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## ソーシャルワーク実践におけるコミュニケーション・スキル －教育現場における技能習得と教授方法－

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### Communication Skills in Social Work Practice － Teaching and Learning Methodologies －

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#### Abstract

Social work is one of the first professions to recognise the importance of communication skills and the link to effective practice. Communication skills can be essential to the task of assessment, interviewing and decision making. Effective communication skills are one of the most crucial components of a social worker's job. Social workers must communicate with clients to gain information, convey critical information and make important decisions. Without effective communication skills, a social worker may not be able to obtain or convey that information. In this global age social workers have to have a broaden mind and multi-cultural understanding because you may have to deal with clients with diversified cultural back grounds. In practice, communication tends to be defined as 'The verbal and nonverbal exchange of information, including all the ways in which knowledge is transmitted and received' (Barker, 2003, Trevithick, 2005). The latter elements of communication, which can often translate the emotional content of the communication, are also referred to as interpersonal skills. According to Thompson (2002) social workers use such skills to communicate 'ethically sensitive practice' (p.307). The purposes of this article are to highlight the role and importance of verbal, nonverbal communication skills and other important communication skills involved in social work practice in this diversified society and what kinds of teaching and learning methods are effective from perspectives of students and teachers.

**Key words** : social work, communication skills, active listening, interviewing skills

## **I Social work and Communication skills**

Social work is understood as a profession charged with fulfilling the social mandate of promoting well-being and quality of life of service users since its emergence in 1950s (Seden and Katz 2003). According to Nelson (1980) social work was one of the first professions to recognise the importance of communication skills and the link to effective practice. Communication skills can be essential to the task of assessment, interviewing and later decision making for social workers.

In practice, communication tends to be defined primarily as 'The verbal and non-verbal exchange of information, including all the ways in which knowledge is transmitted and received' (Barker, 2003: p83 in Trevithick, 2005, p 116). The latter elements of communication, which can often translate the emotional content of the communication, are also referred to as interpersonal skills. According to Thompson (2002) social workers use such skills to communicate 'ethically sensitive practice' (p.307). The purposes of this article are to identify what important communication skills are for social workers, and also what teaching and learning methods are useful to obtain those skills based on the survey conducted among social work students and teachers at some social work educational institutions.

### **I -1 What is Social work**

In recent global days and age, social work cannot be done without understanding different cultures and social issues. According to IFSW and IASSW(2014), 'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences,

humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.' (IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014). It can be said that communication skills are critically important for social workers to carry out such objectives and responsibilities. According to the definition of IFSW and IASSW, 'social work is also a practice profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion'. The definition covers very extensive and wide-range of individual and social issues where social workers should have wide range of social work methodologies, emphatic and people centric understanding as well as heart-full and effective communication skills.

### **I -2 Social work practice**

Social work's legitimacy and mandate lie in its intervention at the points where people interact with their environment. The environment includes the various social systems that people are embedded in and the

natural, geographic environment, which has a profound influence on the lives of people. The participatory methodology advocated in social work is reflected in 'Engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.' As far as possible social work supports working with rather than for people. Consistent with the social development paradigm, social workers utilize a range of skills (including various kinds of communication skills), techniques, strategies, principles and activities at various system levels, directed at system maintenance and/or system change efforts. Social work practice spans a range of activities including various forms of therapy and counseling, group work, and community work; policy formulation and analysis; and advocacy and political interventions. From an emancipatory perspective, that the definition supports social work strategies are aimed at increasing people's hope, self-esteem and creative potential to confront and challenge oppressive power dynamics and structural sources of injustices, thus incorporating into a coherent whole the micro-macro, personal-political dimension of intervention. That is why communication skills are most critical skills they need to obtain. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from one country to the next, and from time to time depending on historical, cultural, political and socio-economic conditions. Therefore necessary and useful communication skills are varied and depend on circumstances. This article tries to find universally acceptable communication skills for social workers and its useful teaching and learning methods in actual social work practice. It is the responsibility of social workers across the world to defend, enrich and realize the values and principles reflected in this definition. A social work definition can only be meaningful when social workers have those skills and actively commit to its values and

vision.

As the author mentioned above effective communication skill is one of the most crucial components of a social worker's profession. Social workers must communicate with service users to gain information, understand the client's problems (\*assessing), and help making important decisions (\*planning), accepting, non-judgmental support. Without effective communication skills, a social worker may not be able to obtain or convey that information. It may cause detrimental effects to service users. In practice good communication skills e.g. (\*verbal and non-verbal communication skills), (\*active listening) (\*interview skills) and some more skills, are crucial for establishing efficient and respectful relationships with service users and lie at the heart of best practice in social work (Trevithick, 2005, p116). Social workers must demonstrate several skills while assessing or interviewing a client.

