



COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN THE CLASSROOM

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In the classroom of the graduation programme, Mitesh was asked to reply the question asked by Prof. Chawda. Mitesh slowly got up and with shivering legs and trembling voice, he replied the correct answer. Prof. Chawda praised him for correct reply but also commented on the public speaking fear. With shy and red face, Mitesh sat down feeling relieved.

This is a very common incident experienced by many students around the globe. For many, speaking in public is the luxury, they cannot afford. One of most feared phenomena is public speaking. After fear of death, stage-fright is second most feared element exists in the world of out of most feared six elements (Hill, 2011). This fear in elite term is called communication apprehension.

Communication Apprehension: Defining

Communication apprehension is the broad term that refers to an individual's fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person/persons (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2005). At core, communication apprehension is a psychological response to evaluation which eventually becomes physical as our body responds to the threats mind perceives. Unfortunately, our body is not able to differentiate between psychological and physical threats. So, when someone asks the shy person to speak in public, he/she reacts as if a big truck rushing down toward his/her direction. Our Circulatory and Adrenal system function at maximum and prepare the person for the "fight or flight" response. Instead of running away from the rushing truck, what one requires to do is to stand and speak, in the case of communication apprehension. To be give effective public presentation or teaching is harder with the excess energy created by the body (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002). As communication apprehension is rooted in mind, it is better to understand more about the response system of our body to stressful situations so that we can develop better management system for preventing the misguided attempt by the body to help us cope with our fear of social judgement. Thought we don't have any training

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personality judgement, we behave as if we are amateur personality psychologist to strive hard to understand the personality of those around us. Personality is the individual's some total characteristics which make him/her unique. Behaviour is the reflection of our personality. Therefore, we infer the personality of individuals by observing and noting the behaviour of him/her in various situations over a period of time and then we label him/her. Teacher is used to describe his/her students with the terms like, quiet, naughty, disturbing, manipulative, bull-headed, understanding, disagreeable, easy to get along with, mannered, cultured, defensive, egotistic, egoist, and so on (Powell, Caseau, & Powell, 2004).

Communication is also a complex series of behaviours. Therefore, it is heavily influenced by personality (McCroskey & Daly, 1987). As personalities are different, so are their ways of communication. Personality drives behaviours. It can be changed but with only considerable efforts. The student who is shy in the first year of his graduation is also a shy person in second year. But with professional intervention and willingness to change, any body can change anything. One sound advice here is to deal with the students as they are, not as the way you like them to be.

Common personality Variables and Communication Apprehension:

Let's observe the impact of common personality variables that have impact on communication in the classroom (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2005):

1) Willingness to Communicate

Students vary heavily in their willingness to communicate with others and same with the classroom situations. Two types of behaviours are considered as classroom problems- being too quiet and speaking a lot. Of course, those who have less willingness to communicate, remain quiet during the classroom discussions whereas those who have more willingness to communicate, remain pro-active in talking. Many a times, teacher rebukes, taunts, insults or satirizes when the students talk a lot as teacher considers that they are disrupting the class. Those who have more willingness to communicate, not much get affected by these behaviours of teacher and do not reduce their willingness to communicate. Students with low willingness to communicate become even quieter with teacher's these behaviours even if those behaviours are not for them, but other students. In short, when teacher scolds the students for talking too much, after a while, only those talk much, who were talking too much and those who are quiet, turn into quieter. That's the nature of personality-driven behaviour.

2) General Anxiety

Almost every classroom has the fidgeters, nail-biters, cowering mice or students with terrified look on their faces. These behaviours are the manifestation of general anxiety. Like every trait, general anxiety is also varied from student to students. Students with high general anxiety are afraid of everything. Teacher must be sensitive to this aspect of the students' personality otherwise the problem gets worse to worst. Putting students in public speaking situations can help them to overcome their anxiety but care should be taken that these practices of exposing students to public speaking situations must help him, not harm him.

3) Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

There is often confusion between self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is the way a person sees herself or himself- tall, introvert, athletic, helpful, commerce student, graduate, a girl, and so on. It is how person describe her/him to do so. Self-esteem is the evaluation we place on ourselves- good, useful, attractive, intelligent or opposite of any of these. Students with low self-esteem often have feeling of not much achievement. They are often reluctant participant in the classroom discussion as they think that they have too little to offer. On the other hand, students with high self-esteem are very confident on their own ability. They like to participate heavily in the class even if they don't have much to offer. It is important that teacher should realize that self-esteem has strong genetic base still it is best for teacher to do his/her best to help all the students no matter how those students see themselves.

