

## COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Education with its correlated activities of teaching and learning involves *communication* as well as reciprocal interaction between the teacher and pupils, as channels of realising its objectives. 'Communis' is a Latin word, meaning 'common'. Hence communication is having common experiences with other people. The word communication means a wide variety of things to different people. The following are some of the widely accepted definitions for communication.

"Communication means *sharing of ideas and feelings* in a mood of mutuality."

"Communication involves *interaction* which encourages *give and take*." This provides feedback to persons involved in exchanging ideas.

"Communication is a process of sharing of experiences till it becomes a common possession."

"Effective communication is a two-way process including feedback and interaction."

It is rather difficult, if not increasingly impossible, to provide children with actual first-hand experiences as the world becomes increasingly complex. Obviously some substitute experience must be evolved and used to enable children to understand and conceptualise their world. This is the essence of *communication* as an integral part of teaching.

### Theory of Communication

The basic communication model involves an informational or interpretative process in which messages, information or reaction to information travel from the initiator to the receiver through the route called communication channel. The message conveyed by the teacher

and/or the educational media may be verbal or visual, and the receiver may listen, see or examine and react in other ways. The communication channel in the classroom should ideally carry both messages and counter-messages; it involves initiation, reception and response which serve as feedback. The communication channel must be kept wide open, as only when the teacher and pupil are able to communicate clearly and without inference, can understanding and appreciation ensue. Usually the more varied and appropriate the sources from which messages originate the stronger and more valid will be the responses and counter-messages that occur between the teacher and students or among students themselves. But unfortunately many interferences and communication barriers arise which impede the smooth flow of communication between the teacher and his pupils in the classroom. Some of these come from outside school agencies as commercial and entertainment media such as advertisements, magazines, radio, TV etc. Others originate from psychological causes arising out of the interactive classroom procedure itself and as such are very difficult to tackle. These include excessive verbalism, lack of related experiences necessary for comprehending the new material presented and consequent attempts to relate the new material to seemingly relevant experiences resulting in what is called 'referent confusion', day-dreaming, limited perception resulting in limited understanding, as well as physical discomfort of the classroom environment. Educational technology uses man's psychological and technological knowledge extensively to break through such barriers to communication in the classroom.

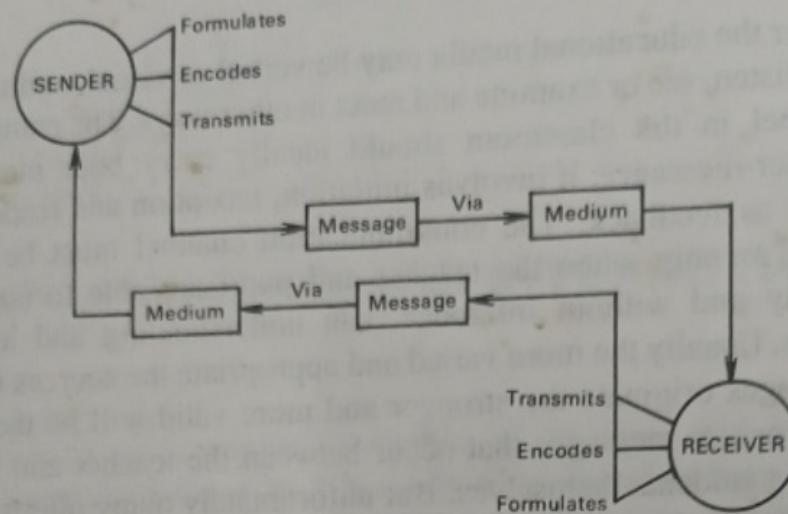
### Communication Cycle

Communication is always made with some purpose. This purpose of communication is encoded in the message and transmitted to its destination where it is decoded and response (feedback) made. Communication without any audience or destination is not generally made by a normal person. There are essentially four components in the process of communication. They are:

1. *Sender or source, technically known as encoder.*
2. *Message or signal,*
3. *The Medium or channel of communication, and*
4. *The Receiver or destination or decoder.*

In this process, the source must have correct information and transmit accurately at optimum speed. The message may be designed





for a single person or a group of people. It may be conveyed by expressions, gestures, spoken or written symbols or by hand-drawn or photographic pictures. Every medium exerts its influence and its peculiarities on the message and in this sense becomes a part of the message. The receiver must understand the message or in other words, must decode it or interpret it and must react or produce a desired response, which must be received by the sender. This is called the *feedback channel*.

