

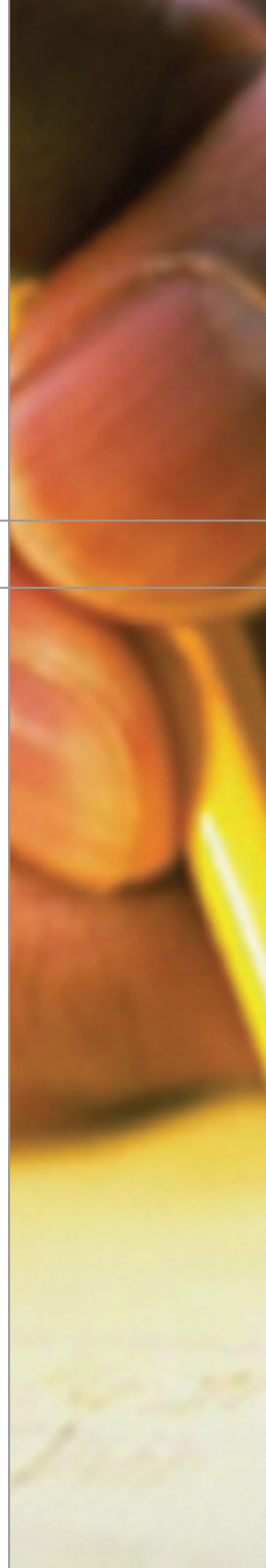
Communication SKILLS

A resource commissioned by the Making Practice Based Learning Work project, an educational development project funded through FDTL Phase 4 Project Number 174/02 and produced by staff from the University of Ulster.

Author

Tara Dixon, Project Manager, University of Ulster

Martin O'Hara, Management Consultant





Communication Skills

Aims and Learning Objectives	2
Introduction	3
Section 1: The Communication Process	4
Section 2: Active Listening Skills	10
Section 3: Non-verbal Communication	13
Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback	18
Section 5: Questioning Skills	23
Section 6: Presentation Skills	28
Appendix 1	33
References	38

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Aims and Learning Objectives

Aims

This resource has been compiled to give a general introduction to effective communication for practice educators. In the first section, the key components of the communication process will be discussed. The basic skills required for effective communication will be explored in the next few sections, and some specific contexts for communication, including giving presentations and feedback meetings, will be examined.

Learning Objectives

On completion of this resource, you should be able to:

- Identify the key components of the communication process.
- Identify some typical problems that can arise in the communication process and demonstrate knowledge of skills to overcome these.
- Demonstrate increased awareness of forms of communication and social behaviour.
- Identify and use strategies for managing specific contexts for communication, including giving presentations.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Introduction

As we progress through our careers in the health or social care environment, the sorts of skills that are critical to our success can change and evolve. Many of us are first responsible for performing specific practical tasks, linked to our developing knowledge base. Our effectiveness centres upon our actions and our growing expertise at performing these. Proficiency at such tasks is often the initial focus.

However, as we continue to progress, it is likely that success will depend more and more upon our interpersonal skills and our ability to develop effective working relationships with key others. Jobs that include a managerial, supervisory or a mentoring role can involve complex relationships with people. Demands can be made that are sometimes conflicting and ambiguous. A practice educator's job can involve reconciling and managing these demands. Not surprisingly, interpersonal and communication skills often rank among the most critical for work related success.

In its most straightforward sense, effective communication may be understood as occurring when the intended meaning of the sender and perceived meaning of the receiver are the same. Yet the level of skill required for effective communication to occur, belies the simplicity of this definition. After examining studies involving hundreds of large organisations, Goleman (1997) concluded that a high level of individual success at work was characterised by 'emotional intelligence', or skills of social awareness and communication. Typically, these included the ability to motivate and influence others, to give honest feedback sensitively, to empathise and develop relationships, to monitor ones own behaviour, to handle emotions both of self and others and to read interpersonal situations and organisational politics. However it is important to note that emotional intelligence, or the skills of social awareness and communication, can be developed and honed.

This resource aims to give a basic introduction to the area of effective communication and will seek to increase your awareness of forms of communication, communication skills and social or interpersonal behaviour therein.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

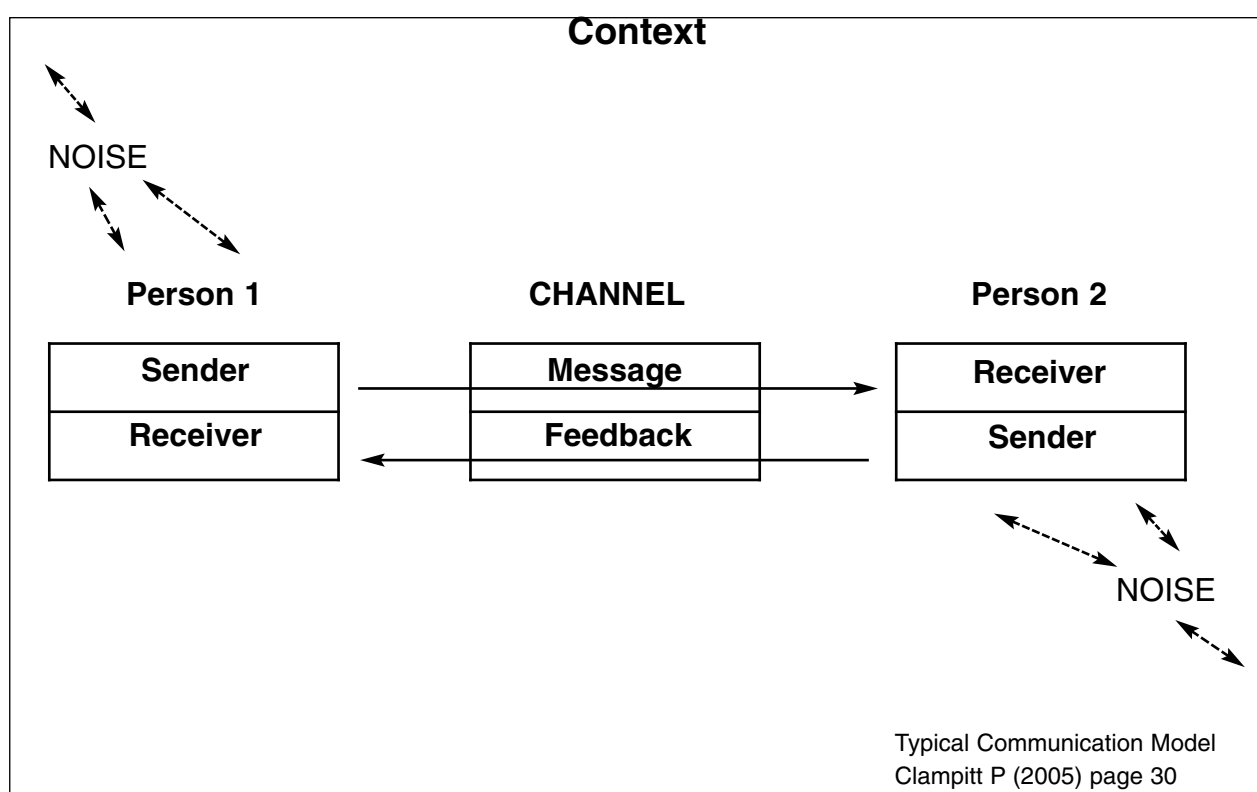
A first step in unravelling the complexity of interpersonal communication is to understand the basic process by which communication occurs. Only then can we identify where possible problems can arise and explore skills for enhancing communication and managing such breakdowns.

Human beings are not passive, predictable objects who always interpret meanings and react as they are 'supposed to'. Neither is communication a passive, predictable, one way event. Rather, communication can be viewed as an active process, influenced by all the complexities and ambiguities of human behaviour. It is also fraught with potential points of breakdown. As Clampitt notes,

'We actively construct meanings within a unique vortex that includes the words used, the context of the utterances, and the people involved.' (2005, p.8)

A more accurate way of looking at the process of communication is probably as a dynamic, circuitous process in which elements such as non-verbal behaviour and individual styles of interpreting and ascribing meaning to events have significant influence. Strategies such as constructing a clear, unambiguous message can encourage effective communication, but so too can seeking to understand meanings imposed by the listener via processes such as actively listening to feedback, as we shall see.

Many models have been developed to simplify and summarise the complex reality of the communication process and to aid our understanding. Some of these are more helpful than others, but all have their shortcomings. The 'Typical Communication Model' developed by Clampitt (2005) demonstrates a number of key elements in the communication process.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

1. Sending The Message:

Person 1 constructs and sends a message. Messages are the signals and symbols that we use to convey what we want to transmit. They can occur in various ways, including visual (non-verbal, written), auditory (verbal and sub-vocal speech), tactile (touch, bodily contact) and olfactory (perfumes, aftershaves) formats.

In order to send the message, it must be encoded into words, as well as tone, inflection, facial expression, and other non-verbal language. While skills such as clear thinking, concise expression of plain english, logical association of ideas and organised speech are important, especially to specific contexts such as giving presentations (see Section 6), they do not ensure that effective communication will take place. The meaning of the message is not contained solely in the words, as factors such as non-verbal cues, the context and the people involved will heavily influence meaning. It is important to note that unintended as well as intended meanings may be communicated via non-verbal leakage.

Consider the following exercise:

Exercise 1

(The scene is a busy open-plan office with a lot of coming and going and background noise).

Practice educator: So how did the procedure go yesterday? (Scanning emails on PC, furrows brow, begins tapping keyboard.)

Student worker: Emmmm fine. (Spoken quietly in monotone. Glances toward practice educator, then at others in the room, then looks to the floor. Hand initially covers mouth, and then begins to bite nails).

- Whether intentional or not, what message do you think the practice educator is sending?
- How much of this is conveyed in words as opposed to non-verbal behaviour?
- What message does the student give in response?

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers.

While the sender may not have total control over the message sent, this can nevertheless be improved and developed through enhancing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Non-verbal behaviour will be explored in greater detail in Section 3.

2. The Channel:

In Clappitt's (2005) model, this refers to the means used to deliver messages and the related formats. Means used to communicate can include face to face, telephone, pager, written, radio and video communication. In face to face communication, which is most often preferred for communication of more important matters, communication occurs through visual, auditory and olfactory formats, while the tactile medium may or may not be used. Skilled communicators will choose the channel most appropriate to the specific goals sought at that time.

3. Receiving the Message:

For effective communication to take place, the message must be accurately decoded and reconstructed by person 2, from the signals received from person 1. However, even if the "encoding" is carried out very well; this in itself does not ensure that it will be "decoded" accurately. The meaning ascribed to the message may vary according to the person doing the interpreting, the context in which the message was given and the total information communicated.

