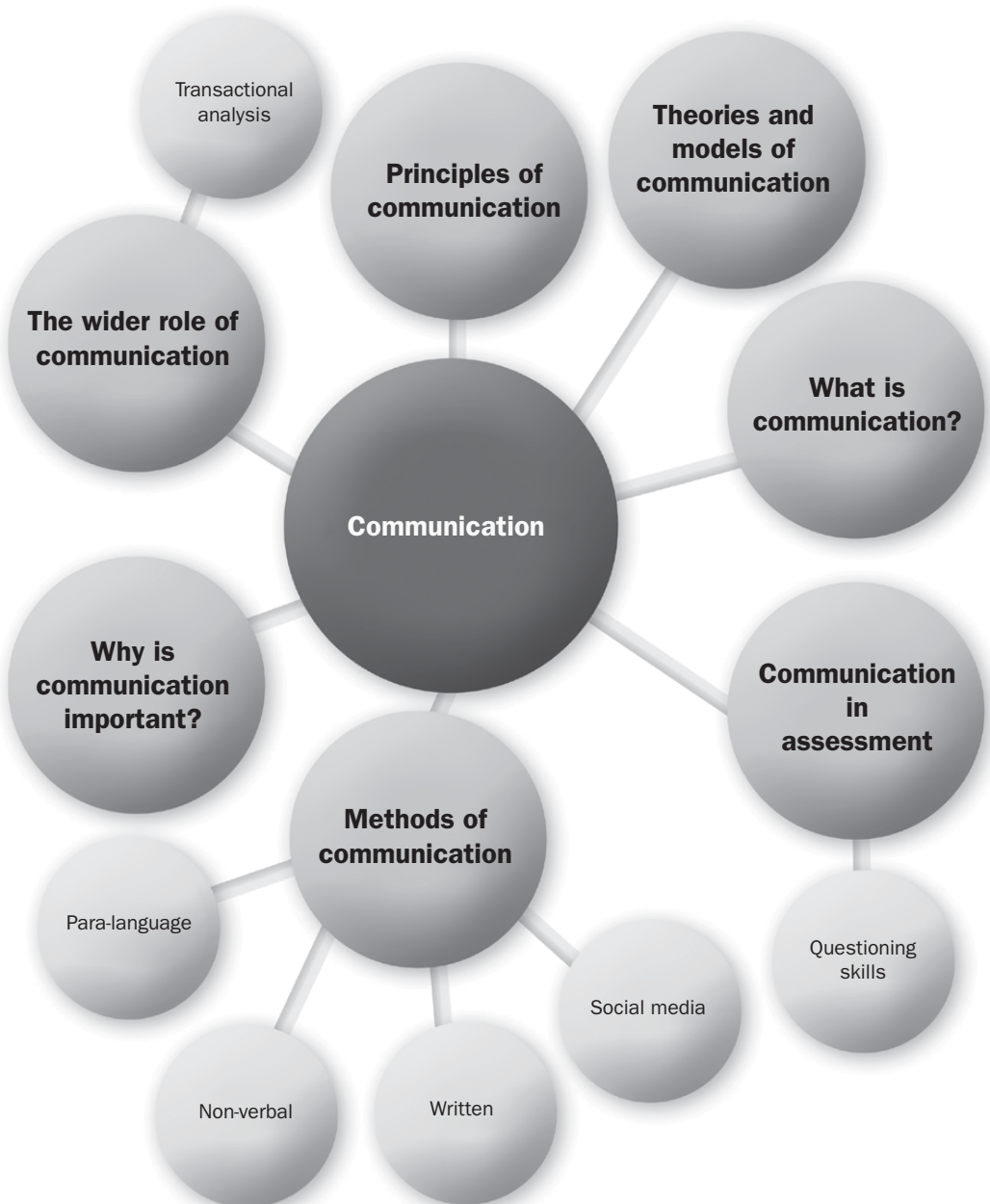


6

Communication



PROFESSIONAL LINKS

This chapter contributes to the following Professional Standards as provided by the ETF (2014).

Professional values and attributes

Develop your own judgement of what works and does not work in your teaching and training.

6 *Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners*

Professional knowledge and understanding

Develop deep and critically informed knowledge and understanding in theory and practice.

9 *Apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence*

Professional skills

Develop your expertise and skills to ensure the best outcomes for learners.

