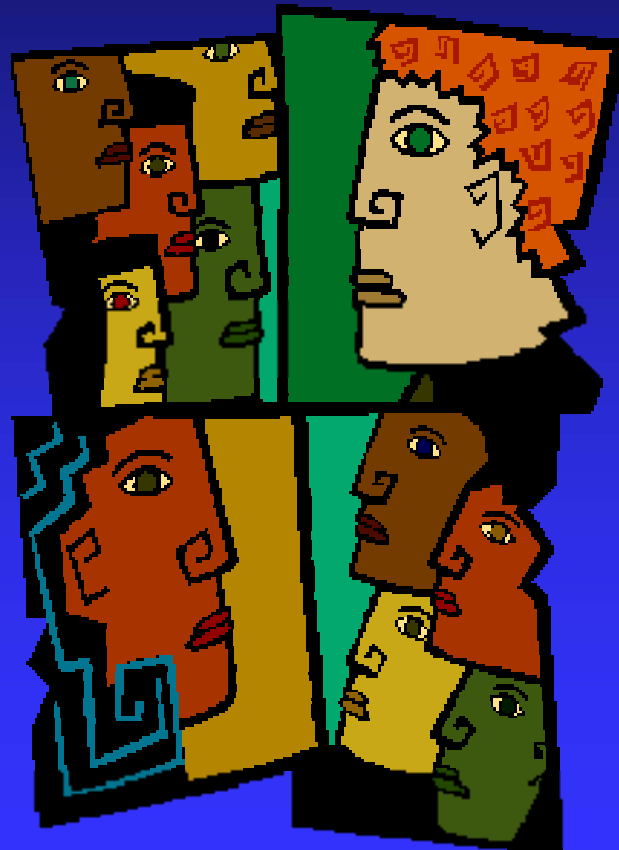
- More communication exchange is expected
 - ◆ Student-teacher interaction
 - ◆ Student-student interaction
 - ◆ Student-others interaction

Highly self-directed focus



- Students may be well-prepared to describe and assert their preferences for communication as a key to their own learning
- Students' communication may serve as a role model for other students
- Students may need to learn how to fit into group process and make reasonable communication compromises with others

Recognizing Communication Diversity



Types of diversity that influence communication

- Language
- Modality (sign, writing, speech, etc.)
- Cultural identity
- Gender
- Emotional & maturational influences
- Physical influences
- Other?

Deaf and hard of hearing students value learning with their communication strengths

◆ Access to visual information



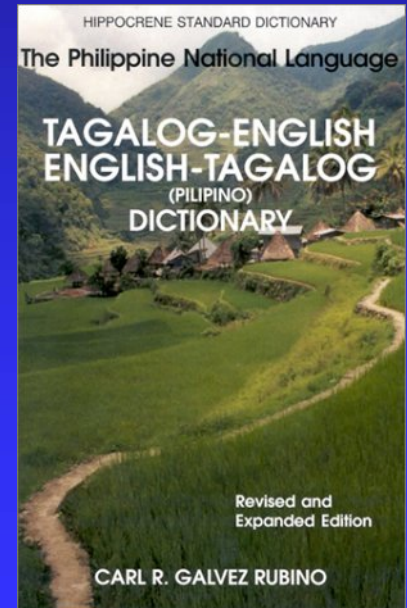
Deaf and hard of hearing students value learning with their communication strengths

