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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIVE INTELLIGENCE FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

“A little tact and wise management may often evade resistance, and carry a point, where direct force might be in vain.”

Author Unknown

By: Kendall Zoller

We have all probably had them. One of those days teaching when everything seems to go according to plan. “Ah” we say, “this is why I went into this profession. The kids were responsive; I was on the mark. Seeing them learn, really feeling the material; is the best thing in the world.” Wouldn’t it be great if we could “flip the switch” and make those days happen as a norm, rather than as an exception? What makes one of “those days” anyway? How are they different than some other days, where the sledding is tough and the classes just don’t seem right? How can we engage and sustain the influence and rapport we feel in the best classes we have led? To answer these and other questions we enter into our nonverbal communicative intelligence to discover the key to making a difference in teaching and learning.

Teachers know the importance of relationship and rapport in the classroom. We know the influences of power, and the negative effects that direct management can have on student learning, classroom dynamics, and rapport. Reflect back on a previous class; one that makes you smile. Is the reflection anchored on a single day, or does it span the entire semester or academic year? The vivid images of smiling and energized students are probably etched in your memory.

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From year to year, each class is unique. It develops a personality, and each can sway from “pain to pleasure” from day to day in seemingly mysterious ways. Through the days and weeks, though, a personality inevitably emerges. Is the class personality student dependent? Or is it simply the result of the melding of teacher and students? More importantly, can a teacher do specific and deliberate strategies to enhance the development of the personality and make the class a more positive learning environment?

Three Factors Influencing Student Learning

New research indicates that what a teacher does in the classroom significantly influences learning, rapport, and the classroom environment. In Marzano’s Classroom Management That Works (2003) three factors have the greatest influence on student learning:

- The teacher’s content expertise
- The teacher’s skill at instructional design and delivery
- The teacher’s skill in classroom management

We will focus on the third of these elements, the realm of classroom management. As we consider the in-the-moment management of class, we will explore the skills and strategies grounded in nonverbal communicative intelligence as means to enhance effectiveness and replicate those “great days” with deliberate intent.

Nonverbal Communicative Intelligence – More Than Body Language

You have read the term, nonverbal communicative intelligence, twice thus far and may be wondering what it is. Welcome to an old friend in a new and meaningful frame. We are not talking simply of body language, but rather, something larger and more dynamic.

Nonverbal communicative intelligence is a set of real skills to use in real time, and with deliberate intent. Nonverbal communicative intelligence (NCI) can be thought of as capacity for interacting with the environment through the use of

a set of specific skills. Specifically, the skills of nonverbal communicative intelligence include the ability to be systematic in your use of gesture, voice, breathing and other nonverbal signals. A teacher skilled in NCI has an ability to notice and react to other student's nonverbal signals. They can forecast with some certainty the behavior of others based on the influence of their own nonverbal patterns.

Teachers with well-developed NCI quickly and easily establish rapport with students. They are also able to make conscious choices about when to use specific patterns for an intended effect on student behavior. What this means for teachers is: those who can implement nonverbal patterns with deliberate intent can enhance and sustain student learning and rapport.

Nonverbal communicative intelligence emerged from this author's research with classroom teachers from Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, the Czech Republic, and the United States who participated in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The teacher's nonverbal patterns were identified and analyzed from two perspectives: one was within the culture of the country to find the baseline nonverbal patterns, their range and frequency of use. The other perspective was across international borders to determine if the patterns are cross-cultural. The findings from this study include the following:

1. Several nonverbal patterns were found in all five countries and in all the teachers in the study
2. Teachers from Japan, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic most often implemented a pattern of high expectation. High expectation is demonstrated when the teacher stands still and maintains direct eye contact, while breathing low (abdominal) as the student asks a question or provides an answer
3. All nonverbal patterns found had a range of implementation and a baseline frequency. This is an important point when understanding cultural norms of communication

4. The nonverbal patterns identified in this study, initially developed by M. Grinder in his book, *ENVoY Your Personal Guide to Classroom Management*, are natural elements of communication that have an influence on student attention

Teachers in this study had no training in nonverbal communication. The patterns evident are all part of their natural patterns of communication. The importance of these findings is that by identifying the patterns, we can learn to replicate them deliberately when teaching to increase our influence on student behavior. The patterns, once learned, can then be used with conscious intention as we interact with students.

Five Patterns You Can Use

Below are five effective nonverbal patterns you can use in your classroom for specific purposes to enhance the learning environment in class. What you will discover is these skills allow you to focus more time and energy on content and less energy and time on management when used effectively. Each skill is listed with a brief explanation, followed by an exercise for you to practice the skill. As you practice these skills and incorporate them into your teaching, the encouragement is to “be kind” to yourself. Consider adopting one or two skills at a time. Practice and refine them for about a week. Once those skills are mastered, move on to the next.