## II Key roles of values

A holistic and participatory model is one of the recent mainstream approaches of social work which is promoted to describe four key roles underpinned by values and ethics, which are:

**\*Assessing:** prepare for, and work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to assess their needs and circumstances.

**\*Planning:** carry out, review and evaluate social work practice, with individuals, families, carers, groups, communities and other professionals.

**\*Acceptance and Support:** accepting and support individuals to represent their needs, views and circumstances.

**\*Interviewing skills**

Both clinical and direct-service social workers conduct

interviews with their clients to help gather information and establish relationships during the initial phase of treatment. Clinical social workers generally focus on mental health, while direct-service social workers assist clients with concrete needs and services. In either case, having strong interviewing skills is vital, because asking the wrong questions or responding inappropriately to the clients can negatively impact treatment and hinder the overall effectiveness as a professional social worker.

To carry out the above task, the basic skills required for the social workers can be identified as follows;

- **Active listening**, non-critical acceptance;
- **Paraphrasing**, applying skills, reacting back; encouraging, summarizing and checking;
- **Empathic understanding**, linking; immediacy;
- Challenging; confronting; work with defenses;
- Planning, goal setting; problem solving; focusing techniques;
- **Nonverbal, verbal communication skills**, knowledge about own and other's use of body language;
- Avoidance of judging and moralistic responses;
- Boundary awareness; structuring techniques; the ability to say difficult things constructively;
- The ability to offer feedback; techniques for defusing, avoiding the creation of and managing hostility;

Related to the above, the basic communication skills required for the social workers can be identified as:

- 1) **Active listening**, attention giving; non-critical acceptance.
- 2) **Applying skills**, ability to use different kinds of questions; minimal prompting; alternatives to questions.
- 3) **Empathic understanding**, linking, immediacy, (emotional relationship building; **verbal communication skills**)
- 4) Knowledge about own and other's use of body

language; (**non-verbal communication skills**)

## 5) Interviewing skills

### 1) Active Listening Skills

A significant portion of a social worker's job involves interviewing clients and other parties involved in a service users (SUs) care. To provide the most effective services and counseling, a social worker must develop the ability to listen carefully and pay attention to details. This may involve learning to take detailed notes so as to easily recall what was said later. Active listening also involves paying attention to how the social worker reacts as the SU is speaking. This means avoiding giving signs that the social worker disagrees with something a SU has said, interrupting a client, rolling eyes, doodling, multitasking, or yawning and appearing generally disinterested in what the SU is saying.

Research has verified listening as the most utilized form. 'If frequency is a measure of importance, then listening easily qualifies as the most prominent kind of communication' (Adler, 2014). Active listening skills need to be learned, practiced in training, developed and refreshed for effective use in real situations. According to author Barry R. Cournoyer in his book 'The Social Work Skills Workbook,' active listening involves the combination of talking and listening skills to show clients that a social worker is an active and collaborative participant in treatment and helps convey empathy for your client's problem or situation. During active listening, the worker uses mirroring techniques to paraphrase and reflect back to a client what he or she has just said. For example, a client may say, 'I hate my spouse when he yells at me. He makes me feel like a child.' An active listening response might involve saying something such as 'So you feel like your spouse doesn't respect you or treat you like an equal partner.' Each response needs to be tailored to what the clients are

saying to demonstrate that the worker is truly listening and engaged in what they are revealing to.

## **2) Applying skills**

Often social workers have to gain information from people who are not willing to part with that information or who may be difficult to understand. A social worker must know how to ask the right questions to get the necessary information or to alter the language of the questions to help a SU understand what was being asked. Social workers may also benefit from knowing how to use alternative tactics for getting information, such as role playing or word association.

## **3) Empathetic understanding**

Empathetic understanding describes a special and demanding alertness on the part of the social worker involved in interviewing a SU. Empathetic understanding is about being present psychologically, socially and emotionally, not just physically (Trevithick 2005,p.123). By using skills such as paraphrasing, reflective questioning, showing facial empathy and open and closed questioning the social worker can convey full interest and understanding to a vulnerable SU (Adler, 2014). This skill involves ‘understanding or appreciating the feelings of others, but without necessarily experiencing them’ (Thompson 2009, p111). Social workers must show sensitivity and respect to the feelings of the client. There is however a difference between sympathy and empathy. Therefore there is a fundamental skill to achieving empathy not merely expressing sympathy.