15 *Promote the benefits of technology and support learners in its use*

18 *Apply appropriate and fair methods of assessment and provide constructive and timely feedback to support progression and achievement*

A list of all of the Standards can be found at the back of this book (Appendix 7).



KEY DEFINITIONS

<i>Kinesics</i>	The study of body movements and gestures.
<i>Medal and mission</i>	An approach to providing feedback.
<i>Non-verbal communication</i>	Communication via a means other than speech.
<i>Para-language</i>	Analysis of tone, pitch or speed in verbal communication.
<i>Transactional analysis</i>	Theory based on the ego states adopted by people when communicating.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the heart of everything that you do as a teacher, whether with learners, colleagues or other professionals and is a skill that will continue to be developed throughout your career. This chapter, through its alignment to literature, asking questions and providing activities, is designed to support you in your understanding of how to apply theories, principles and models of effective communication to develop your practice. You will explore seminal literature and theory in relation to communication (Shannon and Weaver, 1949, cited in Hill et al, 2007; Berlo, 1960, cited in Hill et al, 2007; Berne, 1964), all of which remain highly relevant and widely used. You will also explore the contemporary application of communication theory to teaching practice. It therefore aims to support you in:

- identifying and exploring principles of communication;
- identifying, exploring and critiquing some of the key theories and models of communication;
- considering and developing your approaches to communication in assessment;
- considering and developing the wider role of communication in relation to your practice.



STARTING POINT

What do you already know about communication?

- What methods of communication are you already aware of?
- What do you understand by principles of communication?
- What models and theories of communication are you already aware of?
- How can you ensure effective communication within assessment?
- What do you understand about the wider role of communication?

WHY IS COMMUNICATION IMPORTANT?

As a teacher in FE you will require excellent communication skills in a variety of situations, with a range of people and at differing levels. As you start your DET qualification you will already have some strengths in this area; however, there are likely to be some that you need to develop more fully so that you can swiftly remove any barriers to effective communication between you and your learners and also, as necessary, with other stakeholders (eg parents, other teachers). Your understanding and skills in all of these areas can be developed by engaging critically with key principles and relevant communication theory.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication relates to the giving, receiving and imparting of information, thoughts, ideas, feelings and values. Communication takes place between two or more people. However, Hargie puts forward a wide range of factors, including '*perceptual, cognitive, affective and performative factors*', that can all influence communication (Hargie, 2010, p 11).

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

A number of basic principles underlie any discussion of interpersonal communication and contributions are many and varied. However, you may find the following particularly relevant in your teaching role:

- *interpersonal communication is unavoidable;*
- *interpersonal communication is irreversible;*
- *interpersonal communication is rule governed.*

(West, 2010, pp 26–7)

You cannot avoid communicating. For example, even if you are in a room with a group of learners and do not say anything your body language will convey a message, whether intentionally or otherwise. The irreversibility element of communication means that whether you like it or not, once something has been said it cannot be unsaid and this emphasises the need to think carefully before you speak. Even the act of not speaking will itself convey a message to learners. Knowledge of the often unwritten *rules* and *social knowledge* required in effective communication is essential. Hartley (1999, p 89) acknowledges that these can vary for reasons including cultural background and gender. This is something to consider as you communicate with your learners and, for example, your managers and colleagues, as how you communicate to different groups of people will differ and require the application of different rules of discourse.



Case study

Pat has been on placement in a college for two months. Despite an initially shaky start with nerves, she has overcome this and taken on board feedback about the pace and volume of her speech. She has now had four observations of her practice and, in the latest feedback, observers have commented on her strong communication skills with learners in whole class, small group and one-to-one interactions.

Naturally, Pat is very pleased with her observation feedback; however, based on this, she has decided that she no longer needs to look to develop her communication skills. Instead, she has decided that she will focus on other aspects of her teaching practice as she continues her placement.

Critical question

Why might Pat's mentor and university tutor suggest that she continues to pay attention to aspects of communication?

Comment

There are two key issues here. The first is that no two lessons or groups of learners are ever the same. It would be unwise for any teacher to assume that they have mastered communication based on their latest observations. As a teacher and a professional, Pat should continue to monitor and evaluate all aspects of her teaching to ensure that she doesn't become complacent. With different groups of learners, she will need to vary her communication to suit their individual needs.