In terms of the person doing the interpreting, we all have underlying beliefs and understandings of the world which will influence the ways in which we tend to understand and ascribe meaning to incoming data. Consider the following example:

Practice educator: (Sitting down opposite student in office). I have been monitoring your work over the last week and your understanding really seems to be developing. (Direct eye contact, open posture, smiles).

Student worker 1: Great! That's good to hear. (Smiles and maintains eye-contact). (Thinks- *I'm doing something right! Good*).

Student worker 2: Right. (Direct gaze. Bites lip and looks away). (Thinks- *Why has she been watching me? Does she think I can't do this?*).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

Developing active listening skills such as listening to non-verbal as well as verbal language, paraphrasing, using feedback, and asking appropriate questions can help to identify possible misinterpretations of the message, as well as check for unintended messages. These skills are explored in more detail in Sections 2 and 3.

An important distinction is made here. **Misinterpretations** are faulty understandings of the message. When a message is misinterpreted, the interpretation made by the receiver is different to the message that was sent, as in the example of student 2 above. However, **unintended messages** are those messages that may be leaked unintentionally from one to another, but which are truthful reflections of underlying thoughts or feelings. An example of an unintended message is the preoccupation with something else, leaked by the practice educator in exercise one and the relative lack of interest accurately communicated to his student at that point in time.

4. Feedback:

In the model in Figure one, Person 2 responds to person 1, and this message is received by person 1 as feedback. Again, feedback comprises both the verbal and non-verbal messages of others, and allows us to evaluate how the message has been understood and the response to it. Actively listening to feedback is a key skill in effective communication, and will be explored in more detail in Section 2.

We can also get feedback from our own responses through a process known as '**self-monitoring**' (Hargie et al 2004). Self-monitoring involves staying aware of what we are saying and doing in social encounters and how this is impacting on others. This type of feedback can then be used to alter or adapt our behaviour in the light of the responses from others. People who are skilled communicators are high self-monitors, who continuously analyse and regulate their own behaviour according to the way in which the other person is responding.

Exercise 2:

Look back over the scenario under point 3.

What verbal and non-verbal feedback is being sent in each situation? What might be the interpretation of the practice educator's message, by each student?

In the light of the feedback received, how might the practice educator respond to student 1 in both verbal and non-verbal terms to maximise the effectiveness of the communication?

In the second situation, how might the practice educator respond to student 2?

Is there a difference in the way in which the educator responds according to the feedback given by each student?

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers.

With feedback as with other forms of message, the information received must be interpreted by us. Therefore, the message is susceptible to the same possible misinterpretations and will be influenced by factors such as context and people involved. Meaning is not an inherent quality of the message, but is perceived or constructed in the mind of the recipient. In the above exercise, a message that would seem to have been intended by the practice educator as being genuinely positive was misinterpreted as negative by the student in the second situation. The important part of this communication at this point, is how the practice educator listens to this feedback, the meaning that s/he ascribes to it, and how it is subsequently responded to.

5. Context:

A significant point to note is that communication never occurs in a vacuum. Communication is inextricably linked to the particular context in which it occurs, which in turn has a major impact upon behaviour. Clampitt (2005 p.36) notes that 'context basically functions as the background

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

for the content, much like a canvas for a painting'. Consider the following points:

i. A specific context may predispose toward certain probable interpretations over others. For example, the statement 'I've got a bug', may be interpreted differently when it is used in a conversation between two software engineers, compared to when it is spoken by a sneezing colleague. (Clampitt 2005). Similarly, the question 'How are you?' may be interpreted differently when it is exchanged between two acquaintances passing in the street, compared to when it is asked in a doctor's surgery.

ii. The context will also play a significant role in shaping the response. In the latter example, a simple acknowledgement of the greeting is likely to be made in response to the acquaintance in the street. However, a more detailed answer may be made to the same question when asked by a medical practitioner. Be aware however that we can sometimes assume that an understanding of a shared context exists when it does not. In the situation just described, it may not be unusual for the patient to initially respond to the question as a contextually rigid greeting and respond 'fine'.

iii. Our behaviour will also alter according to the context. For example, a practice educator will probably behave differently when in a student appraisal meeting as they do with the student during an office Christmas dinner.

6. Noise:

The term 'noise' describes anything that can interfere with or distort the meaning of a message. Dickson (1999) has identified a number of such barriers or common sources of noise, which can affect communication accuracy and effectiveness.

- Psychological: These include the perceptual biases or stereotypes that can impact on how we interpret a particular person's message. People respond to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. We each have shortcuts that we use to organize data. Invariably, these shortcuts introduce some biases into communication. Stereotyping is an example of such a shortcut.

Stereotyping is when we assume that the other person has certain characteristics based on the group to which they belong, without checking out to see that they do in fact have these characteristics. Think about the example of the student who misinterpreted the practice educator's positive message as negative. It may be that this student tends to view authority figures as critical people who are likely to put him/her down. Bear in mind though, we do not have enough information at this stage to make this conclusion and this is merely an example of a possible perceptual bias.

- Semantic: This is used to describe situations where language or cultural differences distort or interfere with the meaning of the message. Effective communication requires deciphering and understanding the basic values, motives, and assumptions of the other person. Given that dramatic differences exist across cultures in terms of approaches to time, space, and privacy; the opportunities for misinterpretation when we are in cross-cultural situations are plentiful.

In terms of language, the choice of words or language in which a sender encodes a message will influence the quality of communication.

Because language is a symbolic representation of thoughts, motivations or intentions, room for interpretation and distortion of the meaning exists. For example, a practice educator, intending to motivate a student, comments 'I have high standards and when I ask you to do a piece of work, I would like to see it done'. The student works late into the evening to produce a report not due for another week, misunderstanding the practice educator and believing that s/he wants it straight away. As we have seen, different people may interpret the same words differently. Meaning has to be given to words and many factors affect how an individual will interpret and attribute meaning.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

- **Environmental:** This refers to a range of factors such as size of room, layout of furniture, intrusive noise, heating and lighting etc. Each of these can either encourage or inhibit interaction.
- **Demographic:** Factors such as gender and age can impact on the way in which a message is interpreted. For example, a male listener may nod his head to indicate to the speaker 'I agree', whereas a female listener may nod her head to communicate 'I am listening' (but not necessarily agreeing); so sending the same visible feedback but with different actual meanings (Stewart and Logan, 1998).
- **Disability:** Physical or neurological impairment as well as psychiatric illness can call for alternative means to the usual patterns of communication to be adopted. Some examples include sight or hearing loss, and conditions such as Parkinson's disease or severe depression (Hargie et al, 2004).
- **Organisational:** Barriers to effective communication can be located within the organisation or agency itself. Difficulties with established lines and means of communication, different relative physical location of staff, lack of team or supervision meetings, and under-resourced supervisors are factors that can impact negatively on effective communication.

(Adapted from Dickson, 1999)

Clearly, some degree of noise in communication is unavoidable. The objective for effective communication is to be aware of possible sources of noise and so to seek to reduce this to a minimum.

Summary of Section 1: Learning Points:

- Skills of communication are associated with job-related success. Such skills can be developed and honed.
- The meaning of the message is not contained solely in the words. While skills such as clear thinking, concise expression of plain English, logical association of ideas and organised speech are important, they do not ensure that effective communication will take place.
- Factors such as non-verbal cues, the context and the people involved will heavily influence meaning.
- A message is not only encoded into words, as non-verbal language such as tone, inflection, facial expression, and posture will heavily influence meaning. Unintended as well as intended meanings may be communicated via non-verbal leakage.
- The meaning of a communication is also inextricably linked to the particular context in which it occurs, which in turn has a major impact upon behaviour.
- In terms of the people involved, we all have underlying beliefs and understandings of the world which will influence the ways in which we tend to understand and ascribe meaning to incoming data.
- A misinterpretation is a faulty understanding of the message; - the interpretation made by the receiver is different to the message that was sent. An unintended message is a message that may be leaked unintentionally from one to another, but which is a truthful reflection of underlying thoughts or feelings.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 1: The Communication Process

- Some degree of 'noise' in communication is unavoidable. This includes psychological, semantic, environmental, demographic, disability related and organisational barriers.
- Feedback comprises both the verbal and non-verbal messages of others, and allows us to evaluate how the message has been understood and the response to it. Actively listening to feedback is a key skill in effective communication.
- Developing active listening skills such as listening to non-verbal as well as verbal language, paraphrasing, using feedback, and asking appropriate questions can help to identify possible misinterpretations of the message, as well as check for unintended messages. In the next section, active listening skills will be explored.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 2: Active Listening Skills

Effective communication is heavily dependent on effective listening, something many of us may not be fully proficient at. An additional purpose of effective listening is to convey interest and respect for the other person. This is crucial if we are to have any ability to help solve problems and satisfy the other person's needs and goals as well as our own. Giving constructive feedback, explored in greater detail in Section 4, depends on a wide range of skills including listening skills and feedback skills.

Why is the process of effective listening so elusive? Think of a time when you have pretended to listen whilst continuing with what you were doing or thinking. Think also of a situation where you sought to half listen to another with the intention of tuning in when something of particular importance was said. These are very common occurrences and it is unlikely that you have not experienced them. In fact, most conversations do not take place with the full attention of those taking part. However, our ability to selectively listen in this way is not very good and as a result, valuable information can be unheard and lost.

Studies have shown that listening is the most frequent aspect of workplace communication (Adler and Elmhurst, 1999). Other studies have identified that managers spend 65-90% of their working day listening to someone, with the percentage of time increasing with level of managerial responsibility (Kotter, 1982, Nichols & Stevens, 1990). However, research suggests that misunderstandings are the rule rather than the exception, and that people generally achieve no more than 25-50% accuracy in interpreting the meaning of each other's remarks (Spitzberg, 1994). Becoming fully proficient at listening would therefore seem to have significant influence on workplace communication and related effectiveness.

Effective listening is a specific skill that can be consciously developed and practiced in various workplace situations, whether a meeting, supervision session, telephone conversation or chance meeting in the corridor. Listening is not simply a matter of hearing. Listening is an active psychological rather than passive process, which enables

us to attach meaning to all the information we receive. It requires concentration and effort.

As we listen to others we interpret and evaluate the meaning from the verbal and non-verbal information that we receive. We also plan and rehearse our response in preparing to execute it. While the processes of evaluation, planning and rehearsal occur subconsciously, they can nevertheless interfere with effective listening. It can be important to maintain awareness of this to ensure that the processes that mediate between listening and speaking do not actually interfere with the listening process itself.

Listening Skills

Developing effective listening skills involves two specific steps (Hartley & Bruckman, 2002). These are:

1. To develop the ability to recognise and deal with barriers that prevents you listening with full attention.
2. To develop and use behaviours which help you to listen. Such behaviours can also serve to let the other person know that you are giving them your full attention.