## **4) Verbal communication and non-verbal communication skills**

### **4)-1 Verbal communication**

Verbal communication is a key skill in social work practice and ‘refers to face to face interactions and involves the impact of the actual words we use in

speaking’ (Thompson, 2009, p100). It is important for social workers to be aware of how and what they say in certain situations, for example, in regards to the issue of formality. If the social worker does not access the situation correctly they may be conceived as being too formal or informal and thus will inevitably create barriers.

Effective verbal communication skills include more than just talking. Verbal communication encompasses both how you deliver messages and how you receive them. Communication is a soft skill, and it’s one that is important to every SU. Social workers who can convey information clearly and effectively are highly valued by SUs. Social workers who can interpret messages and act appropriately on the information that they receive have a better chance understanding SUs and helping SUs.

According to Dan Schawbel, one of his predications for 2011 was that soft skills will become more important than hard skills. Schawbel went on to highlight a new research report by Kelly Services conducted with 134,000 people. According to the survey, the traits individuals identify as the most important in creating their personal value were their verbal communication skills.

### **4)-2 Key Differences between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication**

The use of words in communication is verbal communication. The communication which is based on signs, not on words is non-verbal communication. There are very fewer chances of confusion in verbal communication between the sender and receiver. Conversely, the chances of misunderstanding and confusion in non-verbal communication are very much as the use of language is not done. In verbal communication, the interchange of the message is very fast which leads to rapid feedback. In opposition

to this, the non-verbal communication is based more on understanding which takes time and hence it is comparatively slow. In verbal communication, the presence of both the parties at the place of communication is not necessary, as it can also be done if the parties are at different locations. On the other hand, for an effective non-verbal communication, both the parties must be there, at the time of communication. Verbal communication fulfils the most natural desire of humans – talk. In the case of non-verbal communication, feelings, status, emotions, personality, etc. are very easily communicated, through the acts done by the parties to the communication.

#### 4)-3 Non-verbal communication skills

Nonverbal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages without using words, either spoken or written. The term nonverbal communication was introduced in 1956 by psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch and author Weldon Kees in the book *Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations*. Social workers should make eye-to-eye contact when speaking with clients and those involved with their care. Giving a smile can signal warmth and make a social worker seem more approachable.

#### 4)-4 Types of Nonverbal Communication

Judee Burgoon (1994) has identified seven different nonverbal dimensions: (1) body movements including facial expressions and eye contact; (2) vocalics or paralanguage that includes volume, rate, pitch, and timbre; (3) personal appearance; (4) our physical environment and the artifacts or objects that compose it; (5) proxemics or personal space; (6) haptics or touch; and (7) chronemics or time. To this list Richard Nordquist (2016) would add signs or emblems. ‘Signs or emblems include all of those gestures that supplant

words, numbers, and punctuation marks. They may vary from the monosyllabic gesture of a hitchhiker's prominent thumb to such complex systems as the American Sign Language for the hearing disabled where nonverbal signals have a direct verbal translation. However, it should be emphasized that signs and emblems are culture specific. The thumb and forefinger gesture used to represent 'A-Okay' in the United States assumes a derogatory and offensive interpretation in some Latin American countries.’ (Wallace V. Schmidt et al., (2007) It is critical for global social workers who deal with clients with multi-cultural back ground.

#### 4)-5 Deceptive Studies

‘Traditionally, experts tend to agree that nonverbal communication itself carries the impact of a message. The figure most cited to support this claim is the estimate that 93 percent of all meaning in a social situation comes from nonverbal information, while only 7 percent comes from verbal information.’ The figure is deceiving, however. It is based on two 1976 studies that compared vocal cues with facial cues. While other studies have not supported the 93 percent, it is agreed that both children and adults rely more on nonverbal cues than on verbal cues in interpreting the messages of others.’ (Roy M. Berko et al., (2007)

Working as a global social worker or working with challenged people whose non-verbal communication approaches are different from others should realize more of differences and risk of misunderstanding by SUs. Further, many SUs tend to come from vulnerable sections of society. It is possible that their involvement with social workers may invoke feelings of shame or fear. It is likely that this will then leave them vulnerable to feeling misunderstood and not listened to. It is fundamental that social workers treat each SU as an individual and assess their situation as a unique case. In order to build

a good relationship with each SU the social worker must demolish any power or untrusting issues that may be present. This power may be either perceived or real in certain situations. For that reason, congruence plays an important role during the interview process. It may not be completely possible to eradicate the power imbalance but it is a key skill to be aware of the need to achieve congruence. This can be active by using the appropriate language so that the SU can fully understand and be listened to. It is through verbal skills that social workers can convey genuine warmth, respect and non-judgement for the service user. Indeed, verbal communication skills also play a major role when working with other colleagues and professions, and are essential for decision making and assessments (Cournoyer, 1996). Verbal and Non-verbal communication are not contradictory to each other, but they are complementary. In short, both goes side by side and helps a human being, to interact and respond to other human beings. Verbal communication is obviously an important part of life as we use words to communicate. But have you ever thought, that a small baby cannot use language or words to speak, but he chooses signs to show his anger, happiness, and sorrow.

