3.2 NATURE OF CLASS ROOM COMMUNICATION

Communication is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Teaching is a social activity that involves both the teacher and the learners. It is therefore important that two way communication exists between them in order to trigger learning (Sitihendon and Khalijah, 2007). Moreover direct communication between a teacher and learners allows the teacher to get immediate feedback that can help him/her gauge learners' understanding of what has been taught. Based on such feedback the teacher can improve his/her communication.

Due to rapid changes taking place in our social system, teaching-learning environment is also changing at a fast pace. The information explosion due to increased access to different mass communication media has increased the awareness level of learners. As a result they have higher expectations from their teachers than ever before. The role and profile of a teacher is also changing and s/he has to undertake varied roles. While on the one hand the teacher has to fulfill the task of being the source of information on the other hand, s/he has to act as a counselor, mentor and guide. The teacher has to coordinate assignments and fulfill many managerial functions and also use technology for educational purposes. Thus pedagogy, social interaction, management and technology comprise crucial activities of a teacher and the role of communication is paramount in all these activities.

Classroom communication, as discussed in the previous unit is purposive, positive and pragmatic in nature. It takes place between teacher and learners and among learners both in formal as well as informal situations. It involves speaking, lecturing, describing, explaining, illustrating on the part of the teacher and engaging the students in debate, dialogue and discussion. Learners raise questions, doubts and queries to make their difficulties explicit which need to be effectively responded to and addressed by the teacher.

The strength of this approach lies in facilitating maximum feedback, warmth and interaction. However, the limitation is that it is a teacher-centered approach based on the principle of 'teaching by telling' and 'learning by listening' in which the onus of teaching lies on the teacher. It may be noted that despite the presence of a teacher, learners may remain passive recipients of information. If they express their disinterest or passivity, an alert teacher can still control it by using various interactive techniques in arousing and sustaining the interest of the students. However, the problem may become acute when despite a student's apparent interest in the lecture/lesson through appropriate facial expressions and body language, his/her mind may wander elsewhere without following what is being discussed in the class.

Speaking and listening start in the early stages of our lives and continue even when basic speech and language skills have been developed. We are constantly updating

our vocabulary, improvising our expressions and refining our thinking processes. Speaking as well as listening are two very important skills required in the classroom. A teacher has to be a good speaker and at the same time has to be a patient and attentive listener for his/ her learners. Active listening is different from just hearing and requires activities such as hearing, understanding i.e. attaching meaning to what is heard and judging and thinking about it . It is necessary to concentrate on what is being said, interrupt little and put up questions or make constructive comments only if required.

3.2.1 Two-way Communication

In Unit 1 of this block, the role and importance of two-way communication was highlighted. While discussing the elements of communication, we have stated that communication being a two-way process, the element of feedback is crucial. Teaching-leaning happens to be a process in which two way communication is important for transferring information from the teacher to the learners. It was also stated that interpersonal communication allows greater scope for feedback as both sender and receiver can decipher the facial expressions, body movements and cross question each other to resolve their doubts/queries. However, feedback gets diminished when the number of participants in the communication activity increases posing a challenge for the teacher.

3.2.2 Class Size and Communication

Interpersonal communication between two persons offers maximum interactivity. This is also present to a great extent in group communication particularly in small groups. However, as the number of participants in a group increases, the level of communication gets affected.

Individual instruction: The word 'class' itself takes into account a number of students. Nonetheless, some students require individual attention to address their specific educational needs. Individual instruction is generally between two persons and thus can be placed under interpersonal communication. It allows the sender and receiver to use various sensory channels and watch facial expressions, gestures, body language of each other, etc. It facilitates clarifying one's views, persuading or motivating another person more effectively in which there is less scope for misunderstanding. When technology is used to deliver instructions, as for instance, computer based learning, the instruction gets individualized as a learner works and learns on his/her computer.

Small group instruction: Small groups consisting of 15-20 learners are more conducive for teaching and skill development. In small group instruction, teachers can identify the learners, remember as well as use their names for developing a rapport with them. It becomes relatively easier to address individual learning needs of learners. Small group instruction may follow the direct teaching format or it may use different modes of teaching -learning. In addition to lecture format, various other methods of teaching such as seminars, discussions, debates, tutorials, brain storming, problem solving, etc. can be effectively adapted and utilized in small groups.