1. *Barriers to Listening*

The following list identifies just some possible barriers to effective listening, in addition to sources of noise examined in section 1:

Barriers to Listening

- Forming a judgment or evaluation before we understand what is being said, or 'jumping to conclusions'.
- Hearing what we want to hear.
- Tuning out a point of view that differs from our own.
- Formulating and rehearsing our response.
- Being inattentive - thinking about something else entirely.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 2: Active Listening Skills

- Having a closed mind- you do not want to hear what the person has to say.
- Feeling anxious or self-conscious.
- Judging the person, either positively or negatively.
- Subjective biases based on ignorance or prejudice.
- Cultural issues, e.g. listening to the differences in pronunciation of a different accent, rather than the content of the message.
- Excessive and incessant talking or interrupting.

It is important that such barriers to listening are recognised and dealt with. With developing awareness, we can have more control over those barriers that are internal to ourselves, and can adopt and use more helpful listening behaviours.

Exercise 3:

Think of a recent work-based situation when you felt that you were not well and truly listened to.

- a. What was it about the other person's verbal response, and
- b. non-verbal response, that led you to draw this conclusion?
- c. What other factors existed in the situation that may have impacted on communication?
- d. How might any barriers to listening that you have identified, be dealt with.

Check your answers against the information given in this section.

2. *Listening Behaviours*

So what are the keys to effective listening?

Careful analysis of skills that are used by people who are recognised as 'good listeners', show that they use a variety of techniques (Hartley & Bruckman, 2002). Some active listening skills are given as follows:

Active Listening Skills

- Stop talking- listen openly to the other person.
- Remove distractions.
- Be receptive to the other person. Demonstrate that you are prepared to listen and accept what they are saying (without automatically agreeing with it). Non-verbal cues can be particularly important here, e.g. maintaining an open posture, appropriate/comfortable eye-contact, leaning slightly forward. These are sometimes known as attending skills.
- Delay evaluation of what you have heard until you fully understand it.
- Try not to be defensive. Try to relax as any tension or impatience is likely to transmit via non-verbal leakage.
- Maintain attention. Respond through your own facial expressions or body gestures such as a nod or a smile without interrupting the other person's flow. This indicates that you are listening, interested and seeking to understand what they are saying and feeling (again, using attending skills). Be patient.
- Ask the other person for as much detail as he/she can provide; reflect back or paraphrase what the other is saying to make sure you understand it and check for understanding. Paraphrase by asking short non-interrogative questions, using some of what the speaker has said to check your understanding; such as 'so your main concern is...' or 'So what you are saying is...'. Consider the following exchange:

Student: The other member of staff just ignored what I had said about the patient, didn't even look at me and then just carried on with the meeting!

Practice Educator: So what you are saying is that he ignored your question? (*Paraphrasing*)

Student: 'Yes! It was as if I hadn't spoken. I felt really...stupid, like I shouldn't have said it, but when I thought about it later, it was relevant. It wasn't stupid'.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 2: Active Listening Skills

As well as reflecting meanings of what the person has said by summarising the content of their message (beyond paraphrasing their words), you can also reflect feelings, through e.g. 'You sound as if you feel...'. Consider the following response continuing the above exchange:

Practice Educator: You sound as if you felt really embarrassed at the time, but later on you realised that what you had to say wasn't stupid, and then you felt annoyed?

Student: Yes. I was really embarrassed. Now I am so...indignant more than annoyed.

Giving such feedback, especially phrasing it as a question can be crucial in checking that you understand the other person correctly and gives them the opportunity to correct any misinterpretation that you have made.

In summary, listen for message content, but also listen for feelings. The latter tends to be communicated via non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expression etc. Feelings can be reflected (e.g. 'you seem really worried about this?' or 'you seem to be feeling frustrated or annoyed. Is that the case?'). Offering this feedback enables any corrections of misinterpretations to be made.

- Ask appropriate questions e.g. ask the other for their views or suggestions to broaden your understanding of their position.
- If possible and appropriate, particularly in meetings, take notes; decide on a specific follow-up action and date.

Exercise 4:

Look out for opportunities over the next few days to practise some of the skills mentioned. This could initially take place in more informal situations with friends before you broaden out to work-based situations. Try to answer the following questions:

- a. What barriers or distractions am I aware of.
- b. How might I minimise these?
- c. What attending skills am I using?
- d. What following skills am I using (to encourage or reinforce the speaker).
- e. What reflecting Skills am I using?

Check your answers against the information given in this section. If possible, share the goals of the exercise with the other person after you have practised the skills and get some feedback from them on how it felt to be listened to by you.

Summary of Section 2: Learning Points

- Effective communication is heavily dependent on effective listening; however most conversations do not take place with the full attention of those taking part.
- Effective listening is a specific skill that can be consciously developed and practiced. It is an active psychological process which enables us to attach meaning to all the information we receive.
- Developing effective listening skills involves two specific steps: dealing with **barriers** that prevent you listening; and developing and using listening **behaviours**.
- There are various **barriers** to listening, including jumping to conclusions; hearing what we want to hear; rehearsing our response and being inattentive.
- **Active listening skills** include using attending skills (e.g. maintaining an open posture, comfortable eye contact, leaning forward); delaying evaluation; maintaining attention; reflecting back or paraphrasing; giving feedback; listening for feelings; asking appropriate questions etc.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 3: Non-verbal Communication

As we have seen, much of the meaning we derive from communication, comes from non-verbal cues. While we tend to focus on what we say, it is the non-verbal communication that proves to be significant in conveying our message and forming judgements about others. Often a person says one thing but communicates something totally different through vocal intonation and body language. These mixed signals can force the receiver to choose between the verbal and non-verbal parts of the message. Most often, the receiver chooses the non-verbal aspects (Stiff et al, 1990). To illustrate this, think about how vocal, facial and bodily behaviour can change the meaning of the following statement, spoken to a student completing their first month of placement.

'Overall, things seem to be OK'.

The same words can convey praise, uncertainty, annoyance, disappointment, sarcasm or indifference, depending on the accompanying non-verbal cues.

When a message is very mixed, for example, combining words of praise with body language conveying annoyance, or words of criticism accompanied by a cheerful, smiling face; the result can be the creation of tension and distrust. The receiver senses that the communicator is hiding something or is being less than candid.

This raises an important point- often we are unaware of the non-verbal cues we emit and pick up from others- the process occurs with little conscious awareness on the part of the sender or receiver. Sometimes, we carefully monitor what we say in order to ensure it has the desired effect, while paying little or no attention as to how we say it. The non-verbal leakage can however more truthfully reflect our underlying thoughts or feelings about an issue. However, we can learn to be better communicators through enhancing self-awareness and self-knowledge as well as developing better skills at reading non-verbal cues emitted by others.

Exercise 5

To get some sort of idea into what communication would be like if we had to rely solely on the verbal, think about the following. Imagine having only written feedback to questions asked of a new student as part of an introduction to a placement, as opposed to getting answers to the questions from the student during an introductory interview.

1. How much more information would be available from the meeting?
2. How might that additional information be conveyed?

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers.

Culture and Non-Verbal Messages:

Nonverbal communication has been said to have a greater universality than language, in that 'we can often make ourselves known in a rudimentary way through signs and gestures when communicating with people from differing cultural backgrounds who do not share a common language' (Hargie et al, 2004, p.38). However, a word of warning- non-verbal cues can also differ dramatically from culture to culture. An American hand gesture meaning 'A-OK' for example, would be viewed as obscene in some South American countries. It can be vital for those in contact with people from different cultures to do their research and discover what it means to make eye-contact, use hand gestures, to touch another person etc in the other culture; and especially to find out what is taboo (Goman, 2002). Be careful!

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 3: Non-verbal Communication

Some Forms of Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal messages are not always straightforward to understand and compared with verbal language, can be highly ambiguous. For example, the signs that someone is lying to us are very close to the signals of anxiety or nervousness. Often, we react to a combination of such signals rather than just one, and suspect that we are being lied to when a person fidgets, avoids eye contact, hesitates before they speak etc (Hartley and Bruckman 2002). Developing an awareness of non-verbal behaviour can be vital in improving our ability to communicate with others, however it can be important to check out our understanding through good active listening and asking reflective questions (see Section 5).

Forms of non-verbal communication are described as follows:

Facial Expressions and Eye Gaze: Facial expressions provide a rich source of non-verbal information, particularly in conveying emotion. Sometimes emotions can be communicated clearly, for example, a student's confused expression can indicate the need to continue with an explanation, smiling and nodding may demonstrate that they have understood. However on a more subtle level, a frown could come from a headache rather than from difficulty with the task at hand.

It has long since been recognised that the eyes communicate a great deal with expressions such as 'the eyes are the windows of the soul' in common parlance. Think about how it can be difficult to deal with someone wearing sunglasses, for example. Eye contact can indicate engagement or involvement with the speaker and complete lack of eye contact can suggest detachment, nervousness or that the person is hiding something. Use of eye contact can serve a number of purposes – for example, a sequence of breaks and contact in eye gaze is used to regulate the flow in conversation, with the speaker typically engaging in eye contact as they come to the end of their speech turn.

Eye contact of the listener needs to be at a comfortable level – a constant or fixed eye gaze can be unnerving. In addition, the rules for what amounts to appropriate or comfortable eye contact varies from culture to culture. For example, a British or Irish worker who uses their cultural pattern of eye gaze with an Arab colleague may be viewed as shifty or untrustworthy because they do not engage in what Arabs would regard as sufficient eye contact (Hartley and Bruckman, 2002). It is vital therefore to ensure that your NVC is appropriate to both the culture and the context.

Posture and Gestures: The way you sit or stand can convey your attitude or feelings about what you are doing or thinking. Therefore, a slumped posture can indicate despondency or boredom; a relaxed posture may suggest a person is calm and unnerved; a shifting posture might be associated with uneasiness or discomfort. In a more subtle sense, small cues in posture and gesture can be used to communicate clear messages. Turning only slightly from your desk, keeping pen in hand and avoiding eye contact can communicate to a colleague who has interrupted 'I am busy' (Adler & Elmhurst, 1999).

Matching or mirroring of posture may be used to maintain congruence in an interaction and establish empathic rapport. It can be possible in workplace meetings to spot those in agreement with one another, or the 'cliques and coalitions' by noting the members whose posture and gestures are matched (Hargie et al, 2004, p.55).

Voice: The term paralinguistics refers to features such as speech rate, pitch, articulation, pauses emphasis and volume as well as non-verbal vocalisations such as 'ahhh' or sighing. A great deal of information can be communicated this way. It is easy to tell for example that 2 people are arguing when you can hear the sound of their voices but not their words. To illustrate this further, think about how paralinguistics can change the meaning of the following statement, spoken by a student:

'I'll not have that report finished by Friday. Would Monday do?'