### **5) Interviewing skills**

Both clinical and direct-service social workers conduct interviews with their clients to help gather information and establish relationships during the initial phase of treatment. Clinical social workers generally focus on mental health, while direct-service social workers assist clients with concrete needs and services. In either case, having strong interviewing skills is vital, because asking the wrong questions or responding inappropriately to your clients can negatively impact treatment and hinder your overall effectiveness as a professional social worker.

#### 5)-1 Supportive Environment

One of the most important social work interviewing skills is creating a safe, supportive environment for the clients. Creating a supportive environment lets your clients know that it's OK to open up and let down their guard. It helps promote a feeling of respect and equality between you and your client. Methods for promoting this type of safe treatment environment vary from one social worker to another; examples include arranging your office space so that you and your client are seated opposite each other, without a table or desk in between to create a power differential, or asking your clients to refer to you by your first name instead of "Mr." or "Ms."

#### 5)-2 Questioning

Asking the right questions is a foundation of any social work interview. However, your questions need to have a purpose and should not be based on your own personal curiosity about a client. Phrasing questions in open-ended form, when possible and appropriate to the function of your interview, shows your clients that you are interested and open to hearing what they have to say. An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" answer or just a few words. Questions with those kinds of brief answers are referred to as "closed-ended questions." An example of a closed-ended question is, "What do you do for a living?" whereas an open-ended question might be phrased as "Can you tell me about your job?" According to author Thomas O'Hare in his book "Essentials of Social Work Practice," open-ended questions encourage clients to open up and talk about themselves, thereby facilitating treatment.

#### 5)-3 Interpretation

Interpretation is an interviewing skill that should only be used when you've gathered enough information about a client to make an informed, educated analysis of the situation or problem at hand. It's important not to jump

to conclusions or make connections between events that aren't actually related. During interpretation, you help make connections that might not seem obvious to the client but may be clear to you as a clinician, according to the Middle Tennessee State University School of Social Work. For example, an interpretation to a client might involve saying, 'You felt nervous during your job interview because of the time your previous employer told you you'd never get another job in this field again.'

### III Survey on communication skills

#### III-1 Research

Respondents were asked to tell what communication skills are most important, to give an overview of what communication skills are taught at their institution, and to give a description of the teaching and learning methods used.

Objective: The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify what skills are important in social work practice and what methodologies are useful to learn those skills.

Respondents: N=25: 21; students, 4; teachers. Time: August 2016.

**Table 1** Q1 What are important communication skills in social work practice?

Please name three.

1. active listening skill	20
2. non-verbal communication skill	19
3. interviewing skill	18
4. Paraphrasing	14

N=21 Active listening is rated as the most important by the students.

**Table 2** Q2 What teaching and learning methods are useful to obtain those skills?

1. Focus Group Discussions	19
1. Role playing	19
3. Field work research	18
4. Counselling workshop	15
5. Street play practice	15
6. Theatric workshop	15

N=21 Focus Group discussions and role playing are rated the most useful teaching methods by the students.

**Table 3** Q3 Do you have any suggestions regarding communication skill learning?

1.*	19
2.*	15
3.*	13
4.*	10
5.*	10
6.*	9

1.\* Reporting and writing are important.

2.\* Emphasizing skill

3.\* Cross cultural understanding

4.\* Handbooks and textbooks are useful

5.\* Workshop by senior students and experience sharing by NGO persons are useful.

6.\* We want more chances of presentation and making speech skill learning.

N=21 Reporting and writing skills are ranked as the top followed by emphasizing skill.

Q4 Any suggestions or sharing your thoughts on communication skills in social work practice? Social work faculty members, teachers and professional social workers were asked this question. N=4

Suggestions are given mainly from actual social work practice.

