

Nonverbal communication



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Introduction The saying goes, “ Look into a person’s eyes, and you will see their soul. ” But what is it about the eyes that hold so much? Why do the eyes embrace so much emotion, so many feelings? The eyes, along with other body aspects, are able to communicate to people in ways our words cannot, for “ eye contact is an invitation to communicate. If you look directly into a person’s eyes, [...] they will respond in some manner” (Andersen, 2004).

Albert Mehrabian (1967) stated that 55% of communication is body language, 38% of communication is tonality, and 7% of communication is the actual words that are spoken (Misunderstanding Section, line 2). Altogether, 93% of communication is unspoken words – what we use to give or withhold meaning from our words. Communication is a complicated, ongoing process of sending and receiving messages. These messages provide both implicit and explicit interpretations depending on the synchrony between the spoken word and the body language associated with it.

Body language is defined as “ the gestures, movements, and mannerisms by which a person or animal communicates with others” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Knowing 93% of communication lies in unspoken word, teachers must put forth an effort to communicate through their actions and tone of voice, “ Teachers should be aware of nonverbal communication in the classroom for two basic reasons: to become better receivers of students’ messages and to gain the ability to send positive signals that reinforce students’ learning while simultaneously becoming more skilled at avoiding negative signals that stifle their learning” (Miller, 2005).

Teachers need to be more concerned about their teaching-learning situations because “ the pattern of behavior of the teacher affects the pattern of behavior of the learner” (Clark, 1978). With this, teachers must focus on changing the learner’s behavior by changing their own behavior. By paying attention to nonverbal communication, teachers can better manage their classroom and the learners in that environment. One major aspect of body language is eye contact, “ When you fail to make eye contact with someone, you are treating her or him as a nonperson and inviting that person to not communicate” (Andersen, 2004, p. 6). Teachers know that students respond to how they treat them. Therefore, when they choose to interact with them, they can help regulate behaviors by maintaining eye contact. In fact, eye contact from the teacher is the most important nonverbal behavior, for “ eye contact shows confidence, controls classroom interaction, and enables teachers to read the body language of their students. [...] Increasing [...] eye contact dramatically improves motivation in the learning process” (Andersen, 2004, p. 42). Review of Literature In 1507, Leonardo da Vinci revealed his now legendary painting Mona Lisa.

Studied by many and known by all, this painting was the first study to look at body language. It intrigues so many people because the painting is so complex, just like body language. The most interesting aspect of this painting is Mona’s smile. This smile portrays more than just one emotion. In addition, Mona’s gaze follows the viewer no matter the angle she is viewed from. There are many meanings and emotions hidden in this picture and that is why it arguably is the best-known painting in the world (Riding, 2005, lines 4-6).

In his book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin (1872) looked at how our emotions express our feelings and thoughts. Through his many studies, Darwin was able to prove that our expressions of emotions portray more than words. Darwin studied the eyes, nose, arms, voice, and many other body features in order to verify a correlation between body language and others' perceptions. Often, our facial features correlate with our tone of voice in order to express a certain feeling, "The pitch of the voice bears some relation to certain states of feeling is tolerably clear" (Darwin, 1872, p. 03). This being true, one can easily sense another's emotion, such as high spirits, by simply focusing on the unspoken word: A [person] in high spirits, though [he/she] may not actually smile, commonly exhibits some tendency to the retraction of the corners of his mouth. From the excitement of pleasure, the circulation becomes more rapid; the eyes are bright, and the colour of the face rises. The brain, being stimulated by the increased flow of blood, reacts on the mental powers; lively ideas pass still more rapidly through the mind, and the affections are warmed (Darwin, 1872, p. 696-697).

Darwin claims that our emotions are intricately intertwined with our whole body. Our emotions, mind, and body work as one to send signals to other people. People use body language to help drive interaction and keep others engaged. But what happens when our body language is not the same "language" as someone from another country? This poses a problem not only in society but in classrooms as well. Teachers are being asked more and more to create an atmosphere of inclusivity in order to accommodate for diverse populations including gender, ethnicity, religion, and ability. Debra

Pitton et. al. 1993) stated teachers have a responsibility to provide the best possible educational experience day to day and this experience must include body language for many reasons: By incorporating the study of nonverbal messages into pre-service studies, teachers will more readily be able to help students become cognizant of culture, ethnicity, and gender as important variables in everyday life. This will also help students, as they will benefit from an increased appreciation of diversity when they assume their future roles as parents, teachers, community leaders, co-workers, employers, and citizens.