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 3: Non-verbal Communication

Depending on how this is said, the meaning may be heard as 'I don't think it's important' or 'I don't care about it' or 'I'm becoming overwhelmed with the work' or 'I'm very sorry' etc.

In a very general sense, varying the tone, pitch, rate and other vocal features can communicate enthusiasm and can create a sense of interest in the listener. This can be of importance when giving a presentation (see Section 6). However, sometimes paralinguistic cues are difficult to decode and are ambiguous. For example, is the student who talks very quickly nervous, eager to get away, under pressure or is this simply their characteristic way of speaking?

Personal Space & Distance: We all have an area of space around us that we consider as ours and tend to feel uncomfortable when this space is breached. The extent to which people will keep out of or encroach upon our personal space, depends on a multitude of factors including culture, personality, age, sex, status and dominance (Hargie et al, 2004). For example, women typically adopt closer distances than men, particularly with other women. Similarly, extroverts adopt closer distances than introverts, as do the very young and old. North European and North American cultures tend to prefer larger interpersonal distances than do people from Southern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East (Hargie et al, 2004).

The distance that people put between themselves and others can also be instrumental in reflecting attitudes, creating feelings and indicating the balance of power. Thus, we may stand away from someone we regard as unfriendly, or whom we think is going to tell us something we do not want to hear (Knapp & Hall, 1992). Likewise, those who create a large interpersonal distance when communicating with us, we tend to view as less friendly and understanding (Adler & Elmhorst, 1999). The person with the higher status in an interaction generally controls the level of distance and degree of approach.

Personal Appearance: This plays a significant role in determining how a message that we send or receive; will be interpreted and understood. Research has shown that the

more attractively that a person presents themselves, the more advantages they will have in most aspects of life (Wilson & Nias, 1999). A number of factors can influence how attractive a person seems and prospective managers and colleagues are often impressed by those who are well groomed and generally 'in good shape' (Adler and Elmhorst, 1999). While some aspects of physical appearance cannot be changed easily however, the one over which more control is sometimes exerted is that of dress. While many workplace situations for the health and social care professions call for the wearing of a uniform, some do not. In addition, even where a standard dress code or uniform exists, workers may try to 'individualise' it with accessories. Tentative 'rules' for dress in business environments given by Hamilton & Parker (1990) include dressing in neutral colours, simply, conservatively, and as expensively as can be afforded; while also paying heed to others who are successful within the organisation.

Non-verbal Communication Skills

As well as using active listening skills to develop awareness and monitor the non-verbal cues of others, it is important to develop awareness of your own non-verbal cues and their likely impact through close self-monitoring. Some training courses offer videotaping of simulated work situations, and these can be invaluable in developing awareness of characteristic habits or patterns of non-verbal behaviours that you tend to show as well as the possible impact of these (eg, overly sharp tone of voice mistakenly conveying displeasure; smiling when conveying criticism thus watering down the impact of the verbal message; lack of comfortable eye contact suggesting aloofness or dishonesty). However through close self-monitoring and reflecting on your own behaviour as well as by seeking feedback from others who are prepared to give you an honest response, awareness of your own NVC and its likely impact can be gained. In conversations, ask yourself 'Are my non-verbal behaviours reflecting my words? Are they reflecting the message that I want to convey?'

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 3: Non-verbal Communication

Exercise 6

Read through the following scenario, and consider the questions at the end.

This interaction took place between the Practice Educator and student at an appraisal meeting, arranged by the P.E. at short notice when another meeting had been cancelled.

P.E.: As you know, I need to fill out this performance appraisal form before the end of the month, to show how you have been doing now that you are half way through the placement here. (Looking through papers on the cluttered desk, then glances over at the student and smiles).

So, how do you think things have been going? Ah, here it is.

STUDENT: I think things are going well. I'm really learning a lot and it has been a valuable experience so far. (Speaks in a monotone, posture slightly slumped, worried expression).

P.E. Good, Good. (Reading through the form, then looks up at the student and frowns slightly).

(Phone rings). Yes....Yes...OK, just give me 20 minutes or so. Bye. (Looks at the form again). Where were we? Oh yes. Lets start with the action points from the last meeting...Have you met these?

STUDENT: Yes...I think..emmm...Most things I think. (Tone of voice is higher pitched, blank facial expression, leaning forward to read action points, no eye contact).

P.E.: Actually, I noticed that you haven't done point 3 or 4. It seems that you haven't been keeping up. Oh dear. (Smiles at the student)

I know that you will remedy this by the end of the month though. (Smiles again) Won't you?

STUDENT: It's just that things have been a bit...(Glances at the P.E. (who continues to read through the form), then looks at the floor, hand covers mouth, sighs).

P.E.: Is something wrong? You know you can speak freely to me. (Smiles, glances at clock behind student's head, then looks back at student).

STUDENT: No, I'm fine. Sorry. Yes, I'll get that sorted out. No problem. (Spoken in a monotone, expression blank, sitting back in chair, looks at the P.E., then looks away).

P.E.: Good. Moving on then...

1. What non-verbal signals are accompanying the words spoken by the practice educator and student?
2. How might the interpretation of the practice educator's and student's verbal messages be altered by the non-verbal information?
3. In the light of your interpretation, how might the practice educator respond to the student in both verbal and non-verbal terms to maximise the effectiveness of the communication?

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 3: Non-verbal Communication

Summary of Section 3: Learning Points

- While we tend to focus on what we say, it is the non-verbal communication that proves to be significant in conveying our message.
- We are often unaware of the non-verbal cues we emit and pick up from others.
- We can learn to become better communicators through enhancing self-awareness and self-knowledge; as well as developing better skills at reading non-verbal cues emitted by others.
- Non-verbal cues can differ dramatically from culture to culture. It is vital to ensure that your NVC is appropriate to both the culture and the context.
- Non-verbal messages are not always straightforward to understand and compared with verbal language, can be highly ambiguous. Often, we react to a combination of non-verbal signals rather than just one. Ask reflective questions to check your understanding (see section 5).
- Forms of non-verbal communication include facial expressions and eye gaze, posture and gestures, voice, personal space and distance, and personal appearance.
- Active listening skills can be used to develop awareness and monitor the non-verbal cues of others.
- It is also important to develop awareness of your own non-verbal cues and their likely impact on others through close self-monitoring. Seek feedback from others who are prepared to give you an honest response. In conversations, ask yourself 'Are my non-verbal behaviours reflecting my words? Are they reflecting the message that I want to convey?'

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback

In this section we will cover some of the most difficult communication issues practice educators face; - providing constructive, effective and assertive feedback to others. This may be for example, through informal or formal supervision, or through performance appraisal processes. We will also highlight insights that we have gained in previous sections to understand the rationale behind feedback strategies.

Why it can be difficult to provide honest feedback

It is normally not difficult to give positive feedback to people doing well or in general, to give information that people want to hear. Most of us can do this fairly well. However, giving negative or critical feedback, or information that people do not want to hear, can be much more problematic. Nevertheless, it is critical that feedback be honest.

Why are practice educators – and others, so reluctant to provide feedback? The reasons are many:

- Fear of the other person's reaction. People can become defensive and emotional when confronted with critical feedback, as their basic needs to feel competent and accurate are threatened. Some practice educators are fearful of the reaction.
- The practice educator may feel that they do not have enough concrete, objective evidence to back up their feedback, should the student refuse to accept it.
- Fear of causing tension in the work environment.
- Many practice educators would prefer to take on the role of a supportive coach rather than a judge. However, giving feedback often forces a change in this role.

Feedback Skills

It is important to note however that practice educators owe their students nothing less than clear, honest, concise feedback, so they know where they stand at all times.

Students simply will not develop their full potential if practice educators fail to tell them where they need improvement. Honest feedback allows the student to know where they are and what steps they can take to improve themselves.

Feedback can also be reinforcing. If given properly, feedback is almost always appreciated and motivates people to improve. Honest feedback can also strengthen the credibility of the practice educator.

However, it is also important that feedback is given in a supportive and encouraging way, so that the student does not feel constantly criticised, afraid and tense.

There are a number of guidelines toward giving feedback effectively, i.e. so that it can be used constructively rather than incurring overly defensive reactions. The following points are recommended by Levinson (quoted in Goleman, 1996 p.153):

- **Be *Specific*:** Feedback should highlight specific events or examples rather than just general advice. It should also be specific about what the person did. (Avoid generalisations i.e. words such as 'never', 'always', 'all' etc).
- ***Offer a solution*:** Feedback should suggest ways of resolving any problems. There is little or no point in offering negative feedback where there is no way that a person can improve.
- ***Deliver the feedback face to face*.**
- ***Be sensitive*:** This is simply a reminder that feedback, even negative feedback, should be delivered in a positive way rather than simply attacking the other person.

Further guidelines are given by Wertheim (2005)

- ***Be problem oriented, not people oriented*:** Feedback should focus on issues, not the person since the individual usually has little control over

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback

personality. It is important that we refer to what a person does rather than to what we think he is. (Thus we might say that 'the patient's fears about the procedure were not listened to and addressed by the student' rather than calling the student 'insensitive').

- **Be descriptive, not evaluative:** People more readily receive information if the sender describes what happened and communicates the personal effect it had, as opposed to evaluating its goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness.
- **Own rather than disown** the feedback. Use "I have a problem with your work", not "others have been complaining".
- **Check** with the other, that they understand what has been said. Check whether they are willing and able to accept it. One way of checking understanding is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback. No matter what the intent, feedback is often threatening and thus subject to considerable distortion or misinterpretation.
- **Be open to hear new and possibly disconfirming information:** Non-verbal behaviours such as tone of voice, facial expression, posture and gestures, as well as choice of words are crucial here.
- **Be Validating**, not invalidating, and supportive. It is important to acknowledge the other person's uniqueness and importance.
- **Feedback should be helpful** to the receiver and directed toward **behaviour which the receiver can do something about**. A person gets frustrated when reminded of some shortcoming over which he has no control. Ideally feedback should be solicited, not imposed.
- Feedback is useful when **well timed** (soon after the behaviour; depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, and so forth). Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.

- It involves the **amount of information the receiver can use** rather than the amount we would like to give. To overload a person with feedback is to reduce the possibility that he may be able to use what he receives effectively. When we give more than can be used, we are more often than not satisfying some need of our own rather than helping the other person.

Still further characteristics of effective feedback beyond those mentioned, are offered by McClure (2005, P.9):

- Feedback should be regular.
- It should be reciprocal.
- It should include recommendations for improvement.
- It should deal with decisions and action rather than assumed intentions or interpretations.
- It should be based on information which is objective by first hand observation.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback

Exercise 7

Giving feedback in a sensitive, problem-focussed way can significantly affect how it is heard and subsequently handled.

