



Certificate III Education Support

CHC30808

Communicate with Students



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About This Workbook

This workbook is divided into sections which will cover the competencies and skills required.

This course has several resources:

- Student Communication Workbook (this workbook): This resource provides a self paced learning program and may also be used as a reference resource;

plus

- On-line course: Ask your teacher/assessor to register you in this on-line resource.

This course has been designed to appeal to differing learning styles, so the information and learning experiences are presented in different ways.

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes are shown at the beginning of each section. Learning outcomes match the competencies you must demonstrate to be successful in this course of study.

Learning Icons

Throughout each book icons are used to indicate the activity or purpose of the text. The icons used in this course are explained on the following page.

Prerequisites

1. Sound literacy skills.
2. Sound numeracy skills.
3. Basic computer skills, e.g. able to use a mouse and limited keyboard skills

As you work through this workbook you will encounter different symbols that indicate a task for you to complete.



The introduction to the topic and overview of the units, and includes your instructions, assessment and objectives.



This symbol indicates there are Internet sites that will support your learning and provide further resources.



You are to complete the work indicated by this symbol in your notebook.



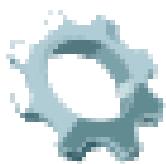
Work that is to be completed by you and returned to your teacher use this icon. You are to return your work primarily through e-mail where possible, otherwise by mail or fax.



You may be asked to listen to or prepare a piece of audio work. Read the instructions carefully.



In some instances, your work may be returned by fax. This is indicated by the icon on the left.



A practical exercise is indicated by this symbol.



Supporting resources may be provided in CD-ROM format. Locations where these resources are to be used display this icon.



This symbol indicates “self-check” questions. Once you have completed the question you need to check your answers from the self check pages at the back of the book.



Unit Overview

This unit provides covers the skills required for education support workers to effectively communicate with students. The unit is suitable for participants who are entering an education workplace, e.g. a school or home learning environment.

Effective communication is vital to establishing safe and positive learning environments. This is a core skill that is required of all persons working in school or educational organisations.

The Unit of Competency, CHCEDS313 *Communicate with students* contains the following elements and performance criteria:

Communicate effectively with students

- 1.1 Use positive and respectful communication styles with students in all situations
- 1.2 Use active listening techniques
- 1.3 Explore students interests and concerns through conversation where appropriate
- 1.4 Communicate clearly guidelines and limits for students' behaviour
- 1.5 Consider non-verbal cues when interacting with students
- 1.6 Use communication strategies that are developmentally appropriate for effective interaction and problem solving with students

Use current recognised good practice techniques of communication .

- 2.1 Communicate with students to maintain the integrity of individual rights, self-determination and personal dignity
- 2.2 Adapt style and language to accommodate different cultural values, practices and cultural sensitivities
- 2.3 Conduct interactions with young people in a fair, equitable and positive manner
- 2.4 Report accurately disclosures that indicate a that a student is at risk of harm in accordance with statutory requirements and organisation procedures

Critical aspects of evidence

The following evidence is critical for competency in this unit:

- demonstrated ability to communicate effectively, verbally and non-verbally, with students, taking into account student's age, level of development, cultural background and needs



Section 1

Communication

On completion of this section, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the importance of effective communication.
2. Explain the scope of communication strategies that should be considered when developing positive communication with young people.



Communication

"Seek first to understand and then to be understood"

Stephen Covey

The ability to communicate well with students is the key to success in your role as an education support worker. The word 'communication' is derived from the Latin word *communicare* which means "to have in common".

Communication develops common meaning, trust and positive relationships. Conflicts are often the result of poor communication between people.

Generally communication can be grouped into two basic principles of effective communication:

- verbal communication - listening, speaking and writing
- non-verbal communication

These principles should be embedded in all of your communication with students and other staff members.

Common understanding, the goal of good communication, comes through an understanding that:

- People interpret words and behaviour differently. Each person interprets what they see and hear through their own sense or perception. Our knowledge, attitudes, values and previous experiences form our perception. Misinterpretations often form at this level as differing perceptions interpret spoken words or actions differently.
- Misinterpretations can be reduced by persons conducting checks for accuracy; that is, seeking feedback as to how a message is being interpreted.



Section 2

Verbal Communications - Listening

On completion of this section, participants will be able to:

1. Use effective listening skills in their conversations with young people.
2. Identify barriers to active listening and work against them.
3. Reflect on own current practices and identify ways to improve own listening.



Effective Listening

A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something."

Wilson Mizner

Listening is a vital yet underestimated part of the communication process. You spend more of your waking hours listening than in any other activity.

