




Teaching and learning as a Dialogical Knowledge Exchange: Through the lens of the Transactional Model of Communication

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the pedagogical process has rarely been seen as a multidisciplinary praxis. The current literature shows that many researchers and teaching and learning instructors have always perceived the pedagogical process from the perspective of the education discipline. Moreover, while teaching and learning are reciprocal, it has been largely contextualised within the boundaries of a teacher-to-student (one-way) transfer process of contextualised knowledge. Therefore, this study synergised two disciplines, education and communication, to provide philosophical tools for articulating pedagogy as a communication process. In doing so, this study used the Transactional Model of Communication to understand the teaching and learning process in higher education from the perspective of communication science. A qualitative grounded theory based on inductive reasoning was used to understand Barnlund's Transactional Model of Communication (TMC) elements of communication in relation to the teaching and learning process. Also, this study employed the Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP) theory to understand the relationship of all three. The outcome of this paper is the development of a Pedagogical Communication Model (PMC) for teaching in a diverse university classroom. Thus, this paper, drawing from the proposed PMC, argues and concludes that communication and teaching and learning are inextricable, with the teaching and learning process relying on communication as the carrier of the educational messages between the teacher and the student during the class interaction. Therefore, the contribution of this paper is to offer a starting point in the debate on the role of communication in the success of the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Transactional Model of Communication, Teaching and Learning, Pedagogical Model of Communication, Critical Communication Pedagogy, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Through the years of research, Communication and Education have been researched far apart. This is done with the understanding that they are two different disciplines. Noticeably, there is limited research in the literature and knowledge of how closely integrated these two areas of study are. In particular, there is a dearth of research that applies or links the process of communication or its models to the process of teaching and learning, or pedagogical practices. Some communication scholars have

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researched the integration of Information Communication Technologies into teaching and learning or social media.¹ Some scholars have applied communication models to marketing and health.²

Although a great deal of research findings from the aforementioned studies are commendable, the application of communication itself to the process of teaching and learning is often neglected. On the other hand, the research conducted, which came close to the objective of this study, focused on developing a framework for improved classroom communication in the South African schooling context.³ In their study, Fredericks and Alexander discuss the integral role of effective communication with its elements, some of which are similar to those attributed to Burnland's Transactional Model of Communication (TMC). In particular, teaching is an interactive process in which the sender also becomes the receiver of the message (knowledge).

The study of communication as an academic discipline has roots in various fields such as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and sociology. Although communication has been fundamental to human interaction for thousands of years, it is still problematic to attribute its definition to a single consensus definition. Although it has been defined in many ways, the common trait in the definition of most communication scholars that can be observed is that it is viewed as a process of interaction and information exchange within a particular social context.⁴

In light of this view, scholars like Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, from a mathematical point of view, laid the foundation for modern models of communication. Thus, recent studies define Communication as a complex social process involving the exchange of meanings between individuals through verbal and nonverbal symbols.⁵ On the other hand, education as a concept is a composite topic that has been evolving for millennia. Regarding education as a discipline, many scholars are of the view that it has been influenced by a number of social institutions, social issues and forces. For instance, political institutions, dynamic economy, culture, and technological forces.⁶

As societies are changing, evolving and becoming global, with new realities and increasing problems, education continues to evolve to meet the needs and bring about solutions to society, while also paving the way for future generations. Although education continues to evolve with the establishment of formal schools and universities where education and teaching take place, there has been a conspicuous shift from "teaching" to "teaching and learning" in terms of the approach. The traditional teaching approach is characterised by an unidirectional flow of information from the teacher to the students or learners, in which the teacher is the primary source of knowledge and the students are passive recipients,⁷ to the non-traditional teaching and learning approaches characterised by the physical

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- ¹ Thato Pecunia Zethi, "Students' Perceptions towards ICTs Used for Emergency Remote Learning in Higher Education during Covid-19: A Case Study of the NWU Mafikeng Campus" (North-West University (South Africa), 2023). K Ratheeswari, "Information Communication Technology in Education," *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research* 3, no. 1 (2018): 45–47; Ayoub Kafyulilo and Jared Keengwe, "Teachers' Perspectives on Their Use of ICT in Teaching and Learning: A Case Study," *Education and Information Technologies* 19, no. 4 (2014): 913–23; E Malatji, M Masuku, and C Baloyi, "Students' Perceptions of Online Teaching and Learning Amid Covid-19: A Case of University of Limpopo" (International Conference on Public Administration and Development ..., 2021)..
- ² Charles R Taylor, "How to Avoid Marketing Disasters: Back to the Basic Communications Model, but with Some Updates Illustrating the Importance of e-Word-of-Mouth Research," *International Journal of Advertising* (Taylor & Francis, 2017); Fungai Mutema, "Breaking the Silence: Communication between Parents and Secondary School Adolescents in the Context of HIV/AIDs in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mkoba High Density Suburb, Gweru," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 4, no. 4 (2013): 604–12.
- ³ Brenton Fredericks and Gregory Alexander, "A Framework for Improved Classroom Communication in the South African Schooling Context," *Helikon* 7, no. 3 (2021).
- ⁴ Chinedu Ibekwe et al., "Relevance of the Social Exchange Theory in Interpersonal Communication among Students of Select Universities in South-East and South-South, Nigeria," *IMSU Journal of Communication Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 58–65; Joseph A DeVito and J DeVito, "The Interpersonal Communication Book," *Instructor* 1, no. 18 (2019): 521–32; Arthur Jensen and Sarah Trenholm, *Interpersonal Communication* (Wadsworth, 1992).
- ⁵ Helmut Scherer, "Communication as a Social Process," *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism* 02, no. 08 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000e125>.
- ⁶ Martin Carnoy, "The Political Economy of Education.," *International Social Science Journal* 37, no. 104 (1985); Antoni Verger, Clara Fontdevila, and Adrián Zancajo, "Multiple Paths towards Education Privatization in a Globalizing World: A Cultural Political Economy Review," *Journal of Education Policy* 32, no. 6 (2017): 757–87; Ali Al-Issa, "The Cultural and Economic Politics of English Language Teaching in Sultanate of Oman," *Asian EFL Journal* 8, no. 1 (2006): 194–218.
- ⁷ Bhagwati Charan Patel, Naveen Goel, and Kusumanjali Deshmukh, "Traditional Teaching Pedagogy: Student vs. Teacher Centric," in *Assessment Tools for Mapping Learning Outcomes with Learning Objectives* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2021), 42–57; Rajnish Agrahari, "The Nature of Educational Reform and Change: From Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered Learning," *Educational*

