Research Paper

Marianne DeMarco

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Have you ever heard the age old question, “What separates man and beast?” What is it that makes us different from animals? A human being’s level of communication is what separates us from the rest. To the average teenager today, communication means calling their friend on the phone, while text-messaging another friend on their cell phone, while checking the e-mails and posting a comment on their classroom wiki page. Wikipedia defines communication as “the process of information usually via a common system of symbols.” Signs and symbols, this is where communication begins. From birth we are processing information, or learning, from these signs and symbols. The signs and symbols develop into the words and language which we use to learn. And eventually, we begin to develop intelligence and high-order thinking skills. In the article, “Teaching with the Brain in Mind,” the author Eric Jensen states, “Today, consensus tells us that heredity provides about 30 to 60 percent of our brain's wiring, and 40 to 70 percent is the environmental impact.” It is only through enrichment that the brain develops. WordNet Search characterizes learning as “the cognitive process of acquiring skill or knowledge; the child's acquisition of language.” In the book, “Philosophy in a New Key,” Susanne Langer describes music as its own language. Music is the language of feeling and emotion. Music as a form of communication helps with the development and growth of the individual and his/her ability to learn. When looking at communication, one cannot leave out the tremendous impact technology has had on language and communication and how technology has helped communication developed throughout the years.

Learning is the pursuit of knowledge. Simplest knowledge is derived from the interpretation of signs (Langer p. 59.) Langer states that, “A sign indicates the existence

– past, present or future – of a thing, event or condition." But we as human beings cannot just leave it at that. This *is* what separates man from beast. Human beings are drawn to interpret the signs. This is an early form of learning, human nature's innate drive to find meaning in the signs that are all around us. Langer's example of Helen Keller is an accurate depiction of the "mystery of language." Helen like the rest of us, and without sight or hearing, wanted to convert the signs, which were all around her, into symbols. By converting them, she gave meaning to the signs around her. A typical child experiences this discovery in the Preoperational Stage of Piaget's Stages of Intellectual Development, Helen experienced this later on in her life. According to Piaget, in the Preoperational Stage a child "can think about something without the object being present by use of language." Words act as symbols to represent the object or sign without it being present, as well as, give it meaning. It is these words that act as symbols that are needed in order to learn the facts being taught in schools now. In Piaget's second stage of Intellectual Development a child begins to formulate logical thought and problem-solving skills. In Jensen's article about brain-based learning, he states that "The single best way to grow a better brain is through challenging problem solving." It is this problem-solving and analytical thinking that is needed more in schools today. Without this type of learning students are unable to develop and thrive in Piaget's last period of formal operation, where the individual's thought processes become more abstract. According to Jensen, it is at this level when, "the major bridge between left and right hemispheres, the corpus callosum, is fully matured" and individuals are truly ready to problem-solve. Surprisingly, it is not whether or not we find the answer that is important, it is the pursuit of the knowledge that aids in the neural growth. The same is true for

philosophy and the pursuit of learning and knowledge. It is the pursuit that allows the individual to grow and mature as a person.

In order to distinguish what separates humans from animals, Langer investigates the study of language by studying the differences between humans and chimpanzees. It is no surprise that humans were able pick up on the verbal symbols while the chimpanzees did not. Any parent can easily agree with this. Parents know that there is a stage in their child's life where their youngster will mimic just about any word, statement or sound without regard to whether or not they have meaning associated with it. This mimicking is how we, as humans, learn language. During Piaget's, Preoperational Stage, also known as, Sensory-Motor Stage young children are employing discovery learning while exploring the world around them. In "Philosophy in a New Key" Langer's experiments showed that "apes do not babble, or play with vocal sounds the way human infants do." And, this is essentially the beginning of what separates man from beast.

If language begins with mimicking and babbling, what happens to individuals who cannot hear sounds or words? In Sherman Wilcox's book, "American Deaf Culture" he recites a memoir from a gentle known as Silent Sam. Being deaf Sam felt "deprived of the natural process of learning language." There are soon many challenges for individuals with disabilities. Learning a language is just one challenge for them. Not only is Sam challenged learning, speaking is just as challenging. Sam is also deprived of sounds and music. Wilcox states that for the "American Deaf Culture" there is one main difference, "the use of vision instead of hearing for getting vital and incidental information." Assistive Technology (i.e. closed captioning, lighted alarm clocks, smoke alarms, and telephones) has come a long way in helping aid individuals with hearing

disabilities. However, the daily challenges regardless of language and communication are innumerous.