4) Machiavellianism

The term 'Machiavellianism' came from the author Niccolò Machiavelli, 15th century for his book 'The Prince' which has been considered as a classic manual for those who want to be rulers. Someone who Machiavellian is sneaky, cunning, and lacking a moral code. High Machs are known as manipulators and low Machs are the people who get manipulated. Machiavellianism is present from the days of playschool. High Machs often have good communication and social skills, and are often able to develop positive relationships with their teachers. As a result, they may get away from all kinds of mischief. Low Machs often lacks communication and social skills and sometimes become alienated from their teachers. They are the one who most likely to be caught and punished if they do something inappropriate in the campus.

5) Locus of Control

Locus of control is a psychological concept. It has to do with where the individual sees the power over her or his life residing. It refers to how strongly people believe they have control over the situation and experiences that affect their lives. In education, locus of control typically refers to how students perceive the causes of their academic success or failure in academic life. People with internal locus of control see themselves as the masters of their own destiny. People with external locus of control see themselves as manipulated being by others. Externals believe in chance or luck – ‘whatever will be, will be.’ Internals believe that only by their own hard work and commitment will they get ahead and succeed. The surprising observation is: Even if teachers are externals themselves, often push students to be internals. The internal values of hard work, commitment and discipline are themes in educational environment. Communication gets affected by locus of control.

6) Self-awareness

Some students are very much aware of their own being and how they work. They look inward and seek to see themselves as they really are. These people are known as privately self-aware. Some students are primarily aware of themselves as others see them. Their self-awareness is their image in the eyes of people around them. They are publicly self-aware. People who are privately self-aware are little insensitive to how they are seen by the others and take no special pain to project false impression. The publicly self-aware lives in the eyes of others. Therefore, they actively try to project a personality that they see as desirable, mostly through their communication.

7) Dogmatism

Dogmatism refers to the level of rigidity of a person’s belief system. High dogmatic individuals have very rigid belief systems- “true believers.” Low dogmatic persons have flexible belief systems and are easily influenced by new information or opinions. It is often difficult to communicate with students with high dogmatic values. Teachers have to be very sensitive while addressing the issues pertaining to belief systems (Hodge, 2014).

8) Tolerance for Disagreement

There will be disagreements in the campus among the teachers, among the students, between students and teachers, and so on. In fact, people do not all think alike. Such disagreement cannot be avoided and they should not be too. New ideas are most of time degenerated from disagreements and communication of those disagreement. A world without disagreements is a stagnant world. Like disagreement, tolerance to disagreement also varies from person to person.

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person. When the disagreement is taken personally, conflict is created. People with a high tolerance for disagreement are relatively conflict resistant. People with a low tolerance for disagreement are highly conflict prone. Students will often or always disagree, so teachers are advised to increase their own tolerance of disagreement otherwise communication apprehension as well as over communication will be the widespread phenomena in their classrooms.

9) Argumentativeness

There are some students who not only can tolerate disagreement but also thrive on it. They enjoy arguing issues. They like to explore the issue until they know how they feel. Argumentativeness sometimes considered by others as a personal attack. Arguments are the opportunities to understand different perspectives of different individuals. It is valuable for students to explore different ways of looking at things, to take positions and to attempt to defend themselves.

These variables are very well studied in educational fields from kindergarten to college in the context of communication apprehension. These variables of personality cause effects for person with high communication apprehension. They are internal discomfort, communication avoidance, communication withdrawal and over communication. Whatever the adverse effects, communication apprehension have, many students have claimed that they have overcome this problem with constant practice and professional support. Any students with communication apprehension can be victorious in the battle of communication but we must not forget that changing traits of any kind is difficult and normally requires the trained professional's help. However, teacher can reduce communication apprehension problems by reducing oral communication demands, making communication a rewarding experience, be consistent about communication, reducing ambiguity and evaluation through talk, increasing student control over success (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2005). All the above-mentioned suggestions require to do some things differently than past. Here, the term 'sensitivity' plays the pivotal role. If teachers are sensitive towards their teaching behaviours in the context of communication apprehension, they are the part of solutions but if teachers are insensitive in this reference, they themselves are the part of problems.

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