

Conceptualizing the G.E. Course, Purposive Communication, for the Social Sciences and Education

Camilla J. Vizconde

Research Center for Culture, Education, and Social Issues
Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Letters
University of Santo Tomas, Manila

Abstract

This paper defines the parameters of the course, Purposive Communication, and proposes the bases for the working syllabus that would address the needs of the general education program in the Philippines. Qualitative in nature, the research tools comprise interviews with experts in the disciplines of social sciences and documentary analysis of the general education programs in a leading tertiary institution. Findings indicated that discipline chairs and documents continue to uphold the need to align the communication skills with the content courses of the program. Beyond the usual reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, there is a need to introduce other tasks like lesson plan writing and demonstration teaching for education; and various tasks for liberal arts, like translation, action research, and interviews. Generally, it was perceived that communication skills, such as writing and speaking, remain very important in the various disciplines.

Keywords: purposive communication, general education, English, education, social sciences

Introduction

According to Isaganl Cruz (2014), Purposive Communication, should be taken as a multidisciplinary course, that not only continues the language courses (Filipino, English or the Mother-Tongue) but also considers research and the behavioral sciences. This may be seen in the writing of the Minutes of the Meeting:

In college, the writing of minutes of meetings cannot be approached merely as a language skill, but must involve organizational communication (for the management implications), the social sciences (for the developmental implications), critical theory (for the non-verbal implications of the words), accountancy (for the significance of the financial data to be reported), philosophy (for the ethical implications), and other disciplines. (Cruz 2014)

Given the inputs of other disciplines in its conception, purposive communication may be deemed multidisciplinary. In spite of the multidisciplinary approach, however, there is still a need to define its context to address questions in organization, implications, and the type of data to be used.

This paper aims to provide the theoretical bases for purposive communication, define the specific language skills that would help achieve the proficiency desired, and clarify the contexts of its use in education and the social sciences.

Related Literature

Communication

The components of communication remain the same: the people, the message, the channel, the feedback, the code and the noise. Several models of communication have already discussed these components in several variants but maintain key concepts (Infante, Rancer and Womack, 1993), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Communication Models

| Model | People | Message | Channel | Feedback | Code | Noise | Variation |
|--|--------|---------|---------|----------|------|-------|---|
| Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 1 st communication model |
| Wilbur Schramm | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | No information as a channel |
| David Berlo's SMCR Model (David Berlo) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | First to include 5 senses as channels |
| James McCroskey) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Expanded the feedback concept |
| Jürgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson | ✓ | ✓ ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Provides 4 levels of analysis |
| Bruce Westley and Malcolm McLean | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Provides intermediaries of communication ; adapted for mass communication |

Nine contexts for communication can be further segmented into various contexts identified by Dainton and Zelley (2015, p. 5):

Table 2. Contexts of Communication

| Context | Meaning |
|-----------|---|
| Cognitive | The influence our thoughts have on the way we communicate |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Individual and social | How individual differences and social roles play a role in the communication process |
| Interpersonal | Refers to the interaction between two individuals, who most often have a relationship with each other |
| Intercultural | Focuses on interpersonal communication when two people are from different cultures |
| Persuasive | Focusing on different types of persuasion encountered, ranging from the inside of one person's mind to the mass media |
| Mediated | Concerned with how technology influences our interpersonal, group and organizational communication |
| Mass communication | Focuses on the influence of mass-mediated messages |

These contexts also propose several ways of understanding communication in the light of the situations, interlocutors, purpose and directions. Furthermore, Miller (2003), as cited by Dainton and Zelley (2015), provides cultural artifacts and behaviors in organizational communication which can shed light as to what to consider in communication:

Table 3. *Artifacts and Behaviors in Organizational Communication*

| Artifacts | Examples |
|------------------------|---|
| Architecture | Open floor plan, cubicles, offices with windows; size of offices; rented suites versus owned campus |
| Technology | Type of phone system used; up-to-date versus archaic computer/computer systems; availability/type of Internet connection, email, portable digital assistants (PDAs) |
| Dress | Business attire versus casual attire; casual Fridays; dress codes |
| Forms of address | Titles used versus first names; differences in address by hierarchical level |
| Decision-making style | Autocratic versus participatory; rapid versus slow; conservative versus risk-taking |
| Communication patterns | Formal versus informal; friendly versus distant; use of acronyms; unique terms; myths, stories, rituals |

As the artifacts and behaviors provide a structure to a communication situation that happens within an organization, a workplace or a group; and help clarify the context by which the communication takes place, the context provides the materials, the registers, the strategies and styles that may be used during the communication process.