- ◆ Opportunity to use their residual hearing

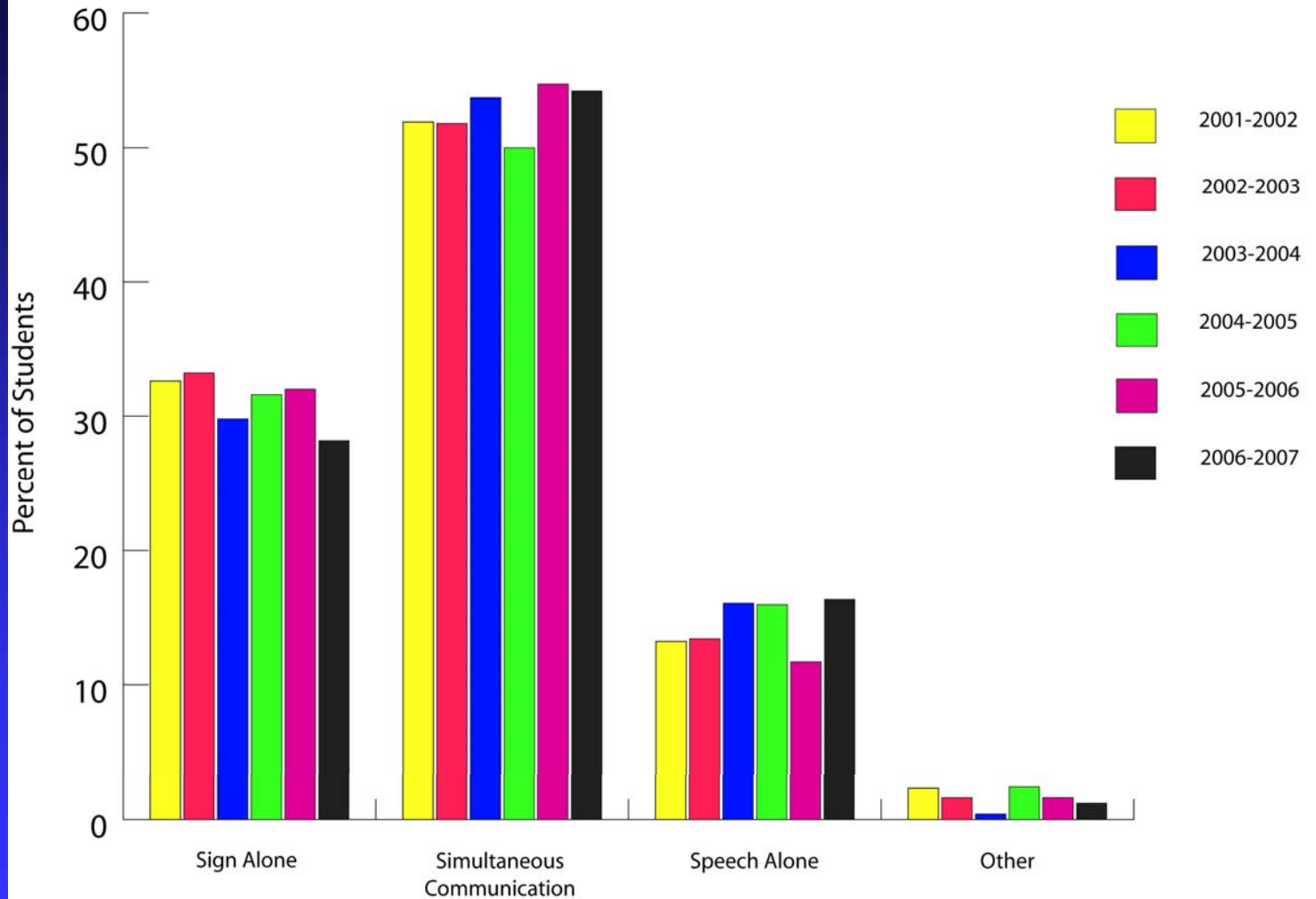


Deaf and hard of hearing students value learning with their communication strengths

- ◆ Use of their strongest language



Communication Preferences of NTID-Supported Students 2001-2007



Positive outcomes of effective communication

- Learning is easier
- Goals are more likely to be met
- Opportunities emerge for expanded learning
- Students and faculty connect better
- More positive perceptions influence the overall college experience

The challenge

- To create a classroom environment where communication issues are openly recognized and managed in a way that promotes learning.



Strategies for Responding to Classroom Communication Diversity



Strategy 1:

Write out your teaching philosophy

- Use writing process to help you understand what you believe about your students and yourself as a teacher
- Write freely and honestly
- Be specific about what you believe about communication
- Reflect on your statement during the academic year and revise as needed

Strategy 2:

Assess and develop your own communication skills and knowledge

- Sign language proficiency
- Spoken language proficiency with deaf and hard of hearing people
- Ability to adapt written language to promote student learning
- Knowledge of cultures and skills in intercultural communication
- Knowledge of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive technology
- Interpersonal “connection” with diverse people