Good listening is one of the most important skills to have if working with young people. Much can be gained by improving your own listening skills.

When the question of how to improve communication comes up, most attention is paid to making people better speakers or writers rather than on making them better listeners .

To a certain extent, listening is more crucial than speaking. The listener arguably bears more responsibility than the speaker to make sense of the conversation. Studies show that 75% of oral communication is ignored or misunderstood. Even rarer is the ability to listen for the deepest meaning in what people say, so you understand what is really going on.

This section of your training is vital as it will require you to reflect on how you do this most common of tasks and work diligently to improve it.

What is listening

We hear sounds around us but often we hear them without really listening to them. So listening is a very different process from hearing:

- Hearing refers to the physical fact of receiving sounds; it is a passive act which happens even when we are asleep.
- Listening however, is an active process which means work. To listen we must not only hear but also pay attention, understand and assimilate what we hear. Listening involves interaction. Have you sometimes felt that someone was hearing what you said without really listening?

Listening involves a conscious effort on your part not only to hear but to understand. Learning to listen can only be achieved by sustained and conscious effort on your part. This will be one of the most challenging learnings you have in this course!

The more you try to listen, the more you will understand.

The keys to listening are silence and concentration:

- Silence: Allow the other person to speak and be heard.
- Concentration: Focus your mind to hear and understand what the other person is really saying. Your effort to listen will bring positive results and a sense of achievement.

As you become a better listener, you will become a more efficient education support worker as well as growing your own confidence.

Barriers to effective listening

The following material is derived from the work of Michael Webb (2006).

I. Knowing the answer

"Knowing the answer" means that you think you already know what the speaker wants to say, before they actually finish saying it or even before they have uttered a word! You generally cut them off, don't allow them to say a word or try to complete their sentences.

This is a common problem when a discussion gets heated or you are attempting to discipline someone. The discussion can degrade quickly.

By interrupting the speaker before letting them finish, you're explicitly saying that you don't value what is being said. Showing respect to the speaker is a crucial element of good listening.

The "knowing the answer" barrier also causes the listener to pre-judge what the speaker is saying; you have become close minded and prejudiced.

A good listener tries to keep an open, receiving mind looking for facts and emotions, acquiring new ideas or insights. By 'knowing the answer' you are simply reinforcing your own existing points of view and nothing is being solved.

Strategy for overcoming:

You can start to overcome the "knowing the answer" barrier by simply forcing yourself to wait for three seconds after the speaker finishes before beginning your reply.

Three seconds can seem like a long time during a discussion, and following this rule also means that you might have to listen for a long time before the other person finally stops speaking. But, they will unconsciously know you value them and are listening; they will be more receptive to what you say and will give your response more credence or value.

Keeping your mind open and mouth closed during conversation requires discipline and practice. Another strategy is to make a personal commitment to learn at least one unexpected, worthwhile thing during every conversation. The decision to look for something new and interesting will ensure your conversations with young people are never dull.

Activity 2.1

Reflect on a past conversation when you may have acted as though you 'knew the answer'. What might have been observed of your behaviour at this time by an external person?

2. Trying to be helpful

A further barrier to good listening is the "trying to be helpful" syndrome. Although trying to be helpful may seem beneficial, it interferes with listening because the listener is thinking about how to solve what he or she perceives to be the speaker's problem.

Consequently, they miss what the speaker is actually saying. It's worth emphasizing that the goal of good listening is simply to listen. Interrupting the speaker in order to offer advice disrupts the flow of conversation, and impairs the listener's ability to understand the speaker's experience.

Trying to be helpful while listening also implies that you've made certain judgments about the speaker. That can raise emotional barriers to communication, as judgments can sometimes mean that the listener doesn't have complete respect for the speaker.

Human beings - especially young people - are social animals; simply knowing that another person has listened and understood is empowering. Often that's all a person needs in order to solve the problems on his or her own. If you as the listener step in and heroically offer the solution, you're implying that you're more



capable of seeing the solution than the speaker is.

Strategy for overcoming:

If you believe you have valuable advice that the speaker isn't likely to know, then politely ask if you may offer what you see as a possible solution. Wait for the speaker to clearly invite you to go ahead before you offer your advice.

Activity 2.2

As an adult working with young people you may fall into a sense of complacency, i.e. adult knows best/everything. In what situations do you think such an approach would be most disruptive to developing positive relationships with young people?



3. Treating discussion as competition

Some people feel compelled to challenge every point the speaker makes, even if they inwardly agree. Discussion then becomes a contest, with a score being kept for who wins the most points by arguing. (Sound familiar from the playground...)