Communication Skills as Practiced

Inasmuch as the ability to communicate effectively remains to be one of the most prominent attributes of university students, Barrie (2004 270) posits that, "graduates of the university will recognize and value communication as a tool for negotiating and creating new understanding, interacting with others, and

furthering their own learning. Hence, the ability to communicate should be well embedded in the curriculum as it seeks a more holistic development of the graduate.

The integration of skills in content, is the focus of American general education courses. As MacDonald acknowledges, citing Maimon, the "Writing Across Disciplines" (WAC) remains an effective and desirable characteristic of the core program.

In Australia, Johnson, Veitch and Dewiyanti (2015) have developed the research-based approach to embedding the communication skills (including teaching, learning and assessment of communication skills) across the curriculum. The framework design is anchored on seven principles, especially the role enhancement in collaborations between disciplinary academics and all practitioners and the integration components. Both principles adhere to the inclusion of the communication skills at any level, in any course requirement found across curricula, and should be observed in the practice of administrators and teachers.

As found in the study of Stroupe, Rundle and Tomita (2016), Japanese teachers hold strong beliefs about learner autonomy. In the Philippine context, the study of Madrunio, Tarrayo, Tupas and Valdez (2016) among tertiary English teachers, reflect that teachers recognize and believe in the concept of learner autonomy but their classroom practices do not reflect this to a great extent. For the "learner's lack the experience of autonomous learning"; the curricula and materials are prescribed; and "the teachers' have limited autonomy to do what they want" (p. 124). Other factors include departmental culture and policies, exam-based teaching and learning, class size, and lack of training in learner autonomy (p. 127).

Given the various views on how communication should be addressed in higher education, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What communication skills are expected from various disciplines in higher education?
2. What are the expected outputs that would manifest these skills?

The study would hopefully contribute to the crafting of a syllabus in purposive communication that would be used in higher education. This would also serve as preliminary data for the inclusion of the communication skills in various disciplines.

Method

Qualitative in nature, the study uses these open-ended questions asked face to face or via email, of various department chairs of a comprehensive university:

1. What communication competencies (skills) should be included in the course?
2. What tasks can help teach these competencies (expected outputs)?

Department chairs who participated included those from education, information and library sciences, history, political science, journalism, literature, communication arts, and Asian studies.

In addition to the open-ended questionnaire, the goals and objectives of the disciplines, the curriculum guides and quality manuals of the various disciplines were analyzed to determine the outcomes. Although the model for the course implementation entails one comprehensive university, which intends to offer the strands mandated by the Department of Education, the course guide to be crafted is intended only for the Education and Social Science strand or department.

Results and Discussion

Communication Skills across Disciplines

As Table 4 below shows, common among the disciplines would be the significance given to speaking and writing skills, as productive skills for acquisition and for the expected outputs.

The results support the findings of Johnson, Veitch, and Dewayanti (2015) that disciplines should embed the communication skills across curriculum because this is one of the basic requirements of the field.