The second issue is that Pat needs to recognise that communication for a teacher is not just what occurs in the classroom. Communication is also interactions with peers, managers, parents and other interested parties. She should also recognise that communication is not just verbal interaction; she should consider a range of aspects of her practice, for example that an email to a colleague may have a different tone to that used to a manager or a parent.

THEORIES AND MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

A basic model of communication, and one that is still used today, is that proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1949, cited in Hill et al, 2007) in which they recognise the two participants in a communication scenario and refer to these as 'source' and 'receiver' (Hill et al, 2007, p 8). A conversation between yourself and a learner would position one of you as the source (the sender) and the other as the receiver. A shortcoming of this model lies with its origins as a model of technical communication. Shannon and Weaver's model also includes the notion of 'interference' or 'noise' (Hill et al, 2007, p 8), which relates to the distortion of the original message. Noise can take a wide range of forms including visual or auditory distractions, disabilities or learning difficulties and languages or jargon. When considering your communication you should therefore carefully consider the environment, the learners and your own communication skills.

With recognition of the technical origins of Shannon and Weaver's model, Berlo (1960, cited in Hill et al, 2007) – also still commonly referred to today – included wider elements within his model of communication. He suggests that a range of further factors could influence the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. These factors include the '*communication skills, attitudes, knowledge, social system and cultural factors*' of the

participants and are a core influence on the effectiveness of communication (Hill et al, 2007, p 12).

COMMUNICATION IN ASSESSMENT

Effective communication is imperative at every stage of teaching, learning and assessment. Skills in assessment can range from those required in giving feedback to those necessary when questioning your learners.

Formative assessment can serve a dual purpose in terms of checking whether learning has taken place and supporting learners to improve their skills and knowledge. The key factor in achieving this is the use of effective feedback. Shute (2008, p 153) supports this and considers formative feedback in terms of '*information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behaviour to improve learning*'.

This use of formative feedback is a significant move away from more traditional methods of assessment that only considered a grade important. The way that formative feedback is provided to learners may be verbal or it may be written. Some recent innovators have even trialled the use of audio or video feedback to learners. This relevance of variety is noted by Race (2014) who suggests that as teachers you should not limit yourself to one particular way of providing feedback to learners. Rather he suggests that a wider variety of approaches can help to meet learners' own preferences or individual needs. For example, when using the *praise sandwich* approach the teacher starts dialogue or written feedback with a positive, then notes the development area and concludes with a final positive. The aim of this is to sandwich the development point to ensure that the feedback does not demotivate the learner. However, there is a danger that the learner will only focus on the first or last comment made by the tutor and fail to recognise the development area.

The importance of feedback is further noted by Petty (2014, pp 70–1) who suggests three key aspects to effective feedback which he refers to as '*goals, medals and missions*':

Goals: *Feedback needs to be explicit in what the learner is looking to achieve overall, so for example, if they are working towards an assignment, the goal will be specified by the learning outcomes or assignment criteria.*

Medals: *Medals are similar to the positives suggested by the praise sandwich approach. They should note what the learner did well.*

Missions: *Missions are clear targets in how to move from the current situation to achieve the specified goals.*

(Petty, 2014, pp 70–1)



Case study

Sue teaches study skills and academic writing to a group of 18 year-olds on an art foundation degree course. Many of the learners are very competent, however, she is aware that one learner (Paula), despite reading widely to support her writing, is struggling with the structure of her written work and her sentences are too long and confusing. On her last feedback sheet and in discussions Sue advised Paula that she needs to work on the structure of her written work, but the re-submission received shows no improvement.

Critical question

How can Sue provide Paula with more effective feedback?

Comment

Sue could use the medal and mission approach. The goal here would be to create a piece of clearly written academic work, therefore the medal and mission should reflect this, for example:

- medal – you have drawn on a wide range of literature to support what you say;
- mission – you should examine your longer sentences and split them in order to improve the flow of your argument.

Questioning skills

Questioning skills are essential for all teachers; however they are often skills that can take some time to develop. With a little guidance you can develop your skills in questioning in order to both engage learners and to ensure that learning has taken place. A common mistake made by teachers is to leave insufficient thinking time for the learners before providing them with hints or often answering the questions themselves. The gap between asking a question and receiving an answer can seem like an awfully long time if you are a new teacher, but you should avoid any desire to fill the gap until you are certain that you have given the learners adequate time to consider their response. Patience, therefore, is one of the key skills to effective questioning and forms part of the *pose, pause, pounce* approach:

Pose: put a question to the class.