Treating discussion as competition is one of the most serious barriers to good listening. It greatly inhibits the listener from stretching and seeing a different point of view. It can also be frustrating for the speaker.

Strategy for overcoming:

Except in a rare case where you truly disagree with absolutely everything the speaker is saying, it is best to avoid dismissing their statements completely. Instead, affirm the points of agreement. Try to voice active agreement whenever you do agree, and be very specific about what you disagree with.

A good overall listening principle is to be generous with the speaker. Offer affirmative feedback as often as you feel comfortable doing so.

4. Trying to influence or impress

Because good listening depends on listening just for the sake of listening, any ulterior motive will diminish the effectiveness of the listener. Examples of 'ulterior motives' include trying to impress or influence the speaker, impress observing audience or other adults.

A person working on an agenda other than simply to understand what the speaker is thinking and feeling will not be able to pay complete attention while listening.

It is an accepted medical principle that people can understand language about two or three times faster than they can speak. This implies that a listener has time to 'waste' for thinking about other things while listening. A good listener knows how to use that spare capacity to think about what the speaker is talking about.

A listener with an ulterior motive, such as to influence or impress someone, will probably use the spare capacity to think about their "next move" in the conversation instead of focusing on understanding the speaker.

Strategy for overcoming:

One strategy is to make note of your internal motives while you're listening. Simply by noticing your motives, any ulterior motives will eventually fade, allowing you to let go and to listen just for the sake of listening.

5. Reacting to red flag words

Words can provoke a reaction in the listener that wasn't necessarily what the speaker intended. When that happens the listener won't be able to hear or pay full attention to what the speaker is saying. Red flag words or expressions trigger an unexpectedly strong association in the listener's mind, often because of the listener's private beliefs or experiences.

Good listeners have learned how to minimize the distraction caused by red flag words, but a red flag word will make almost any listener momentarily unable to hear with full attention.

An important point is that the speaker may not have actually meant the word in the way that the listener understood. However, the listener will be so distracted by the red flag that she will not notice what the speaker actually did mean to say.

Red flag words don't always provoke emotional reactions. Sometimes they just cause slight disagreements or misunderstandings. Whenever a listener finds himself disagreeing or reacting, he should be on the lookout for red flag words or expressions.

Strategy for overcoming:

When a speaker uses a word or expression that triggers a reflexive association, you as a good listener can ask the speaker to confirm whether she meant to say what you think she said.

When you hear a word or expression that raises a red flag, try to stop the conversation, if possible, so that you don't miss anything that the speaker says. Then ask the speaker to clarify and explain the point in a different way.



Activity 2.3

Think of the type of language you hear in the school. Which words are 'red flaggers' for you? Make a list of four words or phrases that trigger an emotional response in yourself. Be honest...

6. Believing in language

One barrier is "believing in language"; a misplaced trust in the precision of words and that all words have one specific meaning. Meaning must always be actively negotiated between the speaker and the listener.

It's not correct to think that a word's dictionary definition is the only meaning that can be assumed when the word is used in speech. Words have a unique effect in the mind of each person, because each person's experience or perception of the world is different. These differences may be small, but the overall effect of the differences can become large enough to cause misunderstanding.

A worse problem is that words work by pointing at experiences shared by speaker and listener. If the listener hasn't had the experience that the speaker is using the word to point at, then the word points at nothing. Worse still, the listener may quietly substitute a different experience to match the word. For example, if a child from a disadvantaged home uses language to explain their lack of food in the home, would you be able to correctly interpret the inferences and emotions inherent in the words?

Strategy for overcoming:

A good listener will practice mistrusting the meaning of words. Ask the speaker supporting questions to cross-verify what the words mean to him.

Don't assume that words or expressions mean exactly the same to you as they do to the speaker. You can stop the speaker and question the meaning of a word. Of course, doing that too regularly becomes a distraction but if you suspect that the speaker's usage of the word might be slightly different, you ought to take time to explore that, before the difference leads to misunderstanding.

7. Mixing up detail with wide vision

Sometimes people pay such close attention to detail, that they miss the overall meaning or context of a situation.

Some speakers prefer concrete, detailed explanations. They might explain a complex situation just by naming or describing its characteristics in no particular order.

Other speakers when they have to explain complex situations, prefer to begin by giving a sweeping, abstract or over-arching view.

Good explanations usually involve both types, with the big-picture view providing context and overall meaning, and the specific view providing interesting and clarifying examples.

When trying to communicate complex information, the speaker needs to accurately shift between the two positions in order to show how the details fit into the big picture. However, speakers often forget to signal that they are shifting from one to another, which can cause confusion or misunderstanding for the listener.