Table 4. Communication Skills and Expected Outputs of Various Departments

| Department | Communication Skills | Expected Outputs |
|---------------|---|---|
| Asian Studies | Written form in which students can be trained to organize their thoughts and perspectives on particular topics of their discipline; should prepare students in peer review style of writing papers. Verbal forms in which students appropriately and confidently deliver their written outputs or generally their academic insights. | Individual research proposal Collaborative writing tasks which would yield a written conceptual framework Colloquium |
| Education | Speaking | Oral presentation Peer teaching Interviews by students of an expert Debates and discussion Critical incident interview |
| | Writing | Extended writing tasks: case study analysis, essay, literature review, report on evaluation of something, research paper, reflective journal/diary Shorter writing tasks: summary or abstract, critical review of one/few articles, annotated bibliography, project/plan proposal, work book/log book, wiki, blog, short-answer exam questions |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| | Doing | Creative performance Creating instructional materials Role play Class participation |
| | Making | Lesson plan Artistic composition Scale model Working prototype Website Computer software application |
| History | Articulate ideas Analytical and critical replies/answers | Action research |
| Journalism | Business writing Enhanced oral/speaking for interpersonal communication | Seminars or full-blown course in business writing English Language Studies- Journalism workshop in dealing with news sources and interpersonal communication by reporters |
| Library Sciences | Oral speaking skills Technical writing skills | Mock job interviews Reporting skills Business letters Memoranda making |
| Literature | Close reading of texts (exegesis) Critical reading and writing skills Semiotic analysis Reviewing books and films Advanced rhetoric Narrative analysis Translation studies Digital literacy research | Exposure to all genres Short writing assignments (rhetoric, analysis, interpretation, criticism) Longer writing assignments (research papers, white papers, policy papers, critical papers) Writing workshops in various genres Writing creative nonfiction Writing across professions (thematic, stylistic, genre analysis, literary adaptations, intersemiotic translation, production of creative portfolio) Translation assignments Retrieval of regional works written in the vernacular; annotation of materials retrieved |
| Media and Communication Studies | Writing for mass media Analyzing theories Critical writing (reviews, criticisms) Translation from one medium to another Reading narratives and dramatic forms | Reading across genres (narrative, non-narrative, dramatic, ludic) Writing about mass media (reviews, criticism) Writing broadcast forms (news, |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| | Scriptwriting (narrative and non-narrative, dramatic) Advanced rhetoric Principles of persuasive communication Reading popular culture Information and media literacy Decoding propaganda and ideology Writing critically about race, class and gender as represented in mass media | plugs, documentaries) Basic dramatic writing Basic scriptwriting Film criticism Production of media portfolio Producing information/communication campaigns Writing and producing advertising, marketing plans Research writing Specialized writing (across profession) Science writing Sports writing Writing about popular culture |
| Political Science | Possess skills in writing and speaking | Academic papers Essays Quizzes and essay exams Class recitations |

Among the responses elicited, the Education department identifies two other skills under communication as "doing" and "creating". These skills do not only combine the reading and writing skills but also include performance and actual presentation of creative activities. The skills required by the Education people seem to be very comprehensivedemanding for this department requires training students in various disciplines of varying grade levels.

The various disciplinary heads generally support Barrie's position (2004) that communication skills are very important attributes of college students, regardless of disciplines.

Notably, the disciplines did not indicate the language to be used for communication. It was implied though that English would be the medium for it is the Department of English that has spearheaded the collection of data.

Expected Outputs for the Disciplines

The diverse outputs from the various disciplines indicate that there is a need to develop a particular course plan that would cater to the requirements of each field. Although most of the disciplines would have research paper or action researches as outputs, there are still other oral and written productions that would be restricted to the discipline.

For example, those in the Education discipline demand that their graduates should be able to craft lesson plans, do action research, and write field studies reports after their classroom observations and immersions.

Those in media require their various types of writing outputs, depending on the type of media: print or broadcast, scriptwriting, review/critique writing, drama writing, news writing, and sports writing.

Other common communication skills include job interviews, resume writing, and professional letter writing. Although most companies accept correspondences via email, the skills and principles for effective Communication remain the same.

Table 5. Attributes Of Graduates of Various Programs

| Program | Attribute |
|------------------|---|
| Arts and Letters | To articulate ideas and express positions as steeped in the Thomasian value of truth, guided by faith and reason. |
| Education | <p>To provide future basic education teachers with a solid understanding of classical and emerging theories, principles and concepts underlying human growth and development as these apply to teaching learning situation</p> <p>To equip students with sound pedagogical know-how and practice vis-à-vis subject matter content as they plan for instruction through maximum effective use of available technological resources</p> <p>To enable future teachers to understand their unique and ever changing roles in assessment of and for learning</p> <p>To deepen students' commitment to scholarship of and for teaching, guided by Christian values.</p> |

Although the expected communication skills are generally similar among the disciplines, the Faculty of Arts and Letters emphasizes articulation or expression and education with pedagogy. As Johnson, Veitch, and Dewiyanti (2015) maintain, communication should be embedded in the curriculum; and as Barrie (2004) promotes, communication is essential in interaction for negotiation and creation of new knowledge.

Furthermore, the contexts of learning for these disciplines also reflect that artifacts and behaviors do play a role in an organization. As proposed by Dainton and Zelley (2015), the organization, in this case, the disciplines, also dictate the type of communication that the graduates should practice effectively.

In the Education discipline, focuses on pedagogy, structures are formal; and approaches may be more conservative (against risk-taking); forms of address would be formal; and architectural design might be that of a classroom. In the same way, those in the Arts and Letters focus on articulation in genera,l being part of the Liberal Arts; structures are still formal; approaches may range from the conservative to the risk-taking; forms of address may range from formal to informal; and the architectural design may begin with the classroom but eventually end up in various types of organization which relate to liberal arts.