- a. Consider the relative impact of each of the following pairs of statements.
 - b. Return to the guidelines for effective feedback above. For the second statement in each pair, note which guideline it seems to relate to.
1. 'You are always late. You never get here on time.' Versus 'I notice that this is the third morning this week that you have arrived late for work.'
 2. 'You have created a problem here!' Versus 'How can we solve this problem?'
 3. 'That was a terrible way to handle that situation' Versus 'Here is what happened... My reaction is ... The outcome has been...'
 4. 'That's not a bad idea, but I don't think the rest of the team would go for it' Versus 'I can see your point, but I don't think it would work because...'
 5. 'You probably won't have any ideas to contribute to the development meeting' Versus 'You might have some ideas or suggestions also'.
 6. 'You are just making too many careless mistakes. You're not doing the job properly' Versus 'We have discussed what happened. What do you think are the obstacles standing in the way of improvement?'
 7. 'You really rushed that procedure to try and get away early' Versus 'When you went through points 1 to 3, you didn't pause to complete point 2 as we had discussed. This meant that ...'

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback

As we saw in the guidelines to the above exercise (Appendix 1) feelings of defensiveness can occur whenever a person feels threatened or punished. As Wertheim (2005) notes, self-protection becomes very important when this happens and energy is spent on constructing a defence rather than on listening. Aggression, anger, competitiveness, and/or avoidance are common reactions.

We also saw that badly delivered feedback can result in feeling that we are seen as insignificant in some way. When a person feels put down, ineffectual, or insignificant because of the communication, Wertheim (2005) notes that they tend to invest in attempts to re-establish self-worth. Energy is thus spent trying to portray self-importance rather than on listening; and common reactions may be showing off, self-centred behaviour, withdrawal, and or loss of motivation.

It is therefore important to use techniques for effective feedback and to think about how you might structure the process.

Structure for giving feedback

As mentioned, situations where you may be giving feedback to a student can range from informal to the more formal settings. The following structure gives steps that could be applied to more formal settings (e.g., the appraisal interview) however some aspects may also be applicable to less formal situations (adapted from Hargie et al, 2004, P.388).

Schedule the meeting: Let the student know in advance of where and when the meeting will be held. Try and ensure there will be no interruptions.

Agree on content: Agree the nature of the meeting, i.e. that aspects of performance will be discussed. This allows the student to prepare also.

Agree on process: This should include agreement on how the meeting will proceed, (e.g. firstly discussing the last action points, what worked well and where you/the department helped or hindered the work effort, new action points etc.).

Agree location: Some sources advise that the person in authority's office is likely to activate anxiety and advise using a neutral space or the employee's work venue.

Start the discussion: This should involve open questions (e.g. How do you feel your placement is going? How do you see your performance?). The student can raise potential problems themselves, and is involved collaboratively from the start.

Exchange Feedback: Some advocate the value of using a 'feedback sandwich' when giving negative or critical feedback. This involves surrounding the critical with positive feedback, so that the person hears the more positive information at the beginning and end of the statement.

Wertheim (2005) advises that when preparing to give critical feedback, initially state the constructive purpose of it (an example might be 'I am concerned about some things you have said to patients, and it is important to me that we talk about it'). He also suggests giving the other a chance to respond (e.g. what do you think?). Other techniques as listed above (e.g. being specific, sensitive, problem-oriented, and checking understanding and degree of agreement) could also be useful here. Pay a lot of attention to the consequences of the feedback, in both verbal but also (perhaps more importantly) non-verbal reactions of the student. You should be acutely aware of the effects of your feedback on the student.

As practice educator, you should also be prepared to receive feedback yourself, as non-defensively as possible. Model openness to both positive and critical feedback. The information that you get may be very valuable. Ask for clarification, summarize, check for accuracy, listen carefully; mentally note questions; and paraphrase what you have heard (Wertheim, 2005).

Develop a plan for improvement: Try and let the student take the lead. You could then offer suggestions to develop or improve upon their ideas. Be more directive if the student shows an inability or reluctance to come up with any ideas. (E.g. ask 'Is there any one behaviour you can change that would improve your performance?').

Close the discussion: Summarise what has been agreed, and provide some sense of direction.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 4: Giving Constructive Feedback

Exercise 8

Return to the scenario presented in Exercise 6, in the section on Non-verbal Communication. Using the information and knowledge gained from the above 'structure for giving feedback', note down a list of points that might have improved the appraisal interview scenario.

A checklist for evaluating your feedback effectiveness

(Adapted from Hill, 1996)

Before the next situation where you will be giving feedback to your student, think through the following points:

- What is your purpose in giving the feedback
- What specific actions do you want to reinforce or correct? What are the consequences of the action?
- What suggestions might be helpful?
- What pitfalls might occur during this interview?
- How do you plan to overcome the pitfalls?

After giving the feedback to the student, think through the following:

- Did the feedback accomplish your purposes
- What specifically did you do?
- What specifically were his/her reactions and your reactions?
- Did you follow the principles of supportive communication?
- Where did you fall short?
- How well did you focus on the situation, issue, behaviour and not the person
- How well did you maintain the self-esteem of the other
- How well did you lead by example?

Summary of Section 4: Learning Points

- While giving negative or critical feedback can be difficult, it is nevertheless vital that such feedback is given honestly, in order to allow the student to know where they are and what steps they can take to improve their work.
- People are likely to become defensive when they feel threatened or attacked, and will be more concerned with constructing a defence rather than on listening to you.
- When a person feels put-down or insignificant because of the communication with you, they are likely to invest in attempts to re-establish self-worth; and will be more concerned with portraying self importance rather than listening to you.
- There are a number of guidelines toward giving feedback effectively, e.g. being specific, offering a solution, checking it is understood, being descriptive, supportive, validating, open to receiving feedback and focussing on the problem rather than 'attacking' the person, etc.
- Steps for giving more formal feedback include agreeing when & where the meeting should occur and what will be discussed; beginning by asking open questions; emphasizing the constructive purpose of the feedback; being open to receiving both positive and critical feedback from the student; and developing a plan for improvement.
- It is important to monitor, evaluate and continue to develop feedback effectiveness.

Further Reading:

Marsh, S. et al, (2005) Managing Failing Students in Practice Making Practice Based Learning Work Learning Material <http://www.practicebasedlearning.org/resources/materials/docs/reflectiononpractice.pdf>

McClure, P. (2005) Reflection on Practice Making Practice Based Learning Work Learning Material <http://www.practicebasedlearning.org/resources/materials/docs/reflectiononpractice.pdf>

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 5: Questioning Skills

Every day of our lives, we use questions. Much of our day to day conversation involves either asking or answering questions. Often however, we do not use skills of questioning to our full advantage.

Some very adept communicators demonstrate a high level of skill in gathering information from others. Such individuals are able to maximise the effectiveness of workplace communication through the use of skilled questioning techniques. They are aware that the same question can be asked in many different ways and each of these ways can achieve a different response. It is possible to improve on your questioning skills by becoming aware of the different types of questions that can be asked so that you can use a variety of questioning styles and know when a specific type of question will have the most impact.

Questioning Techniques

Most texts on interviewing techniques will differentiate between open and closed questions.

An *open question* allows the person to answer in whatever way they choose. For example, 'How are you finding writing up your case study report?'

A *closed question* asks for specific information or a yes/no response. An example would be 'Have you completed your case study report?'

Open questions tend to encourage people to talk, open up and expand. They can serve to loosen up the flow of ideas and are useful when you are interested in gaining the widest possible response from the student. They also tend to be useful in an interview situation where a person's answers and responses to open questions can reveal much about the person's personality in terms of how well they express themselves without guidance or prompting. Closed questions meanwhile, are more likely to encourage short answers. They are useful when you want to establish facts and check on details. Inexperienced workers often ask too many closed questions, especially in interviews or

meetings, when they really want more elaborate information or answers. Conversely, sometimes we just need the bare facts, or to get straight to the point. Asking open questions in this kind of situation will not meet our needs.

Venn (2004) advises that a closed question can be recognised easily because it starts with words or phrases like:

- Do...
- Is...
- Can...
- Could...
- Will...
- Would...
- Shall...
- Should...

Note the way in which how asking a closed question limits communication in the following exchange:

Practice Educator: So, did the lunchtime seminar go OK?
Student: Well, yes, more or less.
Practice Educator: Great! See you tomorrow.

Asking the same basic question using an 'open' style gathers much more detail from the student which, in this situation, is more useful to the practice educator.

Practice Educator: So, how did you feel about the lunchtime seminar?
Student: Well...actually, I felt a bit lost. The speaker was talking about an area that I haven't covered yet in the course. I was wondering whether I need to know about that at this stage? Should I be reading up on it?
Practice Educator: Ah, that's unfortunate. Sorry, I hadn't realised. I think that it is important that you have some knowledge on the topic for the placement, but probably not at an advanced level. I'll speak to your academic tutor about including this topic for future placement preparation, and in the meantime, look out some information for you...

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 5: Questioning Skills

Venn (2004) advises that open questions are more likely to start with words such as:

- How...
- Why...
- When...
- Where...
- What...
- Who...
- Which..

This list is not exhaustive however.

Whilst the distinction between asking open and closed questions seems straightforward and easy to grasp, it can actually be quite difficult to begin to incorporate the more open style of questioning into our work life. We are often over-used to asking the more direct, closed version, sometimes as contextually rigid responses, e.g.

Practice Educator: Hi. How are things going?
Student: Oh, fine thanks.

Exercise 9

To get some practice at asking open questions, re-phrase the following closed questions to make them open.

1. When did this happen?
2. Are you enjoying your placement?
3. Did the meeting go well?
4. Was the conference worthwhile?
5. Did the client session go OK?

See Appendix 1 for suggested answers.

As mentioned, there are times when asking closed questions are actually more useful. As well as using them to establish basic facts, you can also use them to 'close down' an overly wordy or rambling response, and encourage them to give a more concise response. However, sometimes when using several closed questions together, you can sound as if you are interrogating the other person. Venn (2004) advises that rather than using a 'question, answer, question, answer' structure, try 'question, answer, comment'. It can serve to soften the questions while demonstrating that you are paying attention to the answers.

In reality however, asking open questions interspersed with occasional closed questions for clarification, are a useful way to explore complex issues (Blundell, 1998). Often, both types of questions are necessary for encouraging meaningful communication and gathering the information that we are interested in.

This is well demonstrated in the following dialogue, taken from Venn, 2004.

"I've been asking my daughter Rhiannan what she did at school today. There are times when Rhiannan can be as uncommunicative as any child: this was one of them!"

"What did you do in school today, Rhiannan?"

"Nothing much."

"I'm sure you did. Did you do any painting then?"

"Yes."

"Great, you love painting. What did you paint?"

"Lots of trees. We went out on an expedition in the morning and we found out about different types of tree. There are some that drop their leaves in the autumn and others that don't. All my trees kept their leaves."