classroom interaction and information exchange, student-centred and co-creation of curriculum between the teacher and students through effective reciprocal communication approach, and also e-learning, blended classrooms, flipped classrooms.⁸ In these non-traditional approaches, students are not just flight passengers but can also assume the role of co-pilots of the moving plane. In this approach, the teacher acknowledges the socially constructed knowledge as integral to the curriculum. For instance, teaching and learning evolved to also occur through online and blended learning spaces where technology such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) affords students more opportunities to initiate communication and to do so in ways that further decentre the lecturer. Thus, both participants, in the process of teaching and learning, assume the role of the sender and the receiver in the process of knowledge and information exchange. Therefore, this view attributes the essence of Burnland's TMC.

Thus, this paper aims to use the model to understand the process of teaching and learning. Moreso, it attempts to demonstrate the similitude and synergies of Communication science, through TMC, to the teaching and learning process in South African Higher education.

An Overview of the Education Discipline

Current literature shows that Education as a discipline, concept and practice is a highly debated and complex topic. For instance, Wyse argues that education lacks epistemological coherence as an academic field,⁹ while Deng notes that education is a different discipline centred around the understanding and development of educational practices.¹⁰ On the other hand, Wyse sees the concept of education as encompassing both practical knowledge and academic knowledge.¹¹ Thus, the pedagogy serves as an integral component that integrates several disciplines.¹² In light of this view, Adebakin notes that Education is a broad and multidisciplinary field drawing numerous traditions such as historical, philosophical, and sociological perspectives.¹³ Furthermore, it compounds theories, policies, and practices that shape the teaching and learning process. Its different aspects have been explored, including pedagogy, curriculum development, the psychology of education and the role of Learning Management Systems. Wyse notes that the Education Discipline is characterised by the reciprocal relationships between practical and academic knowledge.¹⁴ This is resonated by the teaching and learning practices that are based on educational theories. For instance, Piaget's constructivist theory highlights how students build knowledge based on experiences,¹⁵ Vygotsky and Cole's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development,¹⁶ and Freire's critical pedagogy, which is the theory that forms the basis of this paper, argues that education should empower students by promoting social justice and critical thinking.¹⁷ In addition to this notion, Kumar views Education as a human practice rooted in the need for learning, instead of solely teaching.¹⁸ As a result,

Quest 7, no. 2 (2016): 133; Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim, "Teaching Paradigms: An Analysis of Traditional and Student-Centred Approaches," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 40 (2014): 199–218.

⁸ Gurudeo Tularam, "Traditional vs Non-Traditional Teaching and Learning Strategies-the Case of E-Learning!," in *ICEER 2016* (Western Sydney University, 2016); Pamela Allen et al., "Andragogical Teaching Methods to Enhance Non-Traditional Student Classroom Engagement.," *Journal of Educational Technology* 13, no. 2 (2016): 47–59; Elnaz Safapour, Sharareh Kermanshachi, and Piyush Taneja, "A Review of Nontraditional Teaching Methods: Flipped Classroom, Gamification, Case Study, Self-Learning, and Social Media," *Education Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2019): 273.

⁹ Dominic Wyse, "Presidential Address: The Academic Discipline of Education. Reciprocal Relationships between Practical Knowledge and Academic Knowledge," *British Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 1 (February 5, 2020): 6–25, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3597>.

¹⁰ Zongyi Deng, "Practice, Pedagogy and Education as a Discipline: Getting beyond Close-to-practice Research," *British Educational Research Journal* 50, no. 2 (April 19, 2024): 772–93, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3951>.

¹¹ Wyse, "Presidential Address: The Academic Discipline of Education. Reciprocal Relationships between Practical Knowledge and Academic Knowledge."

¹² Deng, "Practice, Pedagogy and Education as a Discipline: Getting beyond Close-to-practice Research."

¹³ Azeez Babatunde Adebakin, "Education," 2024, 127–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74535-5_8.

¹⁴ Wyse, "Presidential Address: The Academic Discipline of Education. Reciprocal Relationships between Practical Knowledge and Academic Knowledge."

¹⁵ Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. (New York: W W Norton & Co, 1952), <https://doi.org/10.1037/11494-000>.

¹⁶ Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, 1970).

¹⁸ Sushil Kumar, "Lifelong Learning And Education: Understanding The Human Need To Learn," *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah* 13, no. 12 (December 31, 2025): 77–88, <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i12.2025.6612>.

these theories and ideologies have had a significant impact on modern teaching approaches, causing a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning approaches.

In the context of South Africa, over the past 30 years, the teaching and learning scenery has gone through significant changes since the end of the apartheid era, which left a huge gap of social and economic inequalities. In recent years, there has been a developing advocacy for the teaching and learning approach that is humanised (Humanised pedagogy approach). For instance, Bartolome; and Zinn and Rodgers, emphasise that humanised pedagogy seeks to address historical inequities that are the result of the apartheid system while promoting social justice.¹⁹ Furthermore, the approach emphasises the respect for the historical backgrounds, realities, and perspectives of the students as integral to education practice.²⁰ In addition, it shows promise for advancing empowered knowledge and pedagogical development in previously colonised settings like South Africa.²¹ It is important to note that Critical Pedagogy and the Humanised Pedagogy advocate for the shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning approach, and both emphasise redressing the student's historical deficiencies and social realities. Interestingly, this notion can also be simulated and explained through the transactional Model of Communication (TMC), which also views the communication of the educational process in which both the teacher and the student generate social realities, culture and relational contexts. To successfully illustrate these interconnections, it is important to first provide an overview of the communication discipline. Thus, in the following section, the communication discipline is traced and the teacher-centred to student-centred shift in learning approach is explained using Models of Communication, particularly the TMC.