Proposed Course Plan

In the light of the study, the recommended course plan was proposed:

| Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) | Course Contents | Learning Activities | Assessment Tasks |
|--|--|---|--|
| ILO 1: Illustrate the process of communication which enables one to speak and write effectively [CILO 1, 2, 4, 5] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of communication models • Theory of Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film viewing • Panel discussion • Case studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-play/ Demonstration • PowerPoint Presentation or Visual Presentation of Models and Theories |
| ILO 2: Demonstrate competence and confidence in writing and speaking [CILO 1, 2, 3, 5] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking • Demonstration • Argumentation • Effective organization of ideas in academic writing and formal oral presentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short film viewing • Peer critiquing • Text analysis • Round table discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation outline/script • Journal critique/review of related literature • Essay portfolio • Mini-debate/ Demonstration of a process |
| ILO 3: Apply communicative competence and technical vocabulary in different speech tasks related to the completion of a research project [CILO 1, 2, 4, 5] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in small talk • Explaining and describing • Discussing • Informing and advising • Giving feedback • Persuading • Managing conflict/ handling complaints • Negotiating • Demonstrating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture-workshop on techniques for effective oral communication • Situational judgment exercises • Collaborative analysis and critique of videos/ simulations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcriptions • Taped interviews |
| ILO 4: Organize a school event (colloquium or any similar event) that would show the capability to speak in public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing presentations in specific disciplines • Citations • Language editing and proofreading of written outputs • Developing rubrics for evaluating oral | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group dynamics • Peer critiquing • Lecture discussion • Mock demonstrations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colloquium/ Demonstration • Presenting and defending the final research paper • Skill demonstration with annotation |

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| using a prepared research paper [CILO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] | presentations and research papers | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|

The course plan is outcomes-based because this is the approach suggested for the tertiary level. The plan suggests learning outcomes that may be accomplished based on the content, activities and tasks. Its scope is appropriated for a period of 18 weeks or one semester.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The disciplines' needs form the bases for crafting the course that would be implemented in the new curriculum. In the study, there are a number of skills that cut across disciplines just as some disciplines add more specialized topics and outputs needed in their programs. Writing and speaking, which are productive skills, seem to be the prominent skills emphasized in all the disciplines. Expected attributes of graduates also gave premium to these skills.

The following recommendations are also endorsed:

1. to survey or interview practitioners in the field for other facets of the workplace that have not been considered in the study;
2. to broaden the survey to include other universities;
3. to craft and pilot-test the appropriate course syllabus for Purposive Communication.

Creating a new course presents challenges to the curriculum but its inclusion would always be an opportunity to enhance a program. In this case, the purposive communication course, which seems to be geared towards a more specific form of communication, should be able to assist students in meeting the needs of their academic program.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Rodrigo Litao, Dr. Alice Maghuyop and Asst. Prof. Pia Patricia Tenedero in crafting the course plan for Purposive Communication. They have served part of the committee that worked for the creation of the plan.

References

- Barrie, S.C. (2004). A research-based approach to generic graduates attribute policy. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 23(3): 261-275.
- Commission on Higher Education. (2013). *General education curriculum: holistic understandings, intellectual and civic competencies*. (CHED Memorandum 20 Series of 2013). Available in <http://www.ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/CMO-No.20-s2013.pdf>.
- Cruz, I. (2014). Purposive Communication. *The Philippine Star*.
- Dainton, M. & Zelle, E. (2015). *Applying communication theory for professional life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Infante, D., Rancer, A. & Womack, D. (1993). *Building communication theory*. Illinois, USA: Waveland Press.
- Johnson, S., Veitch, S. & Dewayanti, S. (2015). A framework to embed communication skills across curriculum: a design-based research approach. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 12(4): 1-14.
- Madrunio, M., et al. (2016). "Learner autonomy: English language teachers' beliefs and practices in the Philippines." In Barnard, R. and Li, J.'s *Language Learner Autonomy: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Asian Contexts*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: IDP Education (Cambodia) Ltd, 114-133.
- Pearson, J. et al. (2011). *Human communication*. USA: McGraw Hill.
- Stanton, N. (2004). *Mastering communication*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Twombly, S. (1992). "Student perspectives on general education in a research university: an exploratory study." *The Journal of General Education*, 1(41): 238-272.