1) Make effective contact with individuals and

organisations for a range of objectives, by verbal, paper-based and electronic means. (importance of learning e-communication skills)

- 2) Identify and use opportunities for purposeful and supportive communication with users within their everyday living situations. (multi-disciplinary workshop including service users are important)
- 3) Present conclusions verbally and on paper, in a structured form, appropriate to the audience for which these have been prepared. (writing practice is important)
- 4) Make effective preparation for and lead meetings in a productive way. Communicate effectively across potential barriers resulting from differences. (Productivity)

### III-2 Findings

There are a number of key recommendations and suggestions from the data relating to what is currently being taught regarding communication in social work education.

- 1) Listen actively to others, engage appropriately with the life experiences of service users, understand critically their viewpoint and overcome personal prejudices.

While there is evidence of teaching and learning about 'listening actively', there is little that links explicitly with 'engage appropriately with the life experiences of service users'. Responses include 'working with difference and diversity', 'political/social context of social work' and 'adapting skills to users' situations' (practice teachers' focus group), each of which can be seen to contribute to the benchmark but not in a clearly defined way.

- 2) Make effective contact with individuals and organisations for a range of objectives, by verbal, paper-based and electronic means.

There was no systematic approach to teaching and learning about 'making effective contact' that distinguished between individuals and organisations or different objectives. Nevertheless, many of the skills needed for doing so are embedded in curricula, for example, counselling, networking, advocacy and interviewing. It appears, however, that much of this needs to be thought through against the benchmarks in an explicit way.

In terms of modes of communication ('verbal, paper-based and electronic'), there is an emphasis on verbal communication. Nevertheless, paper-based communication skills are reported in terms of 'report writing', 'written communication', 'recording', and 'writing letters'. Electronic means are also referred to in terms of 'IT skills' and 'telephone work'.

The impact of disabilities, including learning disabilities such as dyslexia, is not addressed in the responses.

- 3) Interviewing skills

The most common skill to be identified in the teaching of communication is interviewing. While this is often undefined, in many cases respondents go on to identify particular contributory or 'sub'-skills, including listening, questioning (in particular, asking open questions), non-verbal communication and empathy.

These were also the kind of skills most likely to be identified in students' responses, wherein the focus group suggested that interviewing was the most prevalent communication form they have learnt.

- 4) Written communication skills

There is a clear emphasis on verbal and nonverbal (other than written) communication teaching and learning in current practice. However, where written communication was mentioned, respondents tended to express anxiety about lack of attention to this area, and academics and practice teachers felt that students need particular

support with their written skills.

#### 5) More communication skills required

Increased user involvement, with users coming in to deliver teaching and also being involved with assessment. Increased inter professional teaching - both teaching in mixed groups with other human services students, and teaching about inter professional communication.

Increased assessment by observation as well as written assessment;

Increased use of observation and shadowing, that is, students shadowing experienced social workers in practice. The issue of inter professional communication emerges as a key theme. Some respondents mentioned that there was already teaching in this particular area, and several stated that teaching of communication in this area would be increased.

#### 6) Experiential learning principles

Overall, there was a strong emphasis on experiential teaching and learning, reflected in the strong showing of participative activities such as role play, video work (students being videoed and observing themselves and each other) and small group work. Typically, respondents described sessions beginning with a short period of tutor-delivered theory or background, followed by exercises and role plays in small groups, with feedback. Where direct input from tutors was mentioned, however, all respondents emphasised that this was kept to a minimum-one, respondent described them as 'mini-lectures'.

#### 7) Use both verbal and non-verbal cues to guide interpretation.

Significantly, respondents refer specifically to 'non-verbal communication' as a key skill, and this is supported by reports of other related skills being taught and learnt, for example, 'self-awareness', 'rapport

building' and 'communication through art and play' (practice teachers' focus group). Verbal cues are also addressed in current teaching and learning in terms of 'questioning', 'feedback', 'clarifying' and 'checking out', but, again, not clearly drawn out.

#### 8) Identify and use opportunities for purposeful and supportive communication with users within their everyday living situations.

Practice teachers in particular identify 'adapting skills to users' situations' as key and academics refer to related skills, for example, 'working with difference and diversity'.

#### 9) Communicate effectively across potential barriers resulting from differences.

## IV conclusion

Active listening, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and interviewing skills are rated as the most important communication skills by the students. And focus group discussion and role playing are highly evaluated as effective learning methods. However, teachers and professionals think writing and reporting skills are very important and the students are not aware of it. Those important skills can be interrelated each other. It can be concluded the students can identify learning methods best fit to themselves and develop their strength. In this diversified society, without managing effective communication skills social workers cannot achieve the task based on the social work values; service user oriented, empowerment, acceptance, and universal human rights. Those skills can't be taught only by teachers, but learning and practicing in a students' oriented group work can lead to empowering themselves.

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