An Overview of the Communication Discipline

Communication, as a discipline, has emerged over the past few decades, with its notable interdisciplinary nature and practical relevance in most fields. According to Eadie et al., the transformation of Communication into a discipline occurred between 1964 and 1982 and was characterised by changes in academic societies' leadership and largely curricula.²² Furthermore, the field evolved from classic rhetoric and included elements from speech and journalism studies, and then it developed from the sociological perspective and crisis paradigm.²³ Hence, some university faculty structures in South African higher education are housed under the faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

However, the Communication field has faced various challenges, particularly in establishing its own identity as a discipline. This is due to its broad scope and interdisciplinary nature. For instance, it applies to science as communication science, business as business communication, engineering communication, environmental sciences as environmental communication and so forth. Despite the challenges, the discipline has continued to grow, attributing its strong relations with communication as a social practice and its increasing significance in modern and globalised society.²⁴ As a result, to retain its identity, some scholars, for instance,²⁵ have broadly categorised the communication field into various key areas, such as Interpersonal Communication, Mass Communication, Organisational Communication, Intercultural Communication, and Digital Communication. Moreover, other key fields such as Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC) have been developed,

¹⁹ Lilia Bartolome, "Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 64, no. 2 (1994): 173–95; Denise Zinn and Carol Rodgers, "A Humanising Pedagogy: Getting beneath the Rhetoric," *Perspectives in Education* 30, no. 4 (2012): 76–87.

²⁰ Teresa M Huerta, "Humanizing Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices on the Teaching of Latino Children," *Bilingual Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (2011): 38–57.

²¹ Curwyn Mapaling and Christopher Norman Hoelson, "Humanising Pedagogy within Higher Education: A Ten-Year Scoping Literature Review," *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South* 6, no. 3 (2022): 68–81; Mensah Prince Osiesi, "Humanisation of the Teacher Education Curriculum and Pedagogy in South Africa: A Literature Review," *Futurity Education* 4, no. 4 (2024): 151–66.

²² Shirley Eadie et al., "Assessment Practices to Support the Development of Learner Competencies for a Changing World" (NECT <https://nect.org.za/publications/technical-reports/nectedhub-policy...>, 2020).

²³ Silvia Nastasiu, "Theoretic Aspects of Interpersonal Communication Competence," *International Academy Journal Web of Scholar* 3 (July 12, 2018): 14–18, https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_wos/12072018/5987.

²⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

²⁵ Stephen Croucher, *Understanding Communication Theory: A Beginner's Guide*, 2015.

encompassing subfields such as Strategic Communication, Participatory Communication, Crisis Communication, and Risk Communication.²⁶ Although all these communication subfields seek to reclaim the identity of communication as a discipline, it remains to extricate their interdisciplinary nature. For instance, even the CDSC is still applied to disciplines such as Political Science, Agricultural Science, Health Science, and Developmental Studies, to mention a few. Thus, Lie and Servaes emphasise the need for interdisciplinary collaborations and adaptation of practices from other disciplines to promote effective and sustainable social change.²⁷

Interestingly, one of the oldest communication subfields to be founded is Communication Pedagogy, which is the interest of this paper, and Wilbur Schramm is widely credited as a founding figure of the field. Communication Pedagogy is an interdisciplinary field between Communication and Pedagogy. Many scholars, for instance, Fassett and Rudick note that it encompasses various approaches to teaching and learning communication.²⁸ Moreover, it includes the Critical Communication Pedagogy, which emphasises a social justice and activism approach to teaching. Also, it includes instructional communication, which emphasises effective teaching behaviours and classroom processes.²⁹ In South Africa, the communication discipline has followed the same transition, with the same subdisciplines as noted above. However, there is still limited research on communication pedagogy and the instructional communication subdiscipline. For instance, while few studies have investigated the role of effective communication and its discrepancies during educational information exchange, most studies have focused more on the effectiveness of instructional communication through Learning Management Systems (LMS), and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).³⁰ Although these studies have played an important role in interrogating the communication and LMS and intersections during the teaching and learning process, there is still limited research focused on the interplay between the science of communication and teaching and learning in South Africa. The next section discusses the TMC and their intersections with teaching and learning.

The Transactional Model of Communication

Before delving into the nitty-gritty of the TMC, it is important to first define the model and provide a brief background to the models of communication. According to Barnlund, “A model is an attempt to recreate in physical or symbolic form the relationships alleged to exist among the objects or forces investigated”.³¹ For Barnlund, a model usually consists of an intricate order of lines, wires, arrows and relays by the designer to reproduce the reflex loops of a particular system. In the context of this paper, the TMC should resemble the same imagined structure illustrating relationships between the communication, teaching and learning processes. Thus, the TMC must illustrate symbolic relationships rather than physical relationships, and it must be a functional model rather than a structural model. Furthermore, it must be diagrammatic as a means of picturing the intricate process of communication. Notably, there is limited research that applies its significance to the education field. As noted from the above arguments, the reciprocity of the communication process and the continuous exchange of information can also be attributed to the non-traditional teaching and learning process,

²⁶ Jan Servaes and Rico Lie, “Key Concepts, Disciplines, and Fields in Communication for Development and Social Change,” in *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), 1–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_113-1.

²⁷ Servaes and Lie, “Key Concepts, Disciplines, and Fields in Communication for Development and Social Change.”

²⁸ Deanna L. Fassett and C. Kyle Rudick, “Critical Communication Pedagogy: Toward ‘Hope in Action,’” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.628>.

²⁹ Alan Goodboy, “Instructional Communication Scholarship: Complementing Communication Pedagogy,” *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (June 13, 2018): 9–11, <https://doi.org/10.31446/JCP.2018.03>.

³⁰ Madikwa Hendrietta Segabutla and Rinelle Evans, “Lack of Lecturer Clarity during Instruction: Possible Reason for Poor Throughput?,” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 33, no. 3 (2019): 115–31; Fredericks and Alexander, “A Framework for Improved Classroom Communication in the South African Schooling Context”; Johann Louw et al., “Instructional Technologies in Social Science Instruction in South Africa,” *Computers & Education* 53, no. 2 (September 2009): 234–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2009.02.001>; Pelonomi Ramafi, “Investigating the Barriers of ICT Use in Teaching and Learning at Public Schools in South Africa,” *International Conference on Intelligent and Innovative Computing Applications 2022* (December 31, 2022): 92–102, <https://doi.org/10.59200/ICONIC.2022.010>; Zethi, “Students’ Perceptions towards ICTs Used for Emergency Remote Learning in Higher Education during Covid-19: A Case Study of the NWU Mafikeng Campus.”