The *communication cycle* can be represented by the above diagram.

### Types of Communication

There are three types of communication.

#### 1. *Speaking—Listening*

In this type of communication, interaction is face to face as in the case of listening to a lecture. There are occasions when the listener can share the feelings of the source in the same way as in the case of eye-to-eye contact. An example of this type of communication is listening to the radio programmes.

#### 2. *Visualising—Observing*

The observer is physically separated from its producer and yet is able to feel the impact of the ideas conveyed as in motion film or television. Communication can also take place more effectively by face-to-face contact with the source as in the case of dramatisation where facial expression and gestures produce a greater impact than in the earlier case.

### 3. Writing—Reading

In this type of experience, the 'decoder' is physically separated from the 'encoder' all the time and yet the decoder is able to enjoy and appreciate the feelings of the author.

The arrows both ways in all the three types of communication, indicate that communication is interaction, a sharing and circular or cyclic process.

*Mass Communication Media* include written or *printed* media with or without visuals like magazines, newspapers, journals etc., and the more effective media of larger audience coverage like films, radio and T.V.

### Communication and Language

In spite of the role played by *visuals* in instruction as well as mass communication, *language*, through its spoken and written aspects, continues to have a significant role. So it may be pertinent to note briefly the emergence of language as an effective tool of the human communication system. Language is a system of signs or symbols designed to convey and receive man's ideas and thoughts. Any language contains sound patterns called *words* which by convention and continued usage stand for objects, incidents, activities, qualities, relations, etc. commonly involved in human experience. Oral language preceded written language; and written language symbols have developed considerably since the ancient picture languages of the Egyptians and Chinese. Roger Brown points out to three important characteristics that any communication system should have to be designated as a language, viz., *displacement*, *meaningfulness* and *productiveness*. Displacement refers to the function of language which enables people to communicate about things or events removed in time and space from them. Productiveness means that language symbols can be combined in many ways to express a great variety of meanings. Many theories have been put forward regarding development of language. B.F. Skinner gives a mechanistic and behaviourist interpretation by speaking of language development as a skill due to trial and error and reinforcements including social approach. Children learn language mainly through conditioning of the classical or operant type. On the other hand, Noam Chomsky argues that all natural languages of the world have certain common features (deep structure),



in spite of superficial differences (surface structure), because the human brain is programmed to deal with the common features. Recent sciences like *Psycholinguistics*, *Semantics* and *Information theory* have thrown much light on language as a means of communication. Semantics is concerned with meanings and information theory is concerned with communication process in general and is also concerned with the *reduction of uncertainty*, which often vitiates communication through language. Even in a classroom words are often misunderstood leading to gaps or even failure of communication. Words have often an emotional tone attached to them leading to distortion of objective meaning because a value judgement is added to interpretation of words. Osgood by his scale of *Semantic Differential* has pointed out how emotional states, personality differences and cultural variables influence the meaning of the same word/concept to different persons. The semantic differential asks a person to rate words on a 7-point scale with reference to 3 dimensions - Evaluation, Activity and Potency. Words are rated for evaluation by such descriptive pairs of terms as 'good-bad', 'clean-dirty', etc. For activity, the pairs are 'fast-slow', 'active-passive' etc., and pairs like 'heavy-light', 'powerful-powerless' etc. stand for potency. All the above details regarding language development are to impress upon the teacher practitioner how language as a communication medium is double-edged and has to be used with clarity, aptness and precision. This applies to the language aspect of instructional software such as commentaries to films or TV programmes and captions under pictures.