Each style is prone to weaknesses in communication. For example, people focusing on the big picture often have trouble telling their listener the details that are more important and how those details fit into the overall context. They may also fail to tell their listener that they are moving from one thought to another.

The 'detailed' speaker, however, may confuse their listeners with obscure abstractions, using concepts that are so removed from the world that their listeners get lost.

Strategy for overcoming:

A good listener can explicitly ask the speaker for the overall context or for specific details. Having an accurate picture of how the details fit together is crucial to understanding the speaker's thoughts.

An effective approach is to encourage the speaker to supply missing context or examples by asking him open-ended questions. Asking open-ended questions when listening is generally more effective than asking closed-ended, limited answer, questions.

Examples:

Open: *"Can you give me a concrete example of that?"*

Closed: *"Would such-and-such be an example of what you're talking about?"*

The strategy of asking open-ended questions, instead of closed-ended or leading questions, is an important element of good listening.

How to improve listening skills

Listening is not some background activity that goes on throughout our lives. It is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to listen or not listen: you control the process.

If you want to be a more effective listener:

- Participate: Be prepared to ask questions and make comments.
- Broaden your attention span: Observe everything that goes on by keeping your eyes open and looking at the speaker.
- Control your emotions, be diplomatic and tactful: Should you disagree with an issue or a statement, keep control of yourself. If you disagree with something that has been said, state your point of view in a tactful manner.
- Position yourself for listening: Choose a location that allows you to see and hear what is happening.
- Listen between the lines of the conversation: “Lines” are the words the speaker is saying; in-between the lines are the non-verbal signs the speaker is sending like the tone of voice, the gestures, the facial expression. Listening between the lines gives you a great deal of information about how to interpret what the speaker is saying.
- Understanding group dynamics: Be respectful of the rights of the other members of the group. Let others speak their thoughts without interrupting all the time.

Effective feedback is very important to good listening. As a listener you have a duty to respond.

You can improve your skills in feedback:

- By being prepared to give feedback which can be verbal, non-verbal or both.
- By making feedback clear and accurate. Your response to the other person should be prompt and specific to a single message.
- By monitoring your own feedback. If your feedback is not interpreted as you mean it, it serves no purpose. Don’t forget that sometimes you might have to repeat or clarify a feedback response.

Results of good listening

- Good listening allows you to share with other people, to make friends and to be more successful in your studies and later in your job.
- It also helps solve problems: By encouraging people to talk about their problems, you can help them find solutions to them.
- It provides information: The more information you get the more you are able to make good decisions in your life.
- It improves relationships: Listening is often the solid basis of friendship as well as of co-operation in family and work situations.

The way you choose to listen can influence others. How you listen may well determine how others will listen to.



Section 3

Verbal Communications - Speaking

On completion of this section, participants will be able to:

1. Use appropriate language patterns that foster connection with young people.
 2. Use language developmentally appropriate for the student.
 3. Accommodate different cultural values, practices and cultural sensitivities in their speech.
- 2.3 Interact with young people in a fair, equitable and positive manner.



Purpose

Young people construct their views of themselves and the world in which they live on their daily experiences. School is a core element of their lives for many years and you will play a part in this element.

One of the most important experiences an education support worker may provide for young people is to simply listen and talk appropriately with them. While you will have a role in discipline it is through the daily positive interactions that you will develop relationships that are based on respect and understanding rather than simple authority. By developing long term relationships with young people you also assist them to construct their views of their world and themselves; you have a great opportunity to ensure that this is positive.

What not to do

What not to do

Here are the five worst things to do when you are attempting to communicate (speaking) with young people:

Comparison

"Why don't you behave like your brother in Year X?"

Overtalking

"Richard, I have told you a thousand times today to not run on the concrete pathways; don't say anything, you know what I told you!"

Being a martyr

"I do this because I'm trying to make you safe. I tell you to stop running on the concrete and you do not do that!"

The Prophet

"You're lazy; you won't do well in the coming test!"

Lecturing

"Sit up and pay attention...Now this is what you need to know..."

All of these approaches are doomed to failure. Some of these approaches may make you feel good, but it is a certainty that over the medium and long term, the level and depth of your communication with students will diminish and have little effect on their behaviour, the building of positive self-esteem or enhancing their learning. There are alternatives!

Some positive approaches

Here are some simple approaches that shift the focus from you to the student in terms of co-operation. You need to keep your statements short and to the point (No sense waffling!). However remember that one approach is not going to work with every child.

Trial the approaches; you may have to use more than one to see a positive response. Many of these responses are recommended for positive parenting (e.g. Grose, 2005) but your role as an education worker is very similar.