³¹ Dean C Barnlund, “A Transactional Model of Communication,” in *Communication Theory* (Routledge, 2017), 47–57.

where the approach is not teacher-centred but revolves around both the teacher and the student. The communication of educational knowledge takes a dynamic, and circular process, with both the teacher and the student simultaneously and interchangeably assuming the role of being the sender and the receiver of educational knowledge. As a contemporary lecturer myself, my teaching and learning philosophy mostly ascribes to the non-traditional approach. For instance, this paper recognises the academic literacies they bring to the classroom, understanding that knowledge is also socially constructed. Therefore, instead of telling my students what the communication process is and in what ways we communicate, I afford them an opportunity to begin the conversation around these subjects and the class becomes interactive.

It is important to note that before the inception of the TMC, other models developed earlier. In the context of this paper, such models can be observed to simulate the traditional teaching approach. For instance, the first model of communication can be traced back to the 1940s, which was developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, and it was named after them; the Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication, as illustrated below:

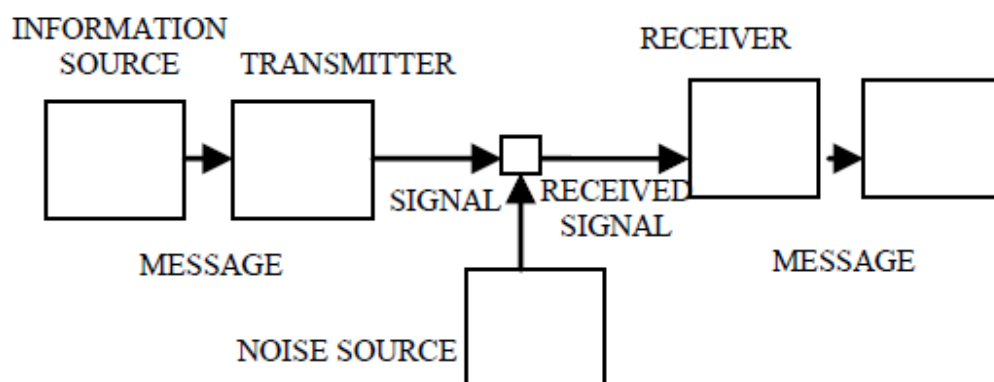


Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the Shannon and Weaver model
(Source: Al-Fedaghi, 2012:2)

The Shannon and Weaver model proposed that communication is a linear approach, in which the communication or the message moves in a straight line, from the Sender or the encoder of the message to the receiver or the decoder of the message. For instance, the sender sends the message from an information source through a particular channel, with potential noise interfering, to the receiver of the message at a given destination. Although it remains dominant in management and organizational behaviour textbooks, its limitations in capturing the dynamic nature of communication and oversimplifying the complexities of human communication by limiting it to a linear and one-way process have been criticized.³² For instance, when applied to the context of teaching and learning, the teacher is considered the "sender" who encodes information (lesson content) and transmits it through a chosen channel (lecture, presentation, activity) to the student "receiver" who decodes the message, with potential "noise" factors like distractions, or unclear language hindering comprehension, or even a higher semantic speaking level from the sender. Therefore, its deficiencies in capturing the dynamic, interactive nature of teaching and learning can be attributed to those of a traditional approach. Thus, over the years, researchers have proposed modifications and alternative models to address its shortcomings, particularly in human communication contexts.³³ As a response to such critics, models of Communication like the TMC came to light. As proposed by Barnlund and Shannon in the 1970s and further developed by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson in the late 1970s, the TMC's emphasis on the reciprocal, dynamic, and continuous nature of information exchange, influenced by various contextual factors, was seen as a

³² Kristen Getchell, James Dubinsky, and Paula Lentz, "A Critique of Transmission Communication Models in Introductory Management and Organizational Behavior Textbooks," *Journal of Management Education* 47, no. 5 (2023): 477–504.

³³ Sabah Al-Fedaghi, "A Conceptual Foundation for the Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication," *International Journal of Soft Computing* 7, no. 1 (2012): 12–19.

solution in delimiting the complexities of the communication process observed from the Shannon and Weaver's linear model of communication.³⁴ Furthermore, the TMC recognises that communication is multidirectional and that both the sender and the receiver are involved in the contribution to the meaning-creating process. Below is the schematic diagram of Transactional Communication.

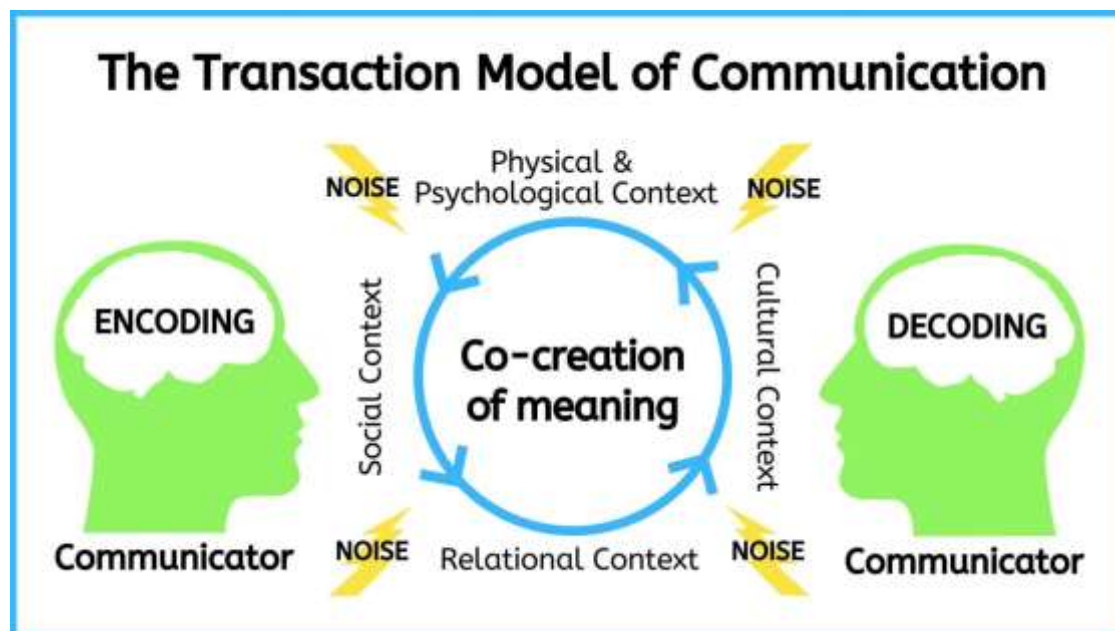


Figure 2: A schematic diagram of Transactional Model of Communication.
(Source: Lapum et al., 2020)