"That sounds like fun: where did you go on your outing?"

"Expedition, Dad! We went to 'Coombe Abbey'. We ate our packed lunches there and played in the adventure playground afterwards."

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 5: Questioning Skills

Note how the author began by asking an open question. This did not give him the information he wanted however, instead resulting in one word answers.

When that happened, the author adapted the way in which he asked his daughter about her day. He started again, asking a closed question, 'Did you do any painting then?'

Once he got her interest it became easier to stimulate her into giving him the information that he was interested in, even through asking closed questions.

Types of Questions

So far, we have looked at 2 types of questions: open and closed. Other more advanced types of questions include the following: (NB: this list is not exhaustive)

- Probing/clarifying Questions
- Reflective Questions
- Direct Questions
- Hypothetical Questions

(Venn, 2005; Blundel, 1998; Ellis, 2003)

Some of these are extensions of the open and closed type, but are worth looking at in their own right. They are all of value and come into their own in different situations and circumstances.

Probing/Clarifying Questions

In reality, these are open or closed questions that serve to build on the person's previous answers, comments and responses. They use information already established in order that we can explore further. These questions also demonstrate to the person that they are being actively listened to.

Some examples of probing questions include:

Tell me more about that?

What happened next?

What did you do next?

How did that happen?

Can you tell me why?

How do you mean?

Can you give me an example?

Who else was involved?

And where were you at that stage?

Dissatisfied? In what way were you dissatisfied with your performance?

However, probing needs to be tackled carefully in order that the student does not feel interrogated. Imagine that you were on the receiving end of all of the above questions, asked in turn after you had given the questioner some information. The likelihood of you beginning to feel defensive to this aggressive sounding barrage is high. Preceding each question with a short summary of what the student has said can serve to soften the questioning and show them that they are being fully listened to (Cole, 1993). This can make the communication feel more relaxed, and is explained in more detail under the next heading.

Reflective Questions

Reflective questions or statements are really comments made before another type of question, which serve to soften the questioning as well as demonstrate to the speaker that they are being well and truly listened to. They typically constitute a short summary of what the other person has said, and may also be considered as a type of paraphrasing.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 5: Questioning Skills

Consider the following example:

Student: It's just that I'm feeling really under pressure with the placement at the minute, and then I slept in this morning and just managed to make it here in time, even though I missed the bus and had to walk all the way in. And it was raining...

Practice Educator: It sounds like you had a bad morning. You were saying that you are feeling really under pressure with the placement? (Reflective question)

In what way are you feeling under pressure? (Probing question)

The practice educator does not want to cut the student off: but is keen to find out some specific information while also letting the student know that s/he is paying attention to what has been said. The practice educator does this by asking a reflective question followed up with a question to probe for the specific information s/he is interested in. By using the reflective comment and question, the student knows that they are being listened to.

Hypothetical Questions

Hypothetical questions can be an excellent way to encourage your student to reflect on issues through thinking through previously unconsidered options. They are also often used in interview situations to test the creativity and mental agility of prospective students or employees (Blundel, 1998).

Consider the following hypothetical questions:

What other points would you consider if your client was older?

What other questions would you ask your patient if they also presented with shortness of breath?

If I could arrange an extension on your final report, how would you feel about presenting the workshop?

If you had extra funding for the department, how would you improve on current practices?

Direct Questions

Direct questions can be either open or closed questions. However, they tend to have the following characteristics:

1. When posing a direct question, you always use the name of the other person
2. You pose the question as an instruction.

(Venn, 2004)

Direct questions are especially helpful when you need to get the other person's attention and acquire specific information. A direct question tends to begin with phrases such as:

Tell me Jane,

Explain to me John,

Describe to me Jill,

Use of the other person's name tends to grab their attention, while phrasing the question like an instruction ('tell me' etc) gives a specific command.

Consider the following example:

Practice Educator: 'Did you get a chance to observe any consultations this afternoon?' (*Closed question*)

Student: 'Yeah.' (Reading through a journal).

Practice Educator: 'Tell me Tom, what sorts of problems were people presenting with?' (*Direct question*)

Obtaining Information through Questioning Techniques

While you will not need to use all of these questioning techniques in any given communication, they can prove to be very useful in building up to the required detail or 'filtering down' information to the bare bones that you need.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 5: Questioning Skills

The following checklist summarises the relative advantages of each (Adapted from Venn, 2004).

Type of Question	Use
Open Questions	For more information
Closed Questions	For specific information or a yes/no response
Probing Questions	For added detail
Reflective Questions	To get the other back on track
Hypothetical Questions	To get the other to think/reflect
Direct Questions	An instruction to get attention

Further Reading

In this section, we covered questioning techniques as a category or type of general communication skills. There is however, much literature that examines questioning techniques specifically in relation to teaching and learning. The following websites give a general introduction to this more specific area:

<http://www.aged.vt.edu/methods/que-skil.htm>

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/Questioning.html>

Summary of Section 5: Learning Points

- The same question can be asked in many different ways and each of these ways can achieve a different response.
- Open questions tend to encourage people to talk, open up and expand. A closed question asks for specific information or a yes/no response.
- Closed questions can also be used to 'close down' an overly wordy or rambling response, and encourage a more concise answer. To avoid sounding as if you are interrogating the other, use a 'question, answer, comment' structure.
- Other more advanced types of questions include probing/clarifying questions (to get added detail), reflective questions (to get the other back on track), direct questions (to get their attention and give an instruction), and hypothetical questions (to get the other to think/reflect).
- Selective use of each of these techniques can prove useful in either building up to the required detail or 'filtering down' information to the bare bones that you need.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 6: Giving Presentations

An activity that many of us view with concern is that of giving presentations. Few people feel entirely comfortable standing in front of an audience to deliver a talk; even fewer actually enjoy it. In fact, a survey carried out in America on common fears, suggested that fear of speaking in front of a group was rated higher than fear of death (Rasberry & Lemoine, 1986)!

The reasons behind this are simple- people fear that public speaking may result in humiliation, embarrassment or loss of dignity. Even the most adept speakers recognise feelings of fear in anticipation of and during delivery of a presentation. However, the key to success is to utilise that fear and to recognise it as a normal, healthy feeling. There is nothing wrong with feeling a level of anxiety and in fact, learning to harness the energy it produces can help you to perform well.

It is also important to have realistic expectations of ourselves. Few of us possess the ability to perform theatrically, or entertain large audiences with witty one-liners and clever tales. However, giving effective presentations does not require these abilities. Clear, competent 'plain speaking' delivered with an air of confidence will suffice (Wells, 1986).

Exercise 10

- a. List the different types of presentations that you have had to (or may be expected to) deliver as part of your role.
- b. Think about a presentation that you gave that went very well. (If you have not had experience of delivering presentations, think of a time when you spoke to a group of people in a work-based context, which went well).
- c. Think about a presentation that you gave that could have been much better (or as before, speaking in a group).
- d. Using information from points b & c, identify your strengths and areas where you need to improve.

See Appendix 1 for some guidelines.

important to look among these for ideas that are pertinent to you, your learning needs and to your own style of presenting. Styles of presentation will be influenced by the context, but also by the person's preferred way of doing it, which may be developed over time. Remember however, the quality of many presentations is determined by the work put in before you even begin to speak.

Dealing with Fears

As we have seen, a common fear is that the presentation will result in some sort of disaster, leaving us feeling embarrassed or humiliated. Once explored however, these fears usually emerge as unrealistic and our imagined 'worst case scenario' is either highly unlikely or not the catastrophic disaster that we think it will be!

Techniques to resolve your anxiety include the following:

- Accept that it is perfectly normal to feel nervous or anxious to some extent.
- Prepare well.
- Be realistic. Are your standards too high? Take off the unnecessary pressure that comes from negative and unrealistic thoughts by challenging them and seeking the more rational view. That worst case scenario you imagine is highly improbable, and if a less than positive outcome does occur, it is unlikely to be the end of the world!
- Use relaxation exercises such as deep breathing.
- Behave 'as if' you are feeling confident; i.e.
 - i. Enter the presentation in a very deliberate way,
 - ii. Rehearse your presentation, but also how you will Stand, set out your notes, change your slides etc,
 - iii. Use other non-verbal behaviours to appear confident (See section on delivery of the presentation).

(Adapted from Hartley & Bruckman, 2002).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 6: Giving Presentations

The remainder of this section will focus on **planning** your presentation, **structuring** the material and will give key points regarding the **delivery** of the presentation.

Planning your Presentation

It can be helpful to plan your presentation in terms of key steps, as follows:

1. **Set your objective.** A simple sentence can be a good means of defining your purpose in giving the presentation, and will begin to determine the content. Try to complete the following sentence:

'As a result of my presentation, my audience will.....'

For example, '*As a result of my presentation, my audience will see their role in interdisciplinary learning more clearly, and will understand and be impressed with the value of providing practice placements in this department.*'

Decide whether the main purpose of your talk is to inform, persuade, motivate or change things. What do you want your audience to do as a result of your talk?

2. **Understand your audience:** Try and have a basic idea of the size of the audience and who they are. Think about what they will be expecting from the presentation, but be realistic about this. Find out what level of knowledge and experience those attending will have about your topic, so that you know where to aim the material. Are the audience likely to have any preconceptions or misconceptions about the subject that you need to address and put right? How might your audience use what you have to say?
3. **Know your setting:** Find out about the equipment – audiovisual aids etc. that will be available. Check out the location of the presentation; the size of the room (to help you decide on type of seating arrangements), and other facilities.

4. **Write down the 'central theme'** of the talk. For example, using the example given in point 1, the theme or overall message might be:

'Interdisciplinary learning opportunities are vital to student placements, form a valuable part of the work of the department and each member of staff has an important role to play'.

5. **Write your outline:** Ask yourself: What are the main points I need to make to get my message across? What supporting information will I need? Where will I get this? How much time will I need? Structure your talk (see section on structuring your talk).
6. **Develop your visual aids:** For example, will you use a flipchart, whiteboard powerpoint, overhead projector or data projector etc. to clarify important points and aid understanding? NB: Do not use too many slides/points.
7. **Prepare your delivery notes,** according to the structured outline.
8. **Deliver your presentation** (see section on delivery).

(Adapted from Gallagher et al, 1998)

NB. Often, presenters with little experience imagine that their audience is waiting for them to fail and that the slightest mistake will result in derision. This just does not happen. Try to remember that the audience is made up of people like you, who want you to do well. Most people will feel a sense of empathy with you and will be understanding if you run into difficulties. Try to take off the unnecessary pressure that comes from negative and unrealistic thoughts, by seeking the more rational view.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 6: Giving Presentations

Structuring Your Presentation

This is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the presentation. The structure should be clear to both you and your audience.