Describe the problem or what you see

This approach provides an invitation to the student to do something, e.g. *'You are very noisy.'* Some students will respond to this gentle approach; many will not, so be prepared to try another approach.

Give students information

Sometimes students will respond simply to you providing the bare information as to why something needs to be done, e.g. *"The sports equipment needs to be put away as the next class is coming shortly."*

Remember they still might not respond; you have got many more to try.

Clearly state the rule or school expectations

Using the code or rules of the school/class brings the power of the group to the situation, e.g. *"Our school code states that we are all polite to one another. So we do not shout; please speak quietly."* However make certain that these rules are clearly promoted at all times!



Give the personal expectations

This is where you state what you want and how you feel about the situation however you do not lay any blame, e.g. *"I am not happy when the reading books are left all around the room as I feel the room is a mess. Let us clean this up so that I feel better."*

This approach has some success with young people who are defensive or have low self esteem.

If this does not still work, then there are more approaches to try.

Write a note

If you have time (certainly not to be used when a student is misbehaving in the playground) write the student a note, e.g. *"Dear Jim, Please do not drop any more papers in the grounds. You must feed me; I am hungry!" The Rubbish Bin*

Remember, there are many approaches and it is only through trial and error (and a large dose of experience) that you will use an approach that is successful. Some young people value the power and argument that can come from being instructed what to do. Don't fall into their trap; keep following the approaches and eventually some success will come your way.

Tell the student what you will do

This approach doesn't tell students what to do; it tells them what you will do, e.g. *"I will listen to you when you have calmed down and stopped yelling."*

Provide choices

Some young people like to make a decision themselves. If you tell them what to do and you take control away from them they feel even more insecure. Provide them with a choice between two ways of behaving and they will select one because they are in control, e.g. *"You start that work you like if you are quiet. If you continue to speak loudly, then you will need to work in that group there."*

Being a broken record

Perhaps we should now say, like a CD with scratches. There are some students who are 'bush lawyers' and just want to participate in an argument with you hoping they will win. Do not get involved in arguments! If it is about routine or school code, revert back to that and stop the debate. If it is about another item, then simply defer discussion until your instructions are followed.

State your instruction and then keep repeating your instruction despite the student's attempts to engage you in an argument. e.g. Aide: *"It's time to to pick up the sports equipment."*



Student: *"The next class can do it."*

Aide: *"It's time to to pick up the sports equipment."*

Student: *"The next class will only get them out again."*

Aide: *"It's time to to pick up the sports equipment."*

When.....then

Trying using a when.....then statement, e.g. *"When you have have put away the MAB blocks then we will have a song."*

This approach focuses the requirement on the student to co-operate; placing the pleasant after the unpleasant. That is part of the real world: Having the good things once the bad things are done.

Invite cooperation

We have all come across some students (at all ages) who for their own reasons just will not do what they are told. This small group are very ego-centric and like to have their own way as a means of appearing to be in control of their life. These student respond more to being asked. When using this approach you must make certain that your body language is congruent with your verbal request; in other words Ask, Don't tell; Smile. Example: *"Can you help me to make certain this area is clean by putting that equipment away?"*

Building self esteem

As an education worker a core element of your role when interacting with students, regardless of their ages, is to contribute to the circumstances that lead to positive self-esteem within the student.

It is a huge challenge.

Using praise and positive statements excessively is like drinking large amounts of soft drink. It loses its taste and sense of importance if it is used too regularly and becomes meaningless.

Being positive and providing praise when it is not deserved will only diminish your words and yourself in the eyes of the student. Regardless of their age, they are intelligent enough to know what is true and what is not. Excessive praise leads to rejection.



When using praise use language that promotes optimism, explains their achievements and doesn't link their self-esteem to the outcomes of their endeavours.

Tell me what you think

If the only positive comments a student gets come from the teacher or education support worker, then it becomes very easy to dismiss or ignore. Lead and encourage them to explain their own achievements in their own language. This makes the praise real and is self assessed against their own image of themselves, e.g. *"Tell me about your piece of art. What do you think about it?"*

Encourage optimism: Attribute good results to personal ability

Optimists attribute their success to ability or endeavour, e.g. *"I did well in that maths test because I studied hard and I am pretty good solving problems."*

Positive self remarks attribute success to ability and endeavour and will then be applied to other circumstances/settings. In your conversations with students encourage the skills of optimism; encourage students to give credit to their own ability and self acknowledge when something has been done well.