In light of the above diagram, one can note that the communication is not limited to just sending the message to the receiver in a straight line. However, it can be observed as a process in which communicators (both the sender and the receiver) generate contextualised social realities, within relational, social, and cultural contexts.³⁵ In relation to teaching and learning in higher education, the TMC perceives the lecture room as a dynamic and engaging space. Notably, in TMC, the sender and the receiver assume the the communicator of information role. They send and receive messages simultaneously. Thus, this signifies the continuous, circular, and dynamic nature of information exchange between both communicators. In the context of teaching and learning, the communication process becomes interactive, where both the lecturer and the student are actively involved in the co-creation of educational knowledge. Both engage simultaneously and exchange their roles in initiating communication messages. Other key features of the TMC include the real-time feedback signified by the circular movement of arrows on the circle between the communicators. That is, the information exchange is constantly adjusted in relation to the evolving interaction between the communicators. This means that both the lecturer and the student actively listen and give each other an opportunity for feedback, with both verbal and non-verbal cues, to achieve a mutual understanding.

It is important to note that, in the communication process, noise can significantly affect communication in different contexts. For instance, it can come in different forms, such as background or physical noise, psychological noise, or semantic noise. Thus, it can impact both communicators by polluting the co-created meaning. In the diagram, the noise is signified by the lightning strikes between the two communicators. In a lecture room case, physical noise can be the background made by other students during the lecture, a student's protest songs, etc. Psychological noise can be, for instance, the lecturer's and the student's emotions that they bring with them into the lecture room. The sadness and excitement of the student and the lecturer can influence the effectiveness and success of the class interaction and the co-created meaning. A Professor using higher semantics to deliver a lecture to a class of first-year students might lose his/her students in terms of comprehending the spoken words. Given

³⁴ Erwan Efendi, Muhammad Ayubi, and Najwa Aulia, "Model-Model Komunikasi Linear," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling (JPDK)* 5, no. 1 (2023): 3899–3906.

³⁵ Jennifer Lapum et al., *Introduction to Communication in Nursing*, 2020.

diversity and inequalities, both economic and literacy levels, in South Africa, it is likely that students with low levels of English proficiency will have difficulty understanding the higher English semantics. When teaching and learning occur online or through Learning Management Systems (LMS), internet problems and unstable signal connections can also be considered as noise (e.g., technological noise).

Based on the TMC diagram, context plays a pivotal role in the success of meaning creation. It is noteworthy that communication takes place within a specific context. This can include the physical and psychological context, for instance, race, culture, language, experience, attitude, feelings, knowledge, and power dynamics. As a result, context with its factors surrounding both communicators, as illustrated in the above diagram, significantly influences how the meaning is co-created, how messages are interpreted and understood, and the feedback.³⁶ In the context of teaching and learning, the cultural and physical contexts play a significant role in shaping the students' learning experiences. Cultural context, in particular, influences the development of curriculum, and teaching and learning approaches set by the university and the lecturer. In South African education, these contexts also play a crucial role, especially given the country's diversity and sociocultural landscape. For example, racial discrimination and prejudice rooted in the legacy of the apartheid era influenced educational structures and policies.³⁷ Therefore, the TMC, through social context, acknowledges the past background imbalances of the students as they approach the dynamic and engaging teaching and learning space.³⁸ Thus, the Critical Communication Pedagogy theory (CCP), which underpinned this paper, explains and supports these ideologies argued above. Below is the discussion of the CCP.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP)

From the works of Education scholars like Paulo Freire's *'pedagogy of the Oppressed'* in the 1970s, Henry Giroux's *'theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition'* in 1983, and Peter McLaren's *'life in schools: An introduction to Critical Pedagogy and the foundations of education'* in 1994/2003b emerged the concept of Critical Pedagogy Theory which sought to understand the power dynamics and hegemony in a classroom.³⁹ Its roots can be traced to critical theory, which is about understanding and challenging the imbalances of the past, like social inequalities, and seeking restorative social justice.⁴⁰ Thus, Communication researchers drew from the interdisciplinary nature of the relationship between Communication and instruction, which intersects with the essence of critical theory and critical pedagogy. In light of this view, CCP emphasizes social justice, activism, and equity in educational settings.⁴¹ Social justice in education, teaching and learning involves considering the morals and intellectual aspects for students to access good educational knowledge, and also considering their diversity.⁴² Furthermore, it addresses identity, racism, sexism, and prejudice.⁴³ Similar to the TMC model discussed in the preceding section, the physical, cultural and social context and background of students become pivotal during the instruction. For instance, in the context of a democratic South Africa, a university encompasses a diversity of students (e.g., multiracial and multicultural) from diverse backgrounds (e.g., lower and upper economic classes, rural and urban areas). Therefore, an inclusive, considerate, and moral teaching and learning approach that also considers equity among students serves justice in this regard.

³⁶ Baptiste Jacquet et al., "Contextual Information Helps Understand Messages Written with Textisms," *Applied Sciences* 11, no. 11 (2021): 4853.

³⁷ Ndileleni P Mudzielwana and Cosmas Maphosa, "The Influence of Context in the South African Higher Education System: A Social Realist Critique," *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 4, no. 3 (2013): 175–81.

³⁸ Jeremiah Chikovore et al., "Children's Learning in the Diverse Sociocultural Context of South Africa," *Childhood Education* 88, no. 5 (2012): 304–8.