Different authors advocate different formats for structuring a presentation, each of which has their merits (Hartley and Bruckman, 2002; Hargie et al, 2004; Adler and Elmhurst, 1999).

In simplest terms however, a presentation should have an *introduction*, *body* and *conclusion*.

Introduction:

Through the introduction you should grab your audience's attention and set the scene. Ways of getting your audience's attention include asking a rhetorical or intriguing question, providing a relevant and interesting fact, giving an anecdote, outlining the valuable information you hope the audience will gain from the presentation/telling them why they need to know the information, giving a quote or making a dramatic prediction.

Your theme should be made clear from the start. Start the audience thinking about the subject matter of your presentation by, for example, a statement of your main objective. It can also be helpful to present the structure to your talk, by explaining briefly how you plan to proceed with it.

The Main Body:

Select the main points that support your argument but only include as much detail as your audience needs. Also, be aware that people will not remember too many points.

Once you have decided on the key points, organise them into a sequence that makes sense to you. This sequence may take various forms, including being chronologically based, problem-solution based, simple-complex based etc. (Hargie et al, 2004; Adler and Elmhurst, 1999).

Explain and build your points using supporting information and evidence.

Conclusion:

There are various ways of concluding a presentation including changing the pace, using a new visual aid, summarising your main points, drawing the conclusion and its importance, making recommendations, asking for questions, getting feedback, asking for or recommending particular actions, getting some sort of commitment from the group to the advocated course of action, or ending by thanking the group for their time and attention.

Do not end suddenly. Give your audience some idea that you are coming to a close; eg. 'And now, before I finish' or 'In conclusion' etc.

Try to end on a strong note through the use of tactics detailed above. Research has long since shown that we tend to remember the opening and closing parts of a presentation over the detail in the middle.

Delivering Your Presentation

DeVito (1990) outlines four main types of delivery:

- a. Impromptu: This involves giving a talk with no prior planning, and is often the least preferred method. Sometimes however, we do not have an opportunity to prepare and are called on to speak at short notice. Take a few moments to write some key points down on a card to help give you some structure, and do not panic. Others will be aware that you had only a short time to prepare. Also, keeping the style relaxed and conversational, so that it seems impromptu (even if this is not the case) can be a very effective style.
- b. Extemporaneous: This involves cue cards or slides on which you summarise the main points which you then flesh out.
- c. Memorised: This approach involves learning and regurgitating a manuscript. This is more difficult when giving longer presentations in that there is a lot of material to be memorised. However, a useful tip is to memorise the first few lines to get you started.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 6: Giving Presentations

- d. **Read:** This involves speaking from a prepared manuscript. However, while this can feel the safest option, try to use it as a guide as far as possible rather than reading it word for word, as your delivery could otherwise sound stilted. Practice and rehearse in order to remember key points.

Ultimately, choose the method, or combination of methods, that is least stressful for you.

Techniques of Delivery

Hargie et al (2004, p. 72) outline a number of features of effective deliveries, summarised as follows:

- Use appropriate language and avoid jargon. If the audience do not understand most of what is being talked about, they will become detached.
- Be suitably paced. Inexperienced speakers have a habit of speaking too quickly. On the other hand, speaking too slowly is a recipe for boredom. Where speed of delivery may be a particular concern, think about placing an accomplice in the audience primed to signal when you get too slow or too quick.
- Use visual aids without placing them centre stage. Even the best of these are only aids to assist the speaker.
- Make use of sub-summaries, signposts and links. Pause at transitional points in the flow of ideas to briefly summarise the material covered. Explaining how this 'chunk' of information links with what comes next helps to signpost the path through the presentation and increases its coherence.
- Emphasize key points verbally, non-verbally and vocally. Emphasize verbally through listing key points (e.g. 'It is vital that you recognise...'), repeating core elements etc; non-verbally (e.g. Gestures, changes in posture, position); and vocally (e.g. Altering volume, speed of delivery, tone of voice).
- Be verbally fluent. Effective public speakers do not have to be word perfect. Nevertheless, lots of 'umms' 'ahhhs' and other fillers such as 'you know' can be highly distracting.

- Be concrete and precise, rather than appearing vague and indefinite.
- Be dynamic. Use punchy rhetoric, vocal variation and non-verbal animation. If you are not enthused, how can you expect to be sufficiently enlivened to enthuse others?
- Be varied, e.g. intersperse talk with graphs, slides or pieces of video that the audience can look at as a break from listening. If appropriate, encourage some discussion or ask the audience to work on a brief exercise.
- Include carefully chosen examples – as a bridge between what the listener knows and is familiar with and the new material being introduced.
- Avoid distractions, e.g. pacing around, playing with a pen or pointer, over use of certain stock phrases. Gain control of body language.
- Seem natural and not contrived. This can take some time and practice.
- Rehearse what is going to be said.

A Final Word on Body Language

Remember the importance of non-verbal communication! While skills such as concise expression of plain english, logical association of ideas and organised speech are important, they do not ensure that effective communication will take place. Behave enthusiastically, make and maintain eye contact, smile, act 'as if' you are confident and relaxed (even if you do not feel it) and make your introduction without reading from your notes too much.

The manner of speech is also important. As well as ensuring that your voice can be heard by the furthest member of the group, speak clearly and at a conversational, appropriate speed. Varying the tone, pitch, rate and other vocal features can communicate enthusiasm and can create a sense of interest in the listener. Pause before key points and stress key parts of the sentence by using change in tone.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Section 6: Giving Presentations

Exercise 11

After your next presentation, return to the information that you compiled on strengths and weaknesses, from Exercise 6. Use this information to evaluate your performance, in conjunction with the above information on planning and structuring your presentation and techniques of delivery (including non-verbal behaviour).

- i. What areas do you now feel more confident about?
- ii. Where do you still need to put in some work toward improvement?

- Choose the method of delivery (e.g. impromptu, extemporaneous, memorised or read) that is least stressful for you.
- Features of effective deliveries include using appropriate language; being suitably paced; using sub-summaries, signposts and links; emphasizing key points; being verbally fluent, concrete and precise; and being dynamic and varied. Try to seem natural and uncontrived.
- Remember your non-verbals! Make and maintain eye contact, smile, act 'as if' you are confident and relaxed (even if you do not feel it), vary the tone, pitch, rate and other vocal features to communicate enthusiasm and create a sense of interest in the listener.

Summary of Section 6: Learning Points

- Most of us tend to feel anxious about presentations, fearing that it will result in some sort of disaster. Techniques to resolve anxiety include accepting that it is normal to feel nervous, preparing well, using relaxation exercises and behaving 'as if' you are feeling confident. Recognise your fears as unrealistic negative thoughts and seek the more rational view. Your nerves will not disappear, but you can use the energy they produce to help you perform well.
- Plan your presentation e.g. by knowing your objective, finding out about your audience and setting, writing down the 'central theme' and outline, developing your visual aids and preparing your delivery notes.
- Structure your presentation through an introduction, main body and conclusion.
- Through the introduction you should grab your audience's attention and set the scene.
- In the main body, select the main points and organise them into a sequence that makes sense to you.
- In the conclusion, end on a strong note through one of the tactics outlined.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Appendix 1

Exercise 1: Suggested answers:

a. *Whether intentional or not, what message do you think the practice educator is sending?* The practice educator seems to be communicating that s/he is busy or preoccupied with something else. This is likely to be an unintended message, i.e. a message that is leaked unintentionally from one to another, but which is a truthful reflection of reality. The practice educator appears to be more concerned with reading emails than with the student's answer at this point of time. It is unclear whether the practice educator is generally disinterested in the student and his/her work from the information that we have, or whether this conclusion would be a misinterpretation on the part of the student.

b. *How much of this is conveyed in words as opposed to non-verbal behaviour?* The practice educator's verbal and non-verbal behaviour appear to contradict each other. While s/he asks the student about yesterday's procedure, his/her lack of attending behaviours (e.g. eye contact, interested facial expression, leaning slightly forward) and preoccupation with the emails tends to send a message of disinterest at this point in time (see Section 2 for information on attending skills). When there are mixed signals in this way, the receiver tends to choose the non-verbal aspects over the verbal part of the message (Stiff et al, 1990). (See section 3 for information on non-verbal communication).

c. *What message does the student give in response?* The student's non-verbals, (i.e. monotone, hesitation/'emmmm' before commenting 'fine', and the apparently nervous gesture of hand to mouth and nail-biting); might suggest that the student is unsure and worried. This hunch could be checked out through reflective questioning (see section 5) and more information could be sought, as to what the student is unsure about, (e.g. the procedure? Talking to the practice educator? Talking in a busy office? etc.). Again, the student's non-verbal behaviour contradicts the verbal message of 'fine'. However, this seems to be missed by the practice educator, who is not actively listening (see section 2 for active listening skills).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Appendix 1

Exercise 2: suggested answers

a. *What verbal and non-verbal feedback is being sent in each situation? What might be the interpretation of the practice educator's message, by each student?* The practice educator seems to be giving positive feedback, and the non-verbal message would appear to support her words. However, while student 1 interprets this as positive feedback, student 2 sees it as negative, misinterpreting the message (*I'm being watched because she thinks I can't do this!*). There are many reasons why the intended message has been misinterpreted:- it may be for example, that this student tends to view authority figures as critical people who are likely to put him/her down. Bear in mind though, we do not have enough information at this stage to make this conclusion and this is merely an example of a possible perceptual bias. Whatever the underlying reason for the misinterpretation, it now needs to be appropriately responded to.

b. *In the light of the feedback received, how might the practice educator respond to student 1 in both verbal and non-verbal terms to maximise the effectiveness of the communication?* How the practice educator listens to the student's feedback, ascribes meaning to it, and how she subsequently responds to it, is important in maximising the effectiveness of the communication. As student 1 appears to have responded positively to the positive message, the practice educator could hypothesize that her message has been correctly interpreted and affirm this with her verbal and non-verbal behaviour, i.e. 'Good. You should be pleased. What we need to look at now is...', continued smile, comfortable open posture, appropriate eye-contact etc.

c. *In the second situation, how might the practice educator respond to student 2?*

Actively listening to feedback given by student 2 should suggest to the practice educator that this student has interpreted her message negatively. The practice educator needs to check this out (i.e. concerned expression, 'You seem to be a bit discouraged at what I have just said? Or 'You seem a bit...?'. Often the other will finish this unfinished question off by responding with what they do feel. Framing this reflection of feeling as a question can be very important- you are checking out, not making a statement). If the student affirms that s/he has some difficulty with the message, the practice educator could again emphasize the positive nature of this communication, (e.g. 'I wanted to let you know that I am pleased with the way your understanding has progressed over the last week. You really seem to be getting to grips with things.' Match non-verbals, i.e. open, relaxed posture, comfortable eye-contact, warm tone of voice etc.).

d. *Is there a difference in the way in which the educator responds according to the feedback given by each student?* There is a clear difference in the way in which the practice educator should respond, according to the feedback she received.