Focus your language on student's effort, improvement, contribution and enjoyment

A useful technique for students who are low risk-takers and low-achievers is to focus your comments on their effort, improvement and enjoyment of an activity. Ensure you focus on the processes rather than the result of the student's endeavours.

e.g. Effort: *"You are trying so hard with your these maths algorithms, Jennifer."*

Improvement: *"Your reading has improved so much since we started these sessions; great work!"*

Contribution: *"I really appreciate your help in putting away the art materials. You were a great help!"*

Enjoyment: *"Its great to see you having fun in Art."*

Encouragement: You can do it!

Everyone needs someone to believe in them. Children and young adults need someone in their lives who says and believes that they can achieve. Be explicit in your encouragement; don't assume they will infer you know they can do it. State your commitment and belief, e.g. *"With further effort, I know that you can master this math algorithm."*

Recognise a hidden skill or talent

Having a skill or talent that is a little different from others is a great way to bolster self-esteem and encourage appropriate behaviour.

This is helpful especially with students who struggle a in terms of academic progress and social groupings. Recognise their skill, enquire about their progress and share their success with others.

Talk in the third person

Using the third person perspective when discussing real life situations of a personal nature (e.g. risk-taking / potential harm behaviours) assists in opening the conversation and enabling more objective discussion. Through the use of third party language young persons may feel more comfortable in discussing issues that are complex within their personal lives.

Challenge their view of the world/perceptions

Young people, like many adults, can be influenced by their peer group. Often they will absorb the majority view within a group and simply express this view of the world, a particular problem or solution. This 'group think' syndrome limits reflective thinking and constructing their own views and solutions to life problems.

As an education support worker you may be able to challenge the 'group think' and encourage the young person to consider alternative perspectives. This must be done with tact and guile.

Present the fact; you are not out to scare them

Believe it or not, young people are rational. Generally children and young adults do not respond well to threats and scare tactics but they do respond to facts. If you want to get a message across about some life activity make sure you know what you are taking about first and then provide specific facts. For example, if you are asked in a high school playground about alcohol, vague statements such as "*Drinking alcohol at a young age is bad for you*" will not create much reflection or response: You'll be ignored. It would be far better to respond with a specific fact that related early age drinking of alcohol with fetal syndrome, diabetes or high percentages of adult alcoholism. That at least will start some reflection on this potentially harm causing behaviour.

Use the Internet, music, television or current affairs as entry points to discussion

How do you start a conversation with a young person? One teacher in their mid-forties still watches the music show *Rage* more for the purpose of ensuring he can initiate a conversation on current music trends rather than trying to continue a past youth obsession.

Identifying a range of information sources that may be used as entry points for you to initiate discussions with young people is one way of getting rid of the periods of silence or simply ignoring of presence that may occur outside of formal learning situations.

Sometimes a timely question or comment (especially if you have been an active listener in the grounds so that you have gained some idea of their interests beforehand) can spark a terrific conversation and provide a further step in building positive relations. Engage in two-way conversations about a whole range of issues; don't limit your interactions to school work or disciplinary activity.

Unpleasant/Potential Harm Sharing

Often some of the students you are attempting to communicate with will be dealing with significant challenges outside of the school environment. Depending upon their age and circumstances, their background challenges may cover areas ranging from sexuality, potential harm and life issues outside of the school grounds.

If these topics come up, you need to be careful but remain positive and supportive. Remember you may be the only person that the student feels comfortable discussing some issues with.

Say the wrong thing or, even, say the right thing in the wrong way and opportunities to help them, retain positive communication and in some instances protect them, may disappear.

When students make disclosures about potential harm/abuse situations, you also need to be very clear about your legal responsibilities regarding the reporting of such circumstances.

Activity 3.1

Select one of the strategies from this section and, with some thoughtful preparation, try it with a student that you have had little successful communication with.

Reflect on how this effort went and what you need to do to refine it.

Now try it with another student.

Share your experiences and insights with your teacher/assessor.





Section 4

Verbal Communication - Writing

On completion of this section, participants will be able to:

1. Be aware of the strength in using written communication with students.
2. Understands the scope of written communication that is appropriate in student interactions.

Writing

This is so prevalent in the school setting where you will work yet we often do not associate it as a means of communicating directly to students. We use it to communicate their successes and failures to parents (i.e. student reports, notes home to parents, etc.) but in our daily interactions with young people we regularly ignore this powerful verbal communication tool.

Some times the written word is the most effective form of communication especially in fostering self-esteem and positive relationships. Why? Well it is one of the few forms of communication that can be kept and revisited. How often have you had positive feelings from the message on the refrigerator door, the unexpected Christmas card, the thank you card from a neighbour whom you assisted when they were ill?