³⁹ Jeffrey Michael Reyes Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools*, vol. 285 (Peter Lang, 2008).

⁴⁰ Dorothy Vaandering, "The Significance of Critical Theory for Restorative Justice in Education," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 32, no. 2 (2010): 145–76.

⁴¹ Fassett and Rudick, "Critical Communication Pedagogy: Toward 'Hope in Action'"; David H Kahl Jr, "Critical Communication Pedagogy and Assessment: Reconciling Two Seemingly Incongruous Ideas," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 21.

⁴² Elizabeth Birr Moje, "Chapter 1 Developing Socially Just Subject-Matter Instruction: A Review of the Literature on Disciplinary Literacy Teaching," *Review of Research in Education* 31, no. 1 (2007): 1–44.

⁴³ Daniel Garber and Donald Rutherford, *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Moreover, teaching and learning justice is served when diverse methodologies and approaches are incorporated, for instance, critical intercultural communication,⁴⁴ which not only creates an inclusive educational environment but also creates a multicultural positive educational environment. In addition, this resonates with South Africa and its educational scene. Given that South Africa has been dubbed a “rainbow nation” due to its diverse citizens. Social justice in the context of education, teaching and learning, on empowerment of students and neutralisation of power dynamics.⁴⁵ From the TMC perspective, the process of teaching and learning shifts from the one-way process of communication (e.g. as illustrated by Figure 1) to a circular process of communication (e.g. as illustrated by Figure 2). This means that, in this mode of teaching, students are also empowered to be the senders of communication rather than remaining as receivers. For instance, the lecturer facilitates an engaging class rather than having the power of being the only source of educational knowledge. Thus, in this sense, the class becomes an environment for the co-creation of educational knowledge, and as a result, justice is served. This is also in the same light as teaching and learning occurring through LMS, where the algorithms virtually allow for the same principles of teaching and learning social justice (e.g., equity, fairness, consideration of moral and intellectual aspects of students, and their identity and diversity) to be applied.⁴⁶ Another significant aspect of CCP is the idea that language and communication can be observed as the sites of power. For instance, Dervin posits that CCP recognises language and communication-biased tools that actively shape social realities and can perpetuate or challenge power structures.⁴⁷ Moreover, its initial concern is how language serves to privilege or oppress. In relation to this view, as a lecturer myself in one of the South African universities, I observed that in my classes, students who are proficient in English and are well-spoken feel more powerful than the students who are not proficient in English and are not very expressive. This, of course, does not mean that language proficiency translates to higher intellect.

According to Allen (2011), cited in Kahl, “Since everyday language has the potential to empower or oppress, CCP contributes to critical pedagogy by acknowledging how everyday interactions help to (re)produce knowledge, (re)construct identities, and (re)iterate ideologies.”⁴⁸ Therefore, this means that a lecturer who inspires interactions and engagement during lectures offers an opportunity, especially to the less proficient and expressive students, to reconstruct their identities and empower the whole class to be effective knowledge (re)producers, which resonates with the idea of co-creation of curriculum. Similarly, the TMC emphasise an interactive mode of communication, circular and engaging. In light of this view, CCP highlights the significance of dialogue and collaboration within the teaching and learning space and beyond to advocate for critical thinking and social change.⁴⁹ This also resonates with the TMC's element of a dialogic communication mode, in which both the student and the lecturer assume the roles of both communicators, senders and receivers of educational messages. In light of these views, there is a need to devise a model that not only highlights the intersections of communication and pedagogy but also highlights the significance of identity, and power dynamics and most importantly, offers a means (or at least a starting point) for lecturers teaching in multicultural, multilingual Higher Education contexts. Therefore, as both a communication scholar and an instructor myself, I draw inspiration from the TMC and the principles of CCP to develop and propose a Pedagogical Communication Model (PMC). Thus, the following section discusses the PMC in detail.

⁴⁴ Miriam Shoshana Sobre, “Developing the Critical Intercultural Class-Space: Theoretical Implications and Pragmatic Applications of Critical Intercultural Communication Pedagogy,” *Intercultural Education* 28, no. 1 (2017): 39–59.

⁴⁵ George Villanueva, *Promoting Urban Social Justice through Engaged Communication Scholarship: Reimagining Place* (Routledge, 2021).

⁴⁶ Vannie Naidoo, “E-Learning and Management Education at African Universities,” in *Management Education for Global Leadership* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2017), 181–201.

⁴⁷ Fred Dervin, “Critical Turns in Language and Intercultural Communication Pedagogy: The Simple-Complex Continuum (Simplicity) as a New Perspective,” in *The Critical Turn in Language and Intercultural Communication Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2016), 82–96.

⁴⁸ Kahl Jr, “Critical Communication Pedagogy and Assessment: Reconciling Two Seemingly Incongruous Ideas.”

⁴⁹ Kahl Jr, “Critical Communication Pedagogy and Assessment: Reconciling Two Seemingly Incongruous Ideas.”

The Pedagogical Model of Communication

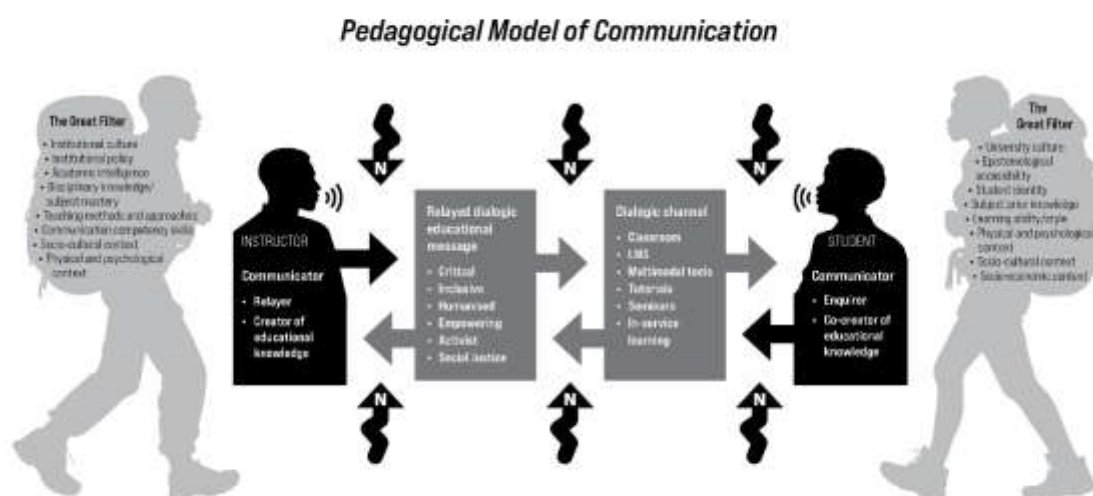


Figure 3: A Pedagogical Model of Communication
(Source: The author, 2025), (design assistance: Brian Garman, 2025)