Exercise 5: Suggested answers:

1. *How much more information would be available from the meeting?* Studies agree that a significantly greater level of information is transmitted via non-verbal as opposed to verbal communication in any face to face interaction. With just the student's written feedback, a lot of potential information would not be available. A great deal more information would therefore be available from the meeting with the student, than from the student's written feedback to questions.

2. *How might that additional information be conveyed?* Non-verbal communication could be transmitted via facial expression, eye gaze, posture, gestures, tone of voice, pitch, rate of speech, and personal appearance etc.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Appendix 1

Exercise 6: Suggested answers:

1. *What non-verbal signals are accompanying the words spoken by the practice educator and student?*
2. *How might the interpretation of the practice educator's and student's verbal messages be altered by the non-verbal information?*

The practice educator initially does not give the student his full attention, and eye contact is largely lacking as he hunts for the form. The student's monotone, slumped posture and worried expression contradict her words and perhaps suggest a sense of anxiety, defeat and weariness. It is unclear by his frown whether the practice educator is beginning to pick up that all is not well, but becomes distracted by the phone ringing.

The student's lack of eye contact and raised tone of voice when answering the question about achievement of action points, may convey a sense of her hiding something. However this is not clear. Remember, non-verbal signals can be highly ambiguous.

The practice educator smiles while conveying some criticism 'It seems that you haven't been keeping up. Oh dear.' This is a mixed message, and when words of criticism are accompanied by a cheerful, smiling face, the result can be the creation of tension and distrust. The receiver senses that the communicator is being less than candid, and in addition, the verbal message is watered down.

The student's words and non-verbals in response, look as if she wants to disclose something or give an explanation. However, the hesitation and hand covering her mouth then suggest that she has decided not to go further. The practice educator's verbal invitation to open up is strongly contradicted by his glancing at the clock, which might be construed as 'I'm not really interested' or 'I haven't got time'. Remember, when verbal and non-verbal signals contradict each other, it is the non-verbal that is most often believed. The student's monotone, blank expression and looking away at the end of this segment, could perhaps suggest a returned sense of defeat.

3. *In the light of your interpretation, how might the practice educator respond to the student in both verbal and non-verbal terms to maximise the effectiveness of the communication?*

There are various points during the communication where the practice educator could have responded differently to maximise the effectiveness of the exchange. The following gives some basic points as guidelines, and you may come up with more.

The practice educator could have used good attending skills to indicate that he was listening, throughout the meeting and especially when asking the question 'is something wrong?' (see section 2).

He could have used a better, 'open' question to begin, (i.e instead of 'So, how do you think things have been going?', asking 'What are your feelings about the placement so far?') (See section 5 on questioning techniques).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Appendix 1

Exercise 6: Suggested answers (continued):

If actively listening, the practice educator should have picked up the mixed message from the student in her response, i.e. her monotone; slumped posture and worried expression contradict her words. The practice educator needs to check this out (i.e. concerned expression, 'You seem to be a bit worried? Or 'You seem a bit...? Is there anything wrong?'), framing the reflection of feeling as a question.

An opportunity to reflect feeling also emerges later in the segment, but again is not taken.

The criticism regarding the non-completion of agreed action points could be delivered more constructively (see Section 4 on giving feedback), and the non-verbal and verbal message could be more closely aligned.

More constructive feedback techniques could involve;

- i. Asking the student to identify any problems herself rather than 'catching her out', through asking e.g. Have you encountered any problems in completing these points?
- ii. Giving the criticism in a 'feedback sandwich', e.g. I see you completed points 1 and 2 well. However, I notice that points 3 and 4 haven't been done.....the last couple of points you have also completed as agreed.
- iii. Be supportive rather than purely critical, i.e. 'What are the obstacles preventing you from getting this done?'
- iv. Find a solution in a problem-oriented rather than person-oriented way, i.e. 'How can we solve this problem?' etc.

Exercise 7: Guidelines for answering questions.

a. The first statement in each pair tends to make us feel either that we are being threatened or that we are seen as insignificant in some way. The more supportive second statement is more likely to engender feelings of support and understanding.

b. 1= Specific rather than generalised; 2= Problem-oriented, not people-oriented; 3=Descriptive, not evaluative; 4= Owned rather than disowned; 5= Validating, not invalidating; 6= Supportive rather than purely critical; 7= Dealing with decisions and actions rather than assumed intentions or interpretations.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Appendix 1

Exercise 8: Suggested answers:

Return to the scenario presented in Exercise 6, in the section on Non-verbal Communication. Using the information and knowledge gained from the above 'structure for giving feedback', note down a list of points that might have improved the appraisal interview scenario.

The following problems should have been addressed:

The appraisal meeting was not scheduled in advance, but at the last minute.

The meeting was interrupted (phonecall).

There did not appear to be an agreement on what would be discussed or how the meeting would proceed. The student was therefore at a disadvantage.

The practice educator did ask an open question to begin with, but did not attend to the answer so that the value was lost.

The criticism could have been delivered in a more sensitive, problem-oriented way; with understanding checked and degree of agreement ascertained (see suggested answers to Exercise 6 above).

As this was only a segment of the meeting, we are unclear how it was closed or whether a plan for improvement was developed. It would be important that a plan was developed.

Exercise 9: Suggested answers.

The following are suggestions, as there are different ways to turn the closed questions into open ones. In order to check out whether you have successfully turned these into open questions, ask yourself whether you could answer your re-worded question with a simple yes/no or short statement of fact (Cole, 1993). If so, they are still closed questions.

1. When did this happen? = What led up to this?

2. Are you enjoying your placement? = What are you enjoying about your placement so far?/ What are you finding challenging about your placement so far?

3. Did the meeting go well? = What happened at the meeting?

4. Was the conference worthwhile? = What did you learn at the conference?

5. Did the client session go OK? = Can you tell me about the client session you did?

Exercise 10: Some Guidelines

a. You may have identified a number of different types of presentations, including meetings with colleagues and/or students, departmental meetings, interdisciplinary meetings, academic meetings, workshop and conference presentations etc. These presentations may range from the formal to the more informal.

d. Identifying your fears and reflecting on your strengths and weaknesses are the first steps in making presentations more effective.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

References

- Adler, R. B. & Elmhurst, J. M. (1999) *Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions* McGraw Hill Singapore
- Blundel, R. (1998) *Effective Business Communication* Prentice Hall Europe
- Clampitt, P. G. (2005) *Communicating for Managerial Effectiveness*. Sage. CA.
- Cole, K. (1993) *Crystal Clear Communication* Prentice Hall Australia
- DeVito, J. (1990) *The Elements of Public Speaking* Harper & Row NY
- Dickson, D. (1999) *Barriers to Communication* in Long, A. (Ed) *Interaction for Practice in Community Nursing* Houndmills Macmillan. Hampshire
- Ellis, R (2002) *Communication Skills: Stepladders to success for the Professional Intellect* Books Bristol
- Gallagher, K., McLelland, B., Swales, C. (1998) *Business Skills: An Active Learning Approach* Oxford Blackwell in
- Hartley, P. & Bruckman, C.G. (2002) *Business Communication* Routledge London.
- Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence*. London. Bloomsbury.
- Goman, C. K. (2002) *Cross-cultural Business Practices* *Communication World*, 19:22-5 in Hargie, O., Dickson, D., Tourish, D. (2004) *Communication Skills for Effective Management*. Palgrave Macmillan. Hampshire.
- Hamilton, C. & Parker, C. (1990) *Communicating for Results* in Hargie, O., Dickson, D., Tourish, D. (2004) *Communication Skills for Effective Management*. Palgrave Macmillan. Hampshire.
- Hargie, O., Dickson, D., Tourish, D. (2004) *Communication Skills for Effective Management*. Palgrave Macmillan. Hampshire.
- Hartley, P. & Bruckman, C.G. (2002) *Business Communication* Routledge London.
- Hill, L. (1996) *Building Effective One-on-One Work Relationships* Harvard Business School Technical Notes, 9-497-028, 1996 cited in Wertheim, E. G. (2005) <http://web.cba.neu.edu/~ewertheim/interper/feedback.htm>
- Kotter, J.P. (1982) *What Effective General Managers Really Do* Harvard Business Review 60 pp156-167 in Adler, R. B. & Elmhurst, J. M. (1999) *Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions* McGraw Hill Singapore
- McClure, P. (2005) *Reflection on Practice Making Practice Based Learning Work: Learning Material*. <http://www.practicebasedlearning.org/resources/materials/docs/reflectiononpractice.pdf>

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

References

Nichols, R. G. and Stevens, L.A. (1990) Listening to People Harvard Business Review 68 pp95-102 in Adler, R. B. & Elmhorst, J. M. (1999) Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions McGraw Hill Singapore

Rasberry, R.W., & Lemoine, L.F. (1986) Effective Managerial Communication Boston MA Kent

Spitzberg, B.H. (1994) The Dark Side of Incompetence in Adler, R. B. & Elmhorst, J. M. (1999) Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions McGraw Hill Singapore

Stewart, J. and Logan, C. (1998) Together: Communicating Interpersonally in Hargie, O., Dickson, D., Tourish, D. (2004) Communication Skills for Effective Management. Palgrave Macmillan. Hampshire.

Stiff, J.B., Hale, J.L., Garlick, R., Rogan, R.G. (1990) Effect of Cue Incongruence and Social Normative Influences on Individual Judgements of Honesty and Deceit Southern Speech Communication Journal 55 pp 206-229 in Adler, R. B. & Elmhorst, J. M. (1999) Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions McGraw Hill Singapore

Tourish, D. and Hargie, O. (Eds) (2004) Key Issues in Organisational Communication. Routledge. London

Venn, P. (2005) <http://www.petervenn.co.uk/adquest/adquest.html>

Wells, G. (1986) How to Communicate NY McGraw-Hill

Wertheim, E. G. (2005) <http://web.cba.neu.edu/~ewertheim/interper/feedback.htm>

Wilson, G. & Nias, D. (1999) in Guerrero, L. and DeVito, J. (Eds) The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Readings Prospect Heights, IL. Waveland Press

PROJECT AIMS

The Project aims to make practitioners more effective at supporting & supervising students in the workplace across a range of healthcare disciplines.

The professions involved in the project are:

- Dietetics
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Radiography

The principal questions to be addressed in this project are:

- What constitutes effective practice in placement education?
- How can effective practice be implemented at organisational, professional and practitioner levels so as to maximise student learning on placement?
- How can this good practice be developed and embedded in the contexts of health and social care within a multicultural workforce?

Project Administrator

Telephone: 028 90 368 458

www.practicebasedlearning.org