Large group instruction: If the number comprising a group is large, it may place certain constraints in the process of communication and reduce the level of interactivity between the source and the receivers. The physical setting may also provide less scope for the source to be visible or audible. Lecture method is generally used for providing instructions to large groups. Information and Communication Technology is being increasingly used to meet the needs of large and dispersed classes in same or different locations.

3.3 USING TECHNOLOGY IN CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

Technology is the latest mantra in educational communication and is used for achieving different learning objectives. "Chalk and talk" along with simple teaching aids viz., maps, diagrams, charts, posters, etc. still continue to be the backbone of conventional classroom teaching. In addition to these, a wide array of technologies is increasingly used for teaching, clarifying points, supplementing and enhancing the quality of learning. Studies have revealed that if used effectively, technology applications can help students in using higher order thinking skills such as thinking critically, analyzing, making inferences and solving problems. It can involve students in innovative and creative activities in collaborative way. Technology provides access to information and helps in establishing contacts with teachers and students located at different locations. However, if technology is used only for presentation, such as OHP, then it may lead to passive assimilation rather than active construction of knowledge. In this section we shall limit our discussion to the use of OHP, audio and video aids and computer technologies.

3.3.1 OHP

OHP or the overhead projector is one of the most commonly used teaching aids in classroom teaching. For using an OHP, slides or transparencies need to be prepared. The first step in this regard would be to select the topic on which you want to develop slides. After proper research, sifting and sieving, content needs to be identified. Then it should be broken into smaller segments maintaining a logical sequencing of the ideas. Each slide should be linked with the next slide to follow. The font size should ideally be 24 or 28 depending upon the size of the class. These slides should be neatly written or word-processed and should not contain many details. You should provide the detailed information during the course of presentation.

You may require technical help for placing the OHP and sharpening the focus on white- board or wall. If handouts of slides have to be distributed, these need to be photocopied and sets prepared in advance. In this case, students can be asked not to take notes, as handouts will be distributed. Some common problems being faced while using OHP are: information overload making the slides cluttered and unreadable, poor focus and power failure among others. Use of OHP slides can complement or supplement the information being communicated by the teacher. However the students remain passive viewers &/ listeners while this technology is used.

3.3.2 Audio-Video Resources

Audio-video aids/cassettes can be effectively used in the classroom situation to make learning interesting as well as engaging. Audio cassettes require power supply/ batteries, audio tapes and tape recorder while the use of video cassettes in the classroom will require television monitor, VCR and power supply. For using audio-visual resources in a class, the first step would be to identify the material on the subject. The audio resources available both within and outside the school/ institution need to be selected. At times, permission to use them also has to be undertaken. After a thorough listening or preview, you have to decide whether the whole programme has to be used in the class or selectively. If selectively, then those portions need to be identified and cued. During teleconferencing sessions audio-video excerpts can be integrated in the design of sessions to highlight some teaching points and also to make the sessions interesting. After listening/viewing of the programme discussion can be built on the issues raised.

Many institutions are investing in simple audio-video gadgets in view of the benefits accrued. For example, if an institution has access to video camera, students can practise speaking in front of an audience. They can develop their video portfolio to demonstrate gradual progress in learning a language or a subject over a period of time.

Many a time, relevant material on a subject may not be readily available and has to be produced. In that case, factors such as willingness of the institution for programme production, resources available in terms of finances, time and personnel at the institutional level, etc. need to be taken into consideration. For using audio-visual resources in the classroom, some basic care is required. First of all, the equipment should be in place and ideally, it should be checked to ensure whether everything is working properly. The functionality of equipment before starting the class should be ensured.

3.3.3 Computer Technology

The access to computers is growing at a steady pace. Computers are largely being used in educational institutions for academic and administrative purposes. The Internet has already captured the imagination of the educational community. It has been found that computer technology can support meaningful, engaged learning for students instead of rote learning. Students can visit the relevant websites and update their knowledge on a given subject. Grades can be upgraded regularly on the school website which can be easily accessed by parents and students alike. Students can get more involved in their studies by monitoring their progress through regular checking of their assignments and grades. Like other forms of technological inputs, the use of computers is generally determined on the basis of its application, i.e. how it is used for learning. The uses of computers in classrooms could be for teaching, exploring, creating, composing, storing, and analyzing data or for communicating with others.