The PMC, as illustrated above, recognises that teaching and learning are interactive, co-constructive, and contextual processes. Moreover, instead of a traditional one-way transmission of educational knowledge, for instance, a teacher-centred approach, PMC emphasises the dialogue, engagement, mutual meaning-making or co-creation of educational knowledge between the instructor and the student. This is further illustrated in the 8 key components, as discussed in detail in the following.

1. The great filter: The Relayer’s context

This is signified by the dark thinking cloud in Figure 3, illustrating a contextual layer that acts as a filter from the instructor’s point of view. Factors in the contextual layer can also affect the quality of the message, which in this case is educational knowledge. For instance, the academic intelligence and subject mastery of the instructor. Furthermore, the physical appearance and psychological state of the instructor can also have an effect on the communication of educational knowledge. For instance, while some studies have highlighted that students perform better when they are taught by their own race⁵⁰ on the other hand, the racial diversity of instructors can break down racial barriers, biases and improve cultural competence from both the instructor(s) and students.⁵¹ Thus, this also speaks to the cultural background of the instructor, including the institutional culture (e.g., vision and mission, teaching and learning policies, and history of the university). Most importantly, the significance of communication skills in dialogic teaching and learning processes cannot be overstated.

2. Communicator: The Relayer of educational messages

In this component, the instructor assumes various roles in the communication process of educational knowledge. Besides being a communicator, the lecturer becomes the **Relayer** of the educational message, and this is because, in this context, the message is sent and received (to and from the students) simultaneously and constantly. In the diagram, the lecturer also assumes the role of being a creator of

⁵⁰ Dan Goldhaber and Michael Hansen, “Race, Gender, and Teacher Testing: How Informative a Tool Is Teacher Licensure Testing?,” *American Educational Research Journal* 47, no. 1 (2010): 218–51; Thomas S Dec, “The Race Connection: Are Teachers More Effective with Students Who Share Their Ethnicity?,” *Education Next* 4, no. 2 (2004): 52–60.

⁵¹ Stephen D Brookfield, *Teaching Race: How to Help Students Unmask and Challenge Racism* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018); R Patrick Solomon, “Exploring Cross-Race Dyad Partnerships in Learning to Teach,” *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 6 (2000): 953–79.

educational knowledge, and this is because, in a dialogic teaching and learning process, lecturers, in addition to organising learning material and content, are usually the initiators of the communication of educational knowledge. Thus, this is where power dynamics is at play. However, based on the PMC, the student remains empowered to engage and become a co-creator of educational knowledge.

3. Relayed dialogic educational messages

While the instructor assumes the role of being a Relayer, the message in the PMC context is signified as the Relayed, for similar reasons explained in the context of the Relayer. The dialogic educational messages have to be critical in the sense that they challenge students to engage in critical thinking. As articulated by the CCP, these messages should have an element of activism, empowerment and social justice. For instance, studies have highlighted the significance of recognising students' different learning abilities, such as visual, auditory, verbal/written, and kinaesthetic.⁵² Therefore, in light of the PMC, Relayer must organise inclusive dialogic educational messages to address the students' different learning abilities and needs of the students. On the other hand, in South Africa, there is still a huge gap in social inequalities, also evident in the education system, due to the legacy of apartheid. Therefore, these messages must also be inclusive of different social backgrounds and classes. Thus, students should be empowered to be co-creators of knowledge despite their social backgrounds. By ensuring such, justice will be served.

4. The dialogic channel for the relayed

This component highlights the channel of communication. In the context of PMC, the channel of communication must be conducive to empowering students to engage in a dialogic and co-creation of educational knowledge. For instance, these channels include a traditional classroom, LMS, tutorials, seminars, multimodal tools (social media, learning through play, Artificial Intelligence, etc), and learning outside classroom settings (e.g., in-service learning or fieldwork).

5. Student as an enquirer of educational knowledge

Based on the PMC diagram, similarly to the Relayer, the student, as the receiver of educational knowledge, assumes multiple roles. For instance, their role goes beyond just being receivers of the relayed educational knowledge to active co-creators of educational knowledge. This is achieved through the constant enquiry of educational knowledge, as indicated by the arrows (with the letter *F* signifying feedback) moving in a circular format to and from the student's end. Although the student's role of enquirer benefits them by improving their critical thinking and engagement, however, time, language proficiency, and expressiveness may be a challenge.

6. The great filter: The Enquirer's context

Similarly to the Relayer's context, the culture and social background of the student may affect the level of participation and engagement in the classroom. Although the increasing diversity in South African university classrooms might be positive, on the other hand, it challenges lecturers and facilitators to recognise students' different learning styles and needs, prior knowledge, and students' academic identities. Some studies⁵³ highlight the importance of recognising and incorporating students' diverse identities as it has the potential to improve students' motivation, engagement, and academic success. According to the PMC, these identities go beyond the cultural backgrounds of students to factors including a sense of self within the educational environment, personal experience, and interactions within the learning environment. Thus, as an instructor, it is crucial to understand the identity of the students for an inclusive and effective teaching and learning environment. Also, with this recognition,

⁵² Rahmat Fauzi et al., "Pengelompokan Gaya Belajar Secara Homogen Dalam Mendukung Pembelajaran Diferensiasi Proses Siswa," *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2023); Praveen Kumar Arora and Sonal Singh Arora, "Identifying Various Learning Styles Amongst Students," n.d.