Langer states that “Anyone who has ever learned a foreign language knows the study of its vocabulary alone will not make him master the new tongue.” Signs and symbols are just the beginning, combining words with the rules of grammar for the purpose of communicating defines language, without which the words themselves would have no meaning. Langer and Piaget agree that there is an optimal time period in which children acquire language. It is this acquisition of language that allows for communication. And only then, with the development of language, will an individual truly have the ability to comprehend, understand and learn. This ability to comprehend is in essence an individual’s intelligence. One’s intelligence can be enhanced through enrichment. According to Jensen, effective use of language and communication can maximize brain growth. In a learning environment, such as the classroom, it is important that we not only challenge students, but provide them with specific feedback.

What would you say if I told you that 90% of all young people today can speak a second language? Shocked? Well, I’m not talking about French or Spanish, I am referring to the Language of the Net, also known as Net Lingo. The American Heritage Book of Usage says “It is too early to tell whether the informality of e-mail will begin to influence the way we write on paper.” However, if you have ever seen a teenage write using Email Acronyms, you might think differently. LOL JFYI (Laugh Out Loud, Just For Your Information) are just a couple of commonly used acronyms that are easily recognizable to a frequent email user. But how does this slang become part of the English Language? The experts at Merriam-Webster have a specific system of how a

word gets in their dictionary. Editors "study the language as it's used" and "they carefully monitor which words people use most often and how they use them." Editors are not just looking for the frequency of use but also the context. Merriam Webster also was cutting edge back in 1806, adding words to their dictionary before any other. Words such as advocate, nutrient, folder, chore, energize and surf, as well as many different foods and animals were added to their dictionary in 1806. Today's prime example was when the word "Google" was added as a verb in today's dictionaries. In the book "The American Language" H.L. Mencken states, "A very large part of our current slang is propagated by the newspapers, and much of it is invented by newspaper writers." The media has a strong influence in the popularity of the word "Google." Mencken declares that "What slang actually consists of doesn't depend, in truth, upon intrinsic qualities, but upon the surrounding circumstances."

Just as language uses words to express meaning, music expresses feelings in form of sounds. Langer calls music the language of feelings and emotion. Musical composers create music that stirs up a reaction in the listener. But, what other sounds evoke emotion? Throughout the day, we are faced with sounds (and signs) that induce an immediate reaction from us, a similar reaction that Ivan Pavlov (the Nobel Prize winner Behaviorist) received in his infamous Dog experiment. By establishing a conditioned response based upon sound, Pavlov was able to make a dog salivate just by hearing that sound and that was associated with its food. The educational game showed to the right

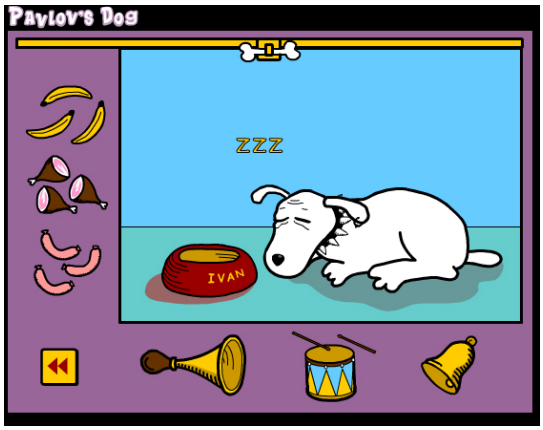

Figure 1-1 – Pavlov's Dog

helps individuals learn more about Pavlov's experiment with conditioned behaviors. We have similar habitual sounds all around us. Beginning first thing in the morning, we have alarm clocks that tell us that it is time to wake up, we have cell phones that ring, and computers that chime telling us that it is time to get to work. Just as a green light tells us to go, so does a honking horn alert us that it is also time drive. These sounds act as signs that evoke just as much emotion, if not more, as music does.

