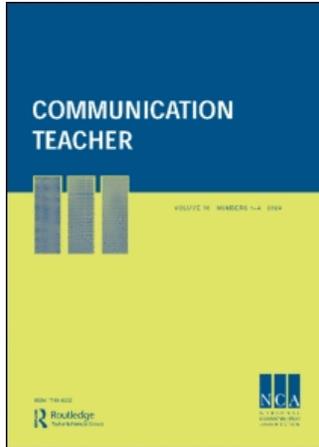


This article was downloaded by:[Bodie, Graham]
On: 19 May 2008
Access Details: [subscription number 792262800]
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Communication Teacher

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713695733>

Student as Communication Skills Trainer: From Research to “Concept Keys”

Graham D. Bodie

Online Publication Date: 01 April 2008

To cite this Article: Bodie, Graham D. (2008) 'Student as Communication Skills Trainer: From Research to “Concept Keys”', *Communication Teacher*, 22:2, 51 — 55

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/17404620802023185
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17404620802023185>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Student as Communication Skills Trainer: From Research to “Concept Keys”

Graham D. Bodie

Objectives: (1) Students will become familiar with academic research; (2) students will understand that communication training should be based on sound research

Course(s): Interpersonal Communication, Public Speaking Fundamentals, Business and Professional Communication (or Any Skills-Based Course)

Rationale

Although textbooks are filled with practical communication advice, many students overlook the importance of basing practical advice about communication on quality research. This oversight is important for two reasons. First, given the explosion of self-help remedies focused on communication (e.g., *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*), students should learn to distinguish between communication myths and best practices. Second, some students are likely to implement communication training programs in their future organizations. For programs to be successful, future practitioners should have experience translating scholarly research into language appropriate for non-expert audiences. The proposed activity teaches students how to find scholarly research that addresses a communication concept and translate this research into “keys for success.” Students have the chance to become communication skills trainers and trainees, and evaluate the success of communication skills programs.

Activity

Student workgroups develop a set of fundamental skills into 3-week training programs with the goal of teaching their concept to a non-expert audience (i.e., their classmates). Thus, each student acts as both a communication skills trainer and

Graham D. Bodie, Louisiana State University Department of Communication Studies. Email: gbodie@purdue.edu

a trainee. This activity was designed for a semester-long (17-week) class of 20–30 students.

Weeks 1 and 2: Group Formation

During weeks 1 and 2, groups of five to six students choose a concept—a basic communication competency that consists of fundamental skills—for their semester project. For example, “Effective Presentational Speaking” is a concept that combines several fundamental skills (e.g., audience analysis, identification of main points). Each of these fundamental skills represents a “key” of successful practice.

Weeks 3–5: Scholarly Research and Bibliography

During week 3, students are introduced to scholarly research and criteria for assessing published material (e.g., date of publication, authority, publication quality; see <http://gemini.lib.purdue.edu/core> for the modules used in the present application). An annotated bibliography is due at the beginning of the fifth week of classes that may contain journal articles, scholarly books, and book chapters as long as they are applicable to the group’s concept. Grades are based on completeness of the source list and adherence of the bibliography to APA guidelines. All group members receive the same grade for their work on the bibliography.

Weeks 6 and 7: Key Development

After reading relevant sources, students develop 50 keys that best represent their concept (e.g., The 50 most important skills for effective presentational speaking), due at the end of week 6. A key is a pithy statement that reflects a small amount of information related to some larger concept. For example, to represent the importance of audience analysis in presentational speaking, one group in my interpersonal communication course developed the key “Walk a Mile in the Audience’s Shoes.” This key is brief enough to be remembered by learners and specific enough to be representative of the skill (audience analysis) necessary for effective presentational speaking. Students also must provide the source(s) used to create each key. This helps demonstrate the connection between research and practice. The list of 50 keys is graded on completeness, faithfulness to the research, and creativity. During week 7, the instructor works with each group to finalize a set of 15 keys that serve as the basis for their 3-week training programs.

Weeks 8–12: Micro-Lesson Development

Each 3-week program contains 15 micro-lessons, one for each weekday. A micro-lesson contains three elements: the key, three to four bullet points expanding upon core components of the key, and food-for-thought (FFT) questions.

Micro-lessons start with the key which is explicated by a series of bullet points (see Figure 1). Each bullet point either: (a) explains what the key means in ordinary language (e.g., “Walking A Mile in the Audience’s Shoes” means considering the audience’s perspective), (b) provides specific examples of how to engage in the requisite skill (e.g., use familiar words and concepts), or (c) provides motivation to utilize the key by suggesting positive outcomes of key use (e.g., increased audience

Figure 1 Example of a micro-lesson.

Concept Keys—Unlocking Knowledge, One Key at a Time

Effective Presentational Speaking
Key #1: Walk a Mile in the Audience’s Shoes.

- *Your audience will be better able to comprehend and understand your topic if they are able to relate it to their unique lives and experiences. So to have the attention of your audience, approach your topic from the audience’s perspective, not your own. This will assist you in bridging the gap between you and your audience, making your presentation more effective.*
- *The audience will trust you more if you show that you can relate to them. This includes using words and concepts the audience knows and is concerned about. This breeds interest, and an interested audience will allow for a better presentation.*
- *Make sure to incorporate ways in which your audience can benefit from the topic of your presentation. Explain to them how they would benefit if the problem you’re addressing in your presentation could benefit them in some way. The audience will have a better understanding of your presentation if it involves something they are concerned about.*
- *A presentation that an audience views as not related to them will not succeed in winning attention or achieving its goals. Use words and concepts that your audience will perceive as effective yet understandable, and you’ll have no choice but to succeed.*

Food For Thought!