⁵³ Linda P Juang and C Philip Hwang, "The Importance of Ethnic-Racialized Identities to Becoming and Being Culturally Responsive and Equity Minded Educators," *Identity* 24, no. 4 (2024): 257–68; Jules Winchester, "The Potential Impact of the Teacher on Student Identities in the Classroom in an English Language Teaching Context," *Tesol Journal* 4, no. 4 (2013): 697–716.

they can become active co-creators of knowledge. However, the psychological context of students cannot be neglected. Students come with emotional burdens, both personal and academic, that lead to depression. For instance, studies reported that more than 45% of the South African student population is likely experiencing depression, and 8.6% attempt suicide due to depression.⁵⁴ Therefore, the emotional state of the students as co-creators of educational knowledge becomes integral in the success of mutual meaning creation in the learning environment.

7. Dialogic feedback

In the PMC, the feedback becomes one of the most important components. It is indicated by the circular movement of the arrows with the letter *F*, which emphasises the constant engagement and dialogue between the Relayer and the Enquirer (lecturer and student). Therefore, PMC encourages a two-way communication process, e.g., in the form of Socratic questioning, open discussions, Q&A sessions, tutorials, student-led lectures etc. In addition, it is inclusive in that it offers different types of assessment (eg, critical essays, oral presentations, group work etc) to cater to diverse students' learning strengths and abilities of diverse students.

8. Noise as a barrier

Noise as a barrier to an effective communication process can come in different formats, for example, background, psychological, and semantic noise, and can undermine the quality of learning.⁵⁵ Based on Figure 3, noise is indicated by the interfering arrows marked with *N* between the feedback. In the context of PMC, noise can interfere in the form of language proficiency and paralinguistics, use of jargon, technological divide (e.g., digital literacy, unequal access to internet, LMS, etc), errors in the course guideline, psychological, and classroom environment. Therefore, both the *relayer* and the *enquirer* must take cognisance of *noise* as a distractive force towards the *co-creation of educational knowledge and meanings*. Thus, the PCM, through *diverse dialogic channels of instruction*, must attempt to address all these interferences through dialogic Constant feedback, and allow the opportunity to send and receive multidirectional and simultaneous feedback to negotiate the meaning for a goal of mutual understanding.

The Merits of the PMC

In light of the discussion of eight key components of the PMC, one can note that, in addition to the interactive and dynamic nature of communications illustrated in the model, it is important not to oversimplify the communication process during the teaching and learning process. For instance, the model posits that teaching and learning should not be perceived merely as the transmission of knowledge from instructor to students; rather, it should be regarded as a dialogic interaction that employs a complex, multifaceted, and multidirectional communication process, involving simultaneous exchanges between the instructor and students. Although the PMC has flaws, it possesses several advantages. For instance, it recommends that instructors teaching in a multicultural contexts should should perceive the classroom as a dynamic arena for dialogue and engagement, rather than merely a venue for the transmission of educational content. Furthermore, the model positions conversation as central to teaching and learning, in which the teacher and students engage as equal participants in the interaction, influenced by diverse situations. Therefore, this approach facilitates the collaborative development of curricula, meanings, and educational knowledge. Central to its orientation toward epistemological justice is the cultivation of a humanising pedagogy grounded in empathy, where both educators and students acknowledge their diverse psychological, physical, cultural, social, and power-laden contexts. When implemented effectively, the model has the potential to challenge established epistemic injustices, improve epistemological access, and enable students to emerge as epistemic agents of excellence. Nevertheless, it has limitations and cannot be universally applied. Institutional factors, such as large class sizes, may constrain dialogical engagement and render it overly time-intensive. Moreover, while authority is

⁵⁴ Jason Bantjes et al., "Epidemiology of Non-Fatal Suicidal Behavior among First-Year University Students in South Africa," *Death Studies* 46, no. 4 (2022): 816–23.

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Ifeduba, "Taxonomy of Communication Noise Impacting the Quality of Library Resources," 2020.

partially decentralised, instructors inevitably retain subject-matter expertise, even as students are encouraged to exercise autonomy through dialogical participation and collaborative meaning-making. Importantly, the model presupposes strong communication skills, underscoring the need for lecturer training, particularly within multicultural higher education settings.

CONCLUSION

This paper used the TMC as an analytical framework to understand the teaching and learning process, highlighting the similarities, interconnectedness, and integration of communication into the teaching and learning process. From the discussion and analysis, this paper proposed the PMC, designed as the starting point for application by instructors teaching in multicultural university contexts. The PMC synthesises the attributes of both TMC and teaching and learning by incorporating additional elements such as the great filter of the educational messages between the instructor and the students, where various contexts from both participants should be taken into consideration. Through this integration, communication is shown to be indispensable for facilitating educational processes in diverse contexts be it traditional classrooms, online learning management systems, or informal learning environments. The instructor and students are thus required to develop strong communicative competencies to engage in dialogical exchanges that support the co-construction of educational knowledge.⁵⁶ Such dialogic communication fosters shared meaning-making and cultivates a collaborative and interactive learning environment. Although the PMC is not without limitations, it nonetheless represents a valuable contribution to ongoing debates about the role of communication in improving teaching and learning. The model underscores the importance of mutual engagement between instructors and students in negotiating meaning, as well as the centrality of listening, interaction, adaptability, and co-creation of curriculum. Moreover, it recognises the influence of broader contextual factors that shape classroom interactions. Ultimately, the PMC advances the goals of critical thinking, collaborative learning, transformative participation, empowerment, inclusion, equity, and addresses epistemological injustices. For further research, this paper recommends a more African-contextualised PMC to close the research gaps in instructional communication from an Afrocentric approach.

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⁵⁶ Wei Zhang and Tetyana Koshmanova, "Exploring Chinese School Principal Experiences and Leadership Practice in Building a Professional Learning Community for Student Achievement," *International Journal of Organizational Leadership* 10, no. 4 (2021): 331; Fatemeh Bambaeeroo and Nasrin Shokrpour, "The Impact of the Teachers' Non-Verbal Communication on Success in Teaching," *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism* 5, no. 2 (2017): 51; Norman D Vaughan, Martha Cleveland-Innes, and D Randy Garrison, *Teaching in Blended Learning Environments: Creating and Sustaining Communities of Inquiry* (Athabasca University Press, 2013).

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