Strategy 3: Learn more about each student's communication

- Reading and writing characteristics
- Sign language type and proficiency
- Speech and speech reception abilities
- Cultural background
- Vision-support and other physical needs
- Readiness to use assistive technology
- Pattern of interpersonal relationships

Strategy 4:

Begin each course with a preliminary plan for communication success

- Base plan on your preliminary knowledge of students' communication skills and needs

Strategy 5: Informally evaluate classroom communication dynamics

- Look for communication similarities and diversity among students
- Determine if your preliminary understandings of students were accurate
- Determine if student patterns appear to be assets and/or challenges

Strategy 6: Evaluate writing samples

- Collect academic writing and informal writing (e-mail, TTY, etc.)
- Compare written communication clarity with other communication modes
- Determine if writing tutoring or other support is needed

Strategy 7:

Ask the students to describe communication

- Use questionnaires for self-description of communication strengths and needs
 - ◆ See sample questionnaire used at NTID
- Ask students what they are seeing in the classroom dynamics
- Ask students what they would like to do to make communication more effective

Strategy 8: Adjust the classroom environment as needed

- Adjust lighting, acoustics, etc.
- Adjust seating pattern and teacher positioning to promote the best teacher-student and student-student communication
- Adapt visual presentation for visually restricted students

Strategy 9:

Establish communication rules and guidelines

- Remind everyone that communication is highly valued in the classroom
- Explain how rules can help students learn together
- Use questionnaire and group discussion to develop communication guidelines
- Set limits on rules and accommodations as needed
- Periodically ask students to assess communication and adapt guidelines as needed

Strategy 10: Use technology to support communication

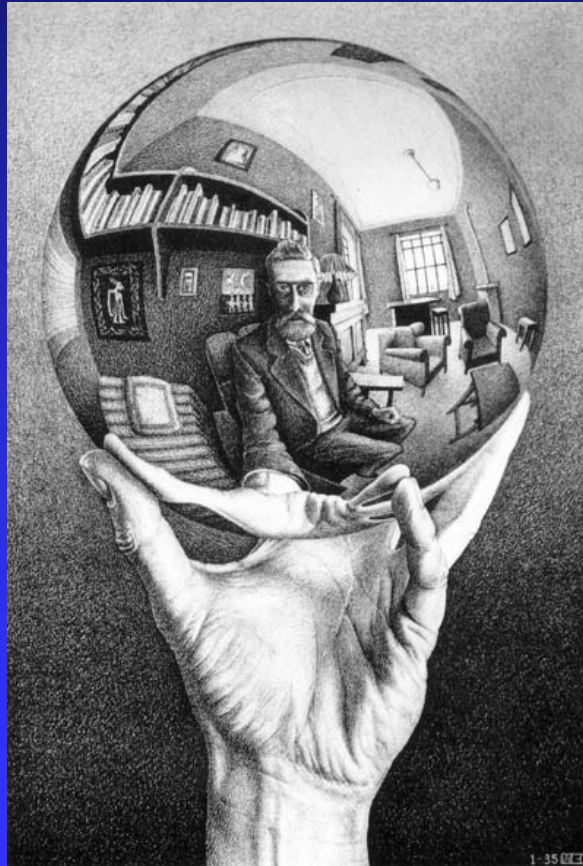
- In-class media
- Computerized interaction (student-student and student-faculty)
 - ◆ E-mail
 - ◆ Online class notes and supplements
 - ◆ Online discussions and tutoring
 - ◆ Other

Strategy 11:

Make other special accommodations

- Allow more time on task
- Meet with students individually
- Refer students to offline tutoring (online and offline) and other support activities

Analyzing Today's Conference



What types of diversity do we have in this videoconference?

- Language?
- Modality?
- Cultural identity?
- Gender?
- Emotional & maturational influences?
- Physical influences?
- Other?

Did we have these?

- Shared understandings of the communication situation while also respecting confidentiality?
- Openly discussed descriptions of the value of diversity?
- Shared participation in the management of communication?
- Effective use of college resources?
- Trust and respect?
- Participants who bridge others' communication toward a more effective group process?
- Other teamwork among participants?

Did we use principles of adult learning?

- Has our videoconference:
 - ◆ Been practical and problem-centered?
 - ◆ Promoted our positive self-esteem?
 - ◆ Integrated new ideas with existing knowledge?
 - ◆ Showed respect for each individual learner?
 - ◆ Used the benefits of previous experience?
 - ◆ Allowed choice and self-direction?