Written messages last longer than spoken messages. It is that simple. So consider what messages you wish to 'last longer' with your students. The written word, especially in terms of reminding or encouraging students, is an often underutilised form of communication.

Consider these simple approaches:

Letter of support

If there is some important encouragement you wish to provide to a young person, and you wish to extend its 'working life', write a note. Remember the spoken word is immediate and in the point of time may be rejected or overlooked; the written messages have the advantage of being there over a period of time, considered many times and often used to console/encourage in times of challenge or stress.

Reinforcement

If you have discussed a solution or provided a time period in which a student is to respond, pen a positive reinforcement of this agreement or instruction and provide it to them later that day.

This only works if the message is couched in positive terms! e.g.
"Jim, I look forward to hearing you read tomorrow. I know you will select an exciting story to read to me."

Create a message book for a particular group of students

This will work well for small groups of students who need ongoing support. Provide each student with a message book and get in the habit of writing supportive messages in it. The messages may range from positive reinforcement statements, a good joke you

have heard, celebrations of their success or generally any thing of interest to that young person.



Activity 4.1

How else can written text be used to foster positive communication between an education support worker and the students they work with?

Brainstorm ways in which you think this could be used in your current situation.

Share your ideas with your teacher/assessor.



Section 5

Non-verbal Communication

On completion of this section, participants will be able to:

1. Be aware of a range of nonverbal communication elements.
2. Take into account the non-verbal cues when interacting with students.



Forms of non-verbal communication

Nonverbal communication is defined as communication without words. It includes behaviors such as facial expressions, posture, body movement, spatial distance, eye movement, touching, and tone of voice.

Nonverbal forms of communication are essential elements of effective communication yet we often overlook this in a conscious sense. There is significant research that indicates the non-verbal communication avenues are very powerful and override messages given through speech.

There are many sources of such research in communication and the common finding is that the emotion and intent of the person communicating is stronger in the non-verbal than verbal forms. Mehrabian's research suggested that only 7% of a message is sent through words, with remaining 93% sent through nonverbal expressions. In fact he thought that:

- 7 % of meaning is in the words that are spoken.

- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).

- 55% of meaning is in facial expression or other forms of body language.

This is not meant to be simplistic and other researchers say it may go up to 35% through words/speech, though most evidence suggests no more than 20% of a message (its intent, relationships, etc.) is delivered by the actual words used.

Commonly, nonverbal communication is learned shortly after birth and practiced and refined throughout a person's lifetime all within the framework of the person's culture, their social interactions and their early learnings within a family. Infants learn nonverbal expressions by watching and imitating, in the same way as they learn verbal skills.

Young children know far more than they can verbalize and are generally more adept at reading nonverbal cues than adults are because of their limited verbal skills and their recent reliance on the nonverbal to communicate. As children develop verbal skills, nonverbal channels of communication do not cease to exist they simply become part of the total communication process. Often this powerful communication tool becomes unconscious in that the child (and most adults) rely on it but do not even know that it is being used to decode messages or communicate with others.

Warning: Because nonverbal communication relies on prolonged

learning with your culture and family, it reflects the dominant culture in which the person grows. Nonverbal language differs between cultures. Check out this website to see how different gestures, use of eyes, etc. mean differing things in a range of cultures:
Gestures: Body Language and Nonverbal Communication
<http://www.csupomona.edu/~tassi/gestures.htm#asian>

Remember what is shared in this workbook reflects the nonverbal language elements of the dominant Australian culture. This may differ for groups of migrant or indigenous students who could have differing cultural mores.

We use nonverbal communication because:

Words are limited

There are numerous areas where nonverbal communication is more effective than verbal forms. Identifying anger, hesitation, sorrow, eagerness - all cannot be masked and are easily communicated through nonverbal signs.

Nonverbals are powerful

Nonverbal cues primarily express inner feelings while verbal messages deal generally with the exterior world.

Nonverbal message more likely to be genuine

As this form of communication is generally unconscious (you do not control it) it is not as easily constructed as spoken or written words.

Nonverbal messages form an extra complex communication channel for you as an education worker. By some thought and practice you can add to the flow of information, both to and from students, by learning to acknowledge simple nonverbal signals.

So for education support workers, the use of nonverbal communication - decoding and sending messages - has three significant advantages:

- An awareness of nonverbal behavior will allow you to become better receivers of students' messages.
- You will become a better sender of signals that reinforce learning.
- Increases the degree of the positive relationship between yourself and a student.