Now you want to make a decision about how to increase your use of this Key. Answering the following questions should point you in the right direction. Be sure to click on the Finish button below once you have answered all the questions.

(1) How would you evaluate your use of this Key in your current work environment?

- (A) Not Effective
- (B) Slightly Effective
- (C) Moderately Effective
- (D) Very Effective
- (E) Extremely Effective

(2) To what extent would increasing your effective use of this Key help you achieve your short-term or your long-term goals?

- (A) Not Helpful
- (B) Slightly Helpful
- (C) Moderately Helpful
- (D) Strongly Helpful
- (E) Extremely Helpful

(3) To what extent do you plan to develop your ability to effectively use this Key?

- (A) Not a Priority
- (B) Slight Priority
- (C) Moderate Priority
- (D) Strong Priority
- (E) Extremely High Priority

(4) What are you actually going to do to improve your effective use of this Key? (Maximum: 360 characters)

© Copyright All rights reserved.

interest) and/or ramifications for non-use (e.g., not achieving goals). Finally, micro-lessons end with a set of standard FFT questions that encourage reflection on personal key use.

Three sets of five micro-lessons are turned in throughout the semester by each group. At the beginning of week 8, the end of week 9, and the end of week 11, students turn in 1 week's worth of micro-lessons (five); micro-lessons are graded for content, clarity, accuracy, and derivation from research. To demonstrate the many iterations through which training programs should go, students modify each micro-lesson based on instructor comments. Modified micro-lessons are also turned in and subsequently re-edited during week 9 and week 11. Final micro-lessons are due at the beginning of week 12.

Weeks 13–15: Program Dissemination

For the final part of the activity, students act as trainees. For ease of dissemination, I chose to utilize an e-delivery system called Concept Keys (CK) (Bodie, Powers, & Fitch-Hauser, 2006); however, specified email content can be created in similar learning systems. Ultimately, any program that allows a micro-lesson to be sent each day through email will work.

Before the start of week 13, trainees register at the CK website by creating a unique username and password (see <http://www.conceptkeys.com/education/studenthelp.php>). CK stores program information (e.g., the number of keys completed/remaining, answers to FFT questions) for each student. Instructors have access to all student information (<http://www.conceptkeys.com/education/teachers.php>) while students have access to their own database.

Starting Monday of week 13, trainees are sent an email reminder at the beginning of each weekday indicating a particular micro-lesson is ready. When students click the URL located in their email, they are sent to the login page where they access the daily micro-lesson and answer daily FFT questions. Each Friday, trainees take automatically generated weekly retention quizzes. The program runs for 3 weeks; thus, students are told to complete programs by Sunday of week 15.

Debriefing

During the first class period after program termination, trainees take an online certification exam generated by KeyEd software. This exam assesses concept knowledge and micro-lesson retention. During the second class period after program termination, the average certification scores of each program are discussed with the class as one measure of program evaluation. The class also shares experiences as trainer and trainee, focusing on the problems and potential pitfalls of translating scholarly research to a non-expert audience. Students and instructor engage in dialogue about whether each of the programs achieved its overall goal (i.e., translating research that speaks to fundamental communication skills into understandable and easy-to-implement keys).

Appraisal

This particular activity is applicable to a variety of classes, and material can be modified based on course objectives. For instance, students can develop as many or as few micro-lessons as needed or desired. The main challenge students faced was how to read and understand scholarly sources. Their task was to produce fundamental keys to behaviors that are quite complex; thus, the success of this activity depends on student ability to understand scholarly research and its implications. The main challenge faced by the instructor is the amount of time devoted to the successful implementation of this activity. Finally, as with any group project, the tendency for groups to “divide and conquer” tasks can be problematic. Thus, instructors may wish to devote class time to the project to help avoid such behavior. Overall, this activity seems to aid in demonstrating the utility of scholarly research to undergraduates and exposing future leaders and trainers to a useful approach to teaching basic communication skills.

References and Suggested Readings

- Bodie, G. D., Fitch-Hauser, M., & Powers, W. G. (2008). Teaching social skills: Integrating an online learning system into traditional curriculum. In R. Zheng & P. S. Ferris (Eds.), *Understanding online instructional modeling: Theories and practices* (pp. 87–112). Hershey, PA: Idea Group.
- Bodie, G. D., Powers, W. G., & Fitch-Hauser, M. (2006). Chunking, priming, and active learning: Toward an innovative and blended approach to teaching communication related skills. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 14, 119–136.
- Bonk, C. J. (2001). *Online training in an online world*. Bloomington, IN: CourseShare.com.
- Datamonitor. (2004, July 14). *E-learning in education*. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from <http://datamonitor-market-research.com>
- Derntl, M., & Motschnig-Pitrik, R. (2005). The role of structure, patterns, and people in blended learning. *Internet and Higher Education*, 8, 111–130.