Pause: allow the learners thinking time depending on the nature of the question.

Pounce: nominate a learner to answer.

When questioning you should also be aware of the nature of the questions that you ask and whether you seek a brief answer or a deeper insight into the area that you are examining. Closed questioning involves a learner being asked a question that will expect short answers, whereas with open questioning the learner is encouraged to provide a more in-depth answer.



Case study

Bob is on his first teaching placement and is teaching history in a sixth form college. His mentor has suggested that he use questioning while delivering the short lecture elements of the course. Bob has tried this a few times with the group and is struggling to get detailed answers from any of the learners. One of the questions that he asked is: *Do you think that the Treaty of Versailles was a good thing?*

Critical question

What is the problem with this question?

Comment

Bob is asking a closed question which encourages a *yes* or *no* answer from the learners. Closed questions can, however, form the basis of further questioning. So he could start with *Do you think that the Treaty of Versailles was a good thing?* And depending on whether Bob received a *yes* or *no* response, he could probe deeper with Socratic questioning and ask '*why?*' or '*why not?*'.

THE WIDER ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

As a teacher you will be required to use your communication skills in team discussions, meetings with managers and other stakeholders (including parents and guardians if you teach 16–18 year-old learners). You will take different approaches, depending on who you communicate with, therefore the analysis of this, in relation to theory, can aid the development of your skills.

Transactional analysis

Whoever you converse with, it is important that you convey the best possible image on behalf of your organisation. Berne's (1964) theory of transactional analysis may help you to do this and is relevant to your interactions with learners and with colleagues in a range of settings, for example office discussions and within meetings (Huddleston and Unwin, 2013). The theory of transactional analysis (TA) considers the way in which you interact with others. Berne (1964) suggests that you can adopt one of three ego states at different times.

Berne's ego states

Parent (P) In a Parent ego state you take on the role of a parent. This can be either as a controlling or nurturing parent.

Adult (A) In an Adult ego state you take on the role of an adult. The adult ego state is responsible, rational and logical.

Child (C) In a Child ego state you take on the role of a child. This can be either as a free or adapted child (a free child responds without any concern for others, whereas an adapted child will comply with adult expectations).

(Berne, 1964)

Berne's theory suggests that for effective communication to take place complementary transactions should be used. For example, if two adults are engaging in logical, rational and responsible communication this means that both of the adults are in an adult to adult state, talking and responding as an adult.

To effectively analyse communication using transactional analysis, you need to consider how the person you are communicating with is responding to you, ie what ego state they are in. For example, if a learner asks you for a pen because they have forgotten theirs, they are using a child to parent transaction. If you respond as a parent and reply in a nurturing manner, providing a pen for them to use, you are responding as parent to child. This is a complementary transaction because you are responding in the state to which you were addressed.

TA relies on concepts of complementary transactions and also crossed transactions. The effective communication that can result from complementary transactions is contrasted by crossed transactions which can lead to communication breakdown. Whereas complementary transactions occur when the other party replies in the same ego state in which they were addressed, in crossed transactions the other party replies in a different ego state to that in which they were addressed. Interestingly though, crossed transactions can, occasionally, be beneficial, especially when adult to adult transactions are introduced. If, for example, a learner says that they don't want to do a classroom activity

(child ego state) and you respond in an adult to adult ego state you can prevent the situation from escalating.

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

You will communicate verbally, non-verbally and also in writing as part of your teaching and wider role. In recognition of the evolving nature of communication you may also utilise social media in order to engage learners.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication (NVC) explores the aspects of communication that are conveyed by means other than the words used. NVC was explored by Albert Mehrabian (2007) who recognised that communication also included vocal aspects such as volume, tone and facial expressions (McKay et al, 2018). Hargie (2010) also notes the importance of proxemics and how people use and view their personal space.

Further evidence of the complexity of communication can be seen by the importance of kinesics. Kinesics refers to the study of body movements and gestures, including eye contact, expressions and even hand gestures. Facial expressions are further considered by Hargie (2010, p 45), who notes '*six basic emotions that are consistently decodable*' stating that these are '*sadness, anger, disgust, fear, surprise and happiness*'. However, Rayudu (2010) cautions that non-verbal gestures do not have universal meaning. Given the diverse cultures around the world, an innocent gesture in one culture may be offensive to another. Equally, while you should be informed and guided by learners' non-verbal communication, you should be careful not to make incorrect assumptions. If your learners are sitting with their arms crossed, they may be cold, rather than defensive.