Types of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication will generally be in six forms:

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Gestures
- Posture and body orientation
- Proximity
- Paralinguistics

Facial expressions

Facial expression involves some of the smallest body movements, but its impact in communication may be greater than any other body language a person displays. Consider the simple task of smiling: This powerful nonverbal cue may transmit happiness, friendliness, warmth of feeling, liking, inclusion and a range of similar positive emotions.

If you smile when you talking to another person you are immediately viewed as more likable, warm, friendly and approachable. Smiling appears to psychologically contagious: If some one is doing it, others react favourably.

Eye contact

Eye contact, an important channel of interpersonal communication, helps regulate the flow of communication. It signals interest in others. Furthermore, eye contact with audiences or people in the group you are speaking to increases the speaker's credibility. Persons who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth and credibility.

Eye contact can often be used to control an interpersonal interaction. When people do not wish to be interrupted, they will often glance away and continue talking. When they wish another person to speak, they will pause, making direct eye contact with the person giving them a visual clue to respond.

Interesting physcial fact: When looking at something pleasing, a person's pupil will measurably dilate (widen); when viewing something displeasing, the pupils will constrict (reduce). This is subconsciously registered by others around you.

Gestures

Failing to gesture while speaking, may lead to the speaker being perceived as stiff, formal and boring. The use of appropriate gestures captures the listener's' attention, makes the message more interesting and facilitates understanding.

Gestures, operate in the unconcious sense, to clarify or contradict

verbal messages, e.g. Small shakes of the head while saying, *"Yes / don't mind doing the extra playground duty"* provide a conflicting message.

Gestures may also serve a role in regulating the flow of conversation, e.g. using the hand to gesture it is your turn to respond.

Posture and orientation of the body

Body postures and movements are major indicators of self-confidence, energy, fatigue, or engagement. All people communicate numerous messages by the way they walk, stand and sit.

Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Leaning slightly back, indicates caution and closure to the other person.

Proximity

Cultural norms dictate what is a comfortable distance for personal communication, e.g. in Asian countries the personal space between people is far smaller than western cultures.

Hall (Hall, ET, 1966) conducted research in North America on the proximity of people and its effect on effective communication. While these results were derived from North American studies they probable reflect similar responses for Australia. Hall's research identified four distance zones in how people reacted to communication and proximity of others:

1. Intimate distance

This is the distance from actual touching to about 35 centimetres. This zone is reserved for those intimate relations and very close friends, e.g. wife, children. The physical presence of another person at this distance is overwhelming. An education support worker should be careful about intruding into this space as they are likely to be perceived as 'intruders/attackers' by students.

2. Personal distance

This is the zone from about 35 centimetres to just over a metre. This zone is generally occupied by good friends. It is also the most appropriate zone for a teacher or education support worker to initiate and hold discussions with individual students.

3. Social distance

This zone appears to exist between a metre and 3.5 metres. It appears to be an appropriate distance for casual friends and acquaintances to interact. This is probably appropriate distance for group discussions between students and adults.

4. Public distance

Any distance greater than 3.5 metres becomes formal. Adults who maintain this range of distances between themselves and students will be regarded as formal and aloof.

To ensure effective communication is occurring always check for signals of discomfort caused by overpowering a student's personal space. If a young person feels that their personal space is being intruded into, effective communication is nearly impossible.

Discomfort signals may include: gaze aversion, sudden aggression, fidgeting of limbs, tapping or hand wringing, quiet self absorbed noise making.

The reverse must also be considered. As an education support worker you do not want to work in the 'public distance' zone either. To ensure you do not become 'distant with distance' move around the group interacting with all members. Increasing your proximity to each student also enhances your ability to make eye contact and increases the opportunities for student to initiate personal requests/comments directly to you.

Paralinguistics

This element of nonverbal communication includes vocal elements, unrelated to words, as:

- Tone
- Pitch
- Rhythm
- Timbre
- Loudness
- Inflection

To maximise your speaking effectiveness, you need to vary these elements of your voice. Think back to what you thought of a speaker who spoke in a monotone. Use your voice to accent the verbal message.

Activity 5.1

Observe your colleagues and teachers at work over a period of time, e.g. five days. See if you can see all of the listed nonverbal communication elements being used in your school. Reflect on your own interactions during that week. Which area did you use most? Which did you use least?





Activity 5.2

Investigate these websites to peruse more information on nonverbal communication:

Exploring non-verbal communication

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/~archer/intro.html>

Body Language

<http://www.bodylanguagetraining.com/>

Non-verbal communication

<http://www.zeromillion.com/business/management/non-verbal-communication.html>

Promexic Research

<http://sharktowntown.com/proxemics/intro.html>

Your local library will probably also have some reference materials available so check that information source out also.

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