Other questions to ask ourselves:

- What other challenges or problems do we see in this videoconference situation?
- In what ways have our challenges provided a contribution to this session?
- What additional information would help us better understand our situation?

Looking Forward to Future Teaching



Where are you going from here?

- Describe some things you will do (or would like to do) to improve the management of communication in your courses.
- Describe ways you can develop yourself professionally to become more skilled with communication diversity in the classroom.

Using a professional development plan

- Select areas for improvement
- Select resources
- Experiment
- Evaluate

Some resources for your use

- Sample student questionnaire
- Personal plan: a checklist
- Scenarios for independent practice

**Thank you for learning with me
in this videoconference.**

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Follow-up Activity: Independent Practice

- You are welcome to use the following scenarios from NTID to practice developing your own communication management plans
- Adapt the scenarios to your own teaching situation and adjust your communication management plan as needed

NTID Situation 1:

“The Distracter”



A student usually comes into class and takes his seat without speaking to or looking at the professor. During the lecture part of the classes, he frequently initiates conversation with students sitting nearby, using sign without voice. When the professor indicates that that is not acceptable behavior because it distracts attention from the lecture, the student is quiet for a few minutes and then begins to converse again. A few other students do not seem to mind this and often participate in these “private” conversations. By the end of the third week, none of the students has approached the professor to complain and most students’ grades seem to be within the normal range. However, the professor is completely irritated and angered by this student.

Strategies and Techniques for “The Distracter”

- What challenges or problems do you see in this situation?
- In what ways can this student provide a valuable contribution to this course?
- What additional information would help you better understand this situation?
- How would you respond to this situation?

NTID Situation 2:

“The Non-Signer”



One male student in a class of twenty students uses speech and a little signing that he learned recently. He knows that the professor is a hearing person. As the first class begins, he volunteers information more than anyone in class. He uses speech but also adds some signs and fingerspelling. He takes a lot of time planning his signing and his communication is extremely slow. Several students express appreciation for this man trying to sign, but they also say it's difficult to understand him. The student who is learning to sign says he is not getting his thoughts out when signing and he is not doing very well understanding those who use sign language without voice. He asks the instructor to sign interpret when he speaks and voice interpret for the non-speakers.

Strategies and Techniques for “The Non-Signer”

- What challenges or problems do you see in this situation?
- In what ways can this student provide a valuable contribution to this course?
- What additional information would help you better understand this situation?
- How would you respond to this situation?

NTID Situation 3:

“The Quiet One”



In a technical course, students are expected to contribute to class problem-solving tasks. A female student who moved from Japan to the U.S. to study at NTID has an excellent attendance record but almost never participates voluntarily. Her replies to direct questions are always very brief. Her language abilities seem to be similar to the other students. When the class is asked to divide into small work teams for an out-of-class follow-up project, one student points toward the Japanese student and says to the entire class, “I’m not going to be on a team with her. The rest of us will have to do all the work.”

Strategies and Techniques for “The Quiet One”

- What challenges or problems do you see in this situation?
- In what ways can this student provide a valuable contribution to this course?
- What additional information would help you better understand this situation?
- How would you respond to this situation?

NTID Situation 4:

“The Overlooked ASL User”