In Jensen's article, he asserts "Think of music as a tool for usage in at least three possible categories: for arousal, as a carrier of words, and as a primer for the brain." Music can increase and decrease brain activity by the type of music that one listens to. For example, classical music relaxes the brain while a more lively song increases the brain activity. Music is also "a carrier of words." The repetition in certain songs facilitates memorization of facts. And lastly according to Jensen, music can "prime the brain's neural pathways" which in turn can help enhance a student' learning capability. With this type of research, it is amazing that schools continue to decrease and eliminate music programs in local schools. Music is an important aspect in the development of the brain and can help a young person to develop as an individual.

With the advent of technology in the 20th Century, communication has taken on a new structure. No longer are we sending messages by pony express or carrier pigeons and waiting weeks or months for information to arrive. Today's communication is instantaneous and takes on a variety of new forms ranging from email to list servers and newsgroups to text and instant messaging. Although Internet communication has enhanced today's businesses, classrooms and society, it not a replacement for real face-to-face communication. The American Heritage Book of English Usage maintains that

"It is also important to remember the virtues that traditional written communication has to offer: the opportunity to shape a piece of writing into something worth saving and the chance to move a reader by the careful arrangement of words for their cumulative effect." There is still hope for the written language. There is a time and a place where it is still appropriate to send a hand written note, for instance, after a job interview or even a thank you note. But without e-mail, business would be quite unproductive. With the development of e-mail, a user has opportunities like never before. Obviously, the speed of communication has increased four-fold, as well as, having no regards for distance and/or time. Technology has allowed us to communication across time zones and language barriers, into what Marshall McLuhan calls a "global village." This global village has its disadvantages as well. The American Heritage Book of English Usage also states "Since the participants in an E-mail discussion can be neither seen nor heard, social cues are absent, making it easy for people to make injudicious remarks." Just like signs and symbols, e-mails are open to interpretation and may have multiple meaning to a recipient. All and all email has opened up the lines of communication but senders of email must remember their "Netiquette" when sending emails to ensure that the message is being delivered in the right context.

All of this technology has created a paradigm shift, or a changed belief, attitude and way of doing things. But, have all of these changes had a positive impact on society? Some would say that without technology the world would not run as efficiently or in the way that we have become accustomed to. Technology has definitely enhanced communication in general, but more specifically, technology has enhanced education. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory article, "Critical Issue: Technology: A Catalyst for Teaching and Learning in the Classroom" discusses how

”Educational technology, especially computers and computer-related peripherals, have grown tremendously and have permeated all areas of our lives” especially in education. Gilbert Valdez and his team provided research that “Seventy-seven percent of public schools had a majority of teachers who used the Internet for instruction during the 2003–04 school year, up from 54 percent in 1998-99 … with 73 percent of high-poverty schools and 71 percent of high-minority schools having a majority of their teachers using the Internet for instruction.” (Fox, 2005, p. 42) Technology is out there in the business world so why shouldn’t it be in our schools. Students need to become adept at technology and develop their skills in working with technology. “Now that a large number of Americans regularly use the Internet to conduct daily activities, people who lack access to these tools are at a growing disadvantage.” Teachers are currently using technology as a communication tool in today’s classroom: “Students use telecommunications to collaborate, publish, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences. Students use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences.” But, we can still do more. Web 2.0 is a term made popular by O'Reilly Media in 2004, which includes new aspects of the web including social networking sites, wikis, and folksonomies. According to wikipedia, Web 2.0 emphasizes online collaboration and sharing among users, is one way in which individuals can develop their communication skills via the Internet. This new direction of the Internet opens up a whole new world for today’s classroom and for communication.

Noam Chomsky writes *“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free*

and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation." Human beings are different from all other species in that we are drawn to not just make sounds and create signs and symbols. We create words that have meaning, in fact, multiple meanings. Researchers like Eric Jensen and Gilbert Valdez and Philosophers like Susanne Langer have spent countless hours studying how the human brain works, learns and communicates. The mystery of language has still gone unsolved as communication develops through the progress of technology. Slang terminology and Net Lingo are all new developments in the timeline of language. Throughout the years new words have been added to our everyday dialogue. And just as our words have changed, so has our music and sounds. The sounds and signs that we hear affect who we are as a person and how we act habitually as seen through Pavlov's behavior experiments. The world around us is constantly changing. New signs, symbols, words and technology are introduced to our lives on a daily basis. Knowledge is power. It is important to use new technologies, music, language, communication and as many resources as possible to attain that knowledge.

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