Para-language

Verbal communication is complex and can be analysed in terms of tone, pitch or speed, as noted by Mehrabian (2007) in his consideration of NVC (McKay et al, 2009). This aspect of communication is referred to as para-language and '*gives communication the distinctive characteristics that make it unique*' (Hasson, 2012, p 8). Hasson further notes that para-language in particular conveys emotions and attitudes. For example, you may be aware that when you are angry your voice can become louder or when you are sad your voice becomes softer, but your voice can also convey other emotions without you realising it. You may be abrupt to others when you are feeling defensive, your speech may slow down if you are unhappy or if you are excited or nervous your speech may speed up (Hasson, 2012).

Written communication

You should also consider the approach that you take in your written communication to ensure that it suits the needs and expectations of the recipient. For example, you may use email to converse with friends but the structure and style would be very different than when you send an email to a potential student or a colleague.

Critical question

How does your email communication to your friends and learners differ?

Comment

The key distinction here is between informal and formal communication. In an email with friends you might start with *'Hi Louise'*, whereas in a more formal email to a learner you should instead start with *'Dear Louise'* or *'Hello Louise'*. When you conclude the email to your friends you might be very informal with *'Bye'* or *'See you later'*, however with a learner you should use *'Regards'* or *'Best wishes'*. The structure of formal emails should be in complete sentences and should avoid *'idioms, clichés and colloquialisms'* (Machin, 2009, p 68).

Social media

The changing nature of communication is particularly relevant given the rise of social media over the past decade. Social media may include blogs and social networking sites allowing the sharing of images, text, audio and video. You may find that whereas learners rarely check their student email, they engage with social media on numerous occasions throughout the day. Therefore, the use of a microblogging application like Twitter could be an excellent way of providing learners with reminders and important announcements. You might even use this approach to issue prompts to engage with homework or specific course elements. Online social networking sites also provide opportunities for learners to develop their skills in collaborative learning and can be used to encourage engagement and interaction with peers outside of the traditional classroom environment.

A word of caution must be noted in relation to the use of social media for learning. You should be careful not to assume that all learners have access to technology and ensure that any choices you make will include all of the learners. You should be particularly aware of the blurring of boundaries and the potential pitfalls that can occur with social media. If used appropriately such technology can be an excellent way of engaging and motivating learners, however, it is important to maintain the professional nature of your interaction.

SUMMARY

The role and effectiveness of any teacher in FE is dependent on successful communication, not only with learners but with a wide range of professionals and other stakeholders. By drawing on relevant theories and principles of communication and carefully analysing your own practice and approaches to communication you will further enhance your knowledge and, consequently, develop both your teaching and professional skills.



Check your understanding

You will find suggested answers to some of these questions at the back of this book.

- Question 1:** In one or two sentences provide a definition of communication.
- Question 2:** What are the implications of rules of communication and why are they important?
- Question 3:** What are the components of Shannon and Weaver's model of communication?
- Question 4:** What are the similarities and differences between Berlo's model of communication and that proposed by Shannon and Weaver?
- Question 5:** Consider some feedback that you have given to a learner. Does this feedback fit with the *praise sandwich* or *medal and mission* approach? If neither of these, consider how you might adapt the feedback to fit with these models.
- Question 6:** What is an advantage and what is a disadvantage of providing feedback using a range of methods?
- Question 7:** What is the difference between kinesics and para-language?

End-of-chapter reflections

- Exploring and applying communication theory to your practice will help you to develop your communication skills.
- Communication is inevitable and involves a range of both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Feedback should be used to guide the learner to improve.
- As a teacher you will communicate with a range of professionals and interested parties via a variety of media.
- How do you think you will be able to use your learning from this chapter to develop your practice?



TAKING IT FURTHER

In addition to the literature already commented upon in this chapter you may find the following of interest.

Mehrabian, A (2007) *Nonverbal Communication*. Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction. Provides an in-depth exploration of Mehrabian's research into non-verbal communication.

Mehrabia, A (2007) *Nonverbal Communication*

Thompson, N (2018) *Effective Communication: A Guide for the People Professions*. 3rd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. A practical guide to communication ranging from verbal to written and also exploring communication difficulties with real life examples.

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