

NTID TRAINING PROGRAM IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Developing the communication skills of NTID students requires instruction and experience in using good techniques of interpersonal communication. At the present time, NTID does not have a satisfactory measure of the social knowledge and interpersonal communication skills of individual students. As a result, professional judgements of teachers and counselors are used to indicate social competence. Pilot work to develop a socialization index is presently being conducted at NTID by the Division of Developmental Education. One of the tools being piloted for inclusion in the "socialization profile" is the *California Psychological Inventory* (1957) which involves self-reporting of social attitudes. There are also plans to include unobtrusive observations of overt social behavior and a measure of social knowledge for the profile. This latter measure, especially, should prove to be very helpful in determining whether an individual student is in need of training to improve interpersonal communication. Despite the absence of an objective measure, it became evident early in the history of NTID that the students wanted and needed additional instruction and experience in various social situations. According to the reports from the placement services, the majority of NTID students go into job interview situations inadequately prepared. Observation and experience with the deaf has indicated the need to increase competence in social skills especially in relationships between the hearing and the deaf.

A twenty item questionnaire was administered to 109 incoming NTID students to indicate the level of student competence and to define content for the course *Interpersonal Communication*. The questions were posed in multiple choice format designed to sample the student's understanding of communication behavior in situations relating to introduction, conversation, discussion, problem situations and job interviewing. Over half (55%) of the students polled indicated they only attempt communication after they get to know a person. During a discussion, over half, (56%) of the students indicated that they seldom or never know what's being discussed. These findings have been confirmed many times by observations of student's performance in the various classroom activities. Even when optimum methods of communication are used, the major cause of breakdown in interpersonal communication is the inability of the student to understand, or attend, to the idea that is being conveyed. Probably the area of greatest reluctance occurs in introduction. Over half (53%) of the students did not choose to introduce themselves in the social situation

presented to them. An even greater number (61%) did not indicate that they thought they should introduce themselves on the first day on the job. During a conversation with a new acquaintance, about half (48%) of the students indicated that they usually talk about themselves while an additional 22% said they do not know how to start a conversation. Many situations are difficult to handle diplomatically. The students polled were presented with a problem involving a mistake with a purchase. Over half (54%) indicated an inappropriate response when confronted with this situation. NTID students have a high motivation to do well on job interview, however, a substantial number (36%) of the students polled did not feel that any preparation was necessary. Many of the students (28%) did not understand the main purpose of a job interview. In responding to a potential employer, nearly half (47%) did not choose the response which clearly shows interest and initiative. A small number of students (9%) chose a completely inappropriate response.

In December, 1971 a ten-hour course in *Interpersonal Communication* was offered to over 100 NTID students. Student response was overwhelmingly in support of this type of curriculum with 74% of the students indicating they thought the course should be required of all NTID students. The students recommended that more class time be devoted to group discussion and preparation for the job interview. Student input was utilized and the course expanded to 20 hours of instruction to include the following objectives:

1. To develop more critical skills in attending to ideas or opinions expressed by others.
2. To improve the student's ability to express personal opinions and respond to others.
3. To increase the student's confidence and initiative in making introductions within varied social circumstances.
4. To increase competence and provide experience in approaching typical problem situations appropriately
5. To familiarize the student with the basic principles of good interpersonal communication and to relate these principles to the interview process.

The major strategies of instruction include activities such as simulation exercises, group discussion and roleplaying making extensive use of videotaping. Material designed for a hearing population has been adapted for use with the deaf. (Stanford and Stanford). One useful and popular activity involves giving the students a problem to solve which requires sharing of information. In using this type of procedure, students readily recognize their difficulty in attending to each other and usually come up with constructive suggestions for improving their own skills. Videotape cassettes have been developed to demonstrate good and poor techniques of interpersonal communication empha-

sizing the special problems of a hearing-impaired individual. Viewing and discussion of these videotapes generate productive discussion and provide the student with concrete criteria from which to judge their own performance in similar situations.

Experience gained through teaching *Interpersonal Communication* and through studying student responses has indicated a need to revise and expand course content to include two courses, one basic and one advanced. Further analysis of the questionnaire administered in Summer, 1974 indicates that 49% of the students could benefit from a basic course. Forty-two percent of the students could more appropriately be placed in an advanced course and 9% demonstrated adequate knowledge of the principles included. Clearly, the judgements of an experienced teacher or counselor will have priority over this objective indicator. Offering instruction at two levels will more appropriately meet the needs of the student who has acquired the basic skills, but could use experience with more difficult situations particularly job interviewing. It will also provide more extensive instruction and experience for the student who lacks basic competence in the area of interpersonal communication.

REFERENCES

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