An inclusive education should facilitate the changes in climate necessary to ensure ongoing change, and knowledge of culturally specific nonverbal communication patterns can enhance this process (p. 2). Teachers' goals are to help their students be active participants in their community and in society. In order to do so, students must be able to understand verbal and nonverbal communication signals as they relate from one person and one context to the next. Nonverbal relates to the unspoken word and a means to send messages that are “ not sanctioned for verbal delivery by our culture” (Wiemann, 1975).

As humans, we have a particular strength to respond quickly and unconsciously pick up clues to other's nonverbal behavior so that we can respond and react; however, we are culture-bound in what we see and can interpret those behaviors incorrectly depending on our background and experiences (Cohen, 1971). Nonverbal behavior is difficult to control or to censor. Nonverbal behavior comes naturally to an individual based on true

emotions, feelings, and culture – it is less likely to be deceptive as verbal communication can be (Galloway, 1993).

With this, there seems to be a necessity for teachers to have complete control over their nonverbal behaviors in order to communicate to their students effectively. Students read more from their teacher's body language than they do their actual words. In fact, most teachers “ are not aware of the ways in which they transmit nonverbal messages to pupils. Classroom culture has its own nonverbal language and pupils absorb its nuances along with the spoken language” (Spanjer, 1972). Peter Andersen (2004) claims immediacy behaviors, which “ signal approach and availability, and send warm, stimulating messages to other people,” help teachers develop a positive relationship with their students. Some immediacy behaviors include touching, smiling, nodding, facing others, showing relaxation, leaning toward others, and synchronizing our conversations; however, in the classroom, the most important immediacy behavior is eye contact, “ Teacher eye contact shows confidence, controls classroom interaction, and enables teachers to read the body language of their students” (Andersen, 2004).

Being able to read body language gives teachers an advantage at recognizing their students' true emotions, enabling the teacher to be more effective on a minute-to-minute basis. By increasing immediacy behaviors, students' motivation in the learning process dramatically improves (Andersen, 2004). Teachers need to be aware of immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact, in order to help their students' succeed in the classroom and, ultimately, outside of the classroom. When it comes to motivating students to complete their work, nonverbal behavior is a prime factor in teacher

effectiveness. Research studies [across K-college] found that learners at all levels reacted more favorably to teachers who used nonverbal immediacy cues. [...] Increasing immediacy behaviors dramatically improves students' motivation" (Goman, 2008). Andersen (2004) concluded people trust body language over the spoken word (p. 14).

People trust body language because it is spontaneous, multi-channeled, and possesses redundant qualities that make it very hard to completely fake (Andersen, 2004). This is applied in classrooms as well. Students rely on the teacher's body language in order to interpret the meaning of their words; however, teachers are not well educated in the area of body language. No prerequisite courses are offered to teachers during their undergraduate/graduate years that help prepare them in nonverbal communication because it is still a largely unexplored area (Ligons, 1973).

Teachers must be aware of nonverbal communication in their classrooms because " nonverbal communication is the medium through which relationships are maintained, regulated, and guided within culturally-prescribed patterns" (Grove, 1976). Focusing on professional success in the classroom is crucial, especially at a changing time in education's history with the passing of the Budget Bill by Governor Walker, " At a time when it is widely recognized that professional success is achieved with or through other people, the power of, and the need for, good interpersonal skills couldn't be greater" (Goman, 2008). Method The examination underlying this paper is a better understanding of how adverse nonverbal behavior (in relation to the spoken word) will, ultimately, negatively impact students emotionally, behaviorally, and academically that teachers find as " problem students," "

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different,” and/or “ difficult. This investigation began with the article The Nonverbal Advantage (Goman, 2008) and the evidence of increasing student motivation and success in the classroom by changing behavior.

Understanding the importance of body language in the classroom setting provided a pathway of inquiry related to immediacy behaviors, student motivation/success, and the classroom teacher of the 21st century. This included reviewing research and articles from different time periods, even dating back to the late 19th century.

The information gathered proved the lack of current research existing in relation to nonverbal communication in a classroom setting; however, after reading multiple examples that verify the significance body language has in relation to student achievement, information regarding nonverbal behavior and its correlation to student motivation and achievement is imperative to know in order to progress not only certain classrooms but also schools as a whole.

A short survey of nine multiple choice questions and one open-ended question (optional to answer) focused on teachers’ views of nonverbal behavior in the profession of teaching and working with children. The survey also provided information regarding their awareness of their own nonverbal behavior along with their thoughts on the ability to change their nonverbal behavior.

The purpose of this research was to aid in providing valuable information to serve as a guide for teachers and administrators on how to change their

behavior in order to change their students' behavior and, ultimately, improve student achievement and motivation as well as schools' success.