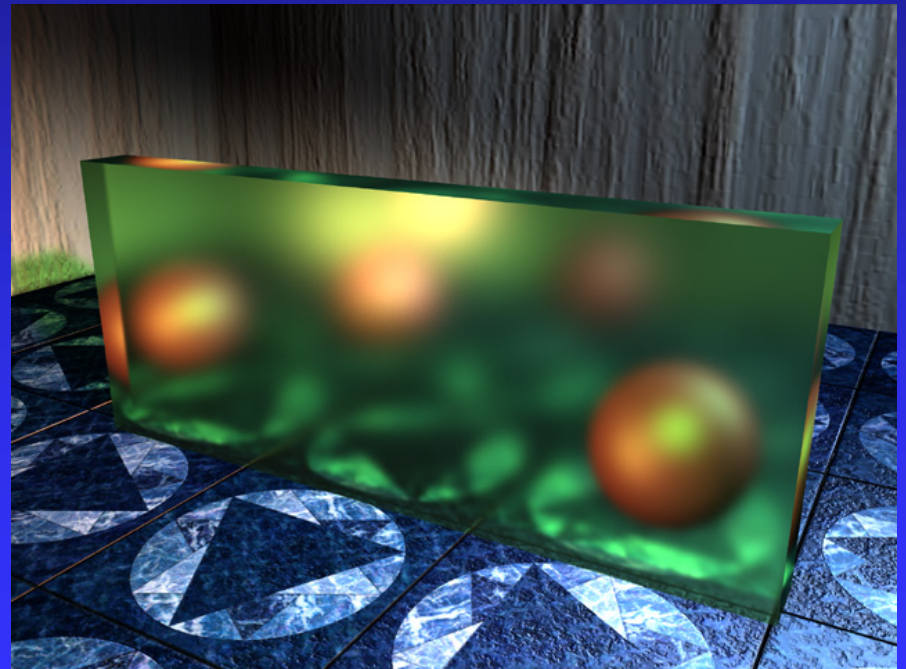
A student raises her hand in the second week of classes and says to the professor, “I am concerned that you are ignoring my need for ASL.” She says that ASL is her first language and asks why the professor and a few of the students are not more skilled in using the language of Deaf people in a college for Deaf people. It is the professor’s belief that the class consists of several students who are long-term ASL users but most of the students have been using English-based signing during class. The professor knows that two students strongly prefer spoken English but they all are able to use English-based signing fairly well. None of the students responds to the woman who asked for ASL to be used in class. They wait to see how the professor will handle her question and her concern.

Strategies and Techniques for “The Overlooked ASL User”

- What challenges or problems do you see in this situation?
- In what ways can this student provide a valuable contribution to this course?
- What additional information would help you better understand this situation?
- How would you respond to this situation?

NTID Situation 5:

“The Visually Impaired”



A female student with very restricted vision is enrolled in a course that uses a lot of visual media. The professor and other students do not know her vision is restricted. In the first class, the professor hands out the course description. It includes NTID's policy on providing special accommodations for students in the classroom. The policy says that it is each student's responsibility to inform the professor if there are any special visual, auditory or other needs that require accommodation. At the end of the fifth week, the student is handed her exam with a failing grade. She approaches the instructor privately and asks, "How can you fail me when I can't read small print, I couldn't tell who was talking in class, you moved around too much and the room was too bright for me to see the board?"

Strategies and Techniques for “The Visually Impaired”

- What challenges or problems do you see in this situation?
- In what ways can this student provide a valuable contribution to this course?
- What additional information would help you better understand this situation?
- How would you respond to this situation?

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- Slide 2 Classroom - http://aaptonline.dhs.org/GradSeminar/images/Graduate_Student_Teaching_Seminar3.jpg
- Slide 5a Teacher with student - <http://www.uiowa.edu/~cyberlaw/oldinav/wjhome.html>
- Slide 5b, Mountain climber - <http://www.cserkeszek.org/pictures/60s/csomo.jpg>
- Slide 5c Dancer - <http://www.theage.com.au/ftimages/2002/09/10/1031608241111.html>
- Slide 10 Faces mosaic - <http://www.aallnet.org/committee/diverse/>
- Slide 12a Classroom media - <http://www.northcentral.tec.wi.us/wonder/sysdesc/Wwtc.jpg>
- Slide 12b Mouth - <http://www.thebigholistic.com/images/mouth.jpg>
- Slide 12c Hand - <http://www.palatineinc.com/images/sign.jpg>
- Slide 13a Implant - <http://www.oraldeafed.org/schools/cid/images/implant.jpg>
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- Slide 13c Conversation - <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aiia/hypocrisy.html>

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- Slide 14a Teacher - www.spedlawyer.com/sign-language.jpg
- Slide 14b Filipino Sign Book <http://www.mccid.edu.ph/fslcover.jpg>
- Slide 14c Tagalog-English Dictionary
<http://images.amazon.com/images/P/0781809606.01.LZZZZZZZ.jpg>
- Slide 17 Roundtable class - <http://www.nyc.gov/html/rwg/html/2001a/deaf.html>
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- Slide 53 Overlooked ASL-
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