### Communication in the Classroom

Communication in the classroom is to a considerable extent carried on through language—spoken and written, with the former playing a relatively greater role. According to Jean Piaget, the early speech of children is 'ego-centric'. They interpret words and use them in terms of their own limited personal experience, not yet grasping the possibility that other children and adults who have had different experiences may have different concepts. Only by 7-8 years does 'socialised' speech develop. This takes into account the views of others. The ego-centricity of speech is due to the inability of the young child to think about more than one thing or one aspect of a thing at a time and this characteristic conditions his thinking also. So young children use words and understand words in a different way from older children and adults, and in communicating with them in the classroom, this should never be



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ignored. Jerome Bruner also indicates a similar view when he speaks of the three stages of 'intellectual development'—'inactive', 'iconic' and 'symbolic' representative stages—and states that using language as an instrument of communication and thinking is clearly seen in the symbolic stage. In trying to communicate, using language in the classroom, teachers may benefit from the views of David P. Ausubel regarding 'advance organisers', regarding learning and retention of meaningful verbal material. The advance organisers roughly correspond to broad categories within a unit of learning and these permit students to integrate and relate material presented.

Good teaching is more than mere communication. It is not enough if the child merely repeats the same word as conveyed to it. The teacher's concern is that the child should recognise the word, understand the meaning and use it appropriately with correct spelling on future occasions. True learning has occurred only when the act of communication has succeeded in making permanent and meaningful addition to the student's communication skills. Classroom communication is not a mere one-sided presentation of facts; it requires *intercommunication* between student and teacher. There must be reaction and interaction with constant reciprocal feedback.

Teachers should know several things about communication. Classrooms are set up for the purpose of communicating and not for dictating teacher's ideas on the young and growing minds. Developing communication skills in children is the basic concern of the school and hence teachers must provide ways and means of developing and improving the skills. Teachers must realise the constant influence of several communication media outside the classroom upon the student. The words that the children seem to possess before entering school were all learned through various media. Teachers must capitalise on the students' conditioning to these media and must relate them to the school activities. Communication can occur only when the teacher and his pupils share common meaning and experiences.

Pupils with widely different backgrounds, different abilities and interests attend school today. Further the teacher has to manage with the vast explosion in knowledge. Students have too few opportunities and too little time to explore the vast subject-matter included in the curriculum in depth. To meet these challenges, the teacher has to make use of new and improved communication devices in the classrooms.



Modern technology has provided films, filmstrips, radio, television, magnetic tapes, stereoscopic pictures and myriads of communication devices. These materials and techniques can be divided into two categories.

1. Those that are effective for use with groups containing individuals of varying abilities, and
2. Those that can be used advantageously in individualised instruction with a minimum teacher assistance.

*Barriers to Communication:* If the purpose of the communication has been achieved, it is effective. Barriers to communication arise not only from diversity of purpose, but also due to unclear encoding and selection of a wrong medium. Communication may fail in certain instances as in the following:

- (a) When facts are to be presented based on different socio-economic backgrounds.
- (b) When facts are based on alien time dimension and space dimension.

Teachers have extra problems as communicators as they have to be sure of their messages reaching *all* pupils regardless of the kind of interference present in the classroom. These barriers can be overcome to a very great extent by means of various audio-visual aids. The so-called mass media of communication like radio, motion picture, films and television reach mass of people at high speed with low cost. They are very flexible in their use and are excellent in quality. Verbalism which is a disease usually contracted in schools can be eradicated only when learning in a classroom is made real, meaningful, concrete and first hand. Audio-visual materials, if properly used, offer great opportunities for improving learning. For bridging the communication gap, use of audio-visual materials is not the best reason but only the practical reason. Now such media may be used flexibly in instructional systems resulting in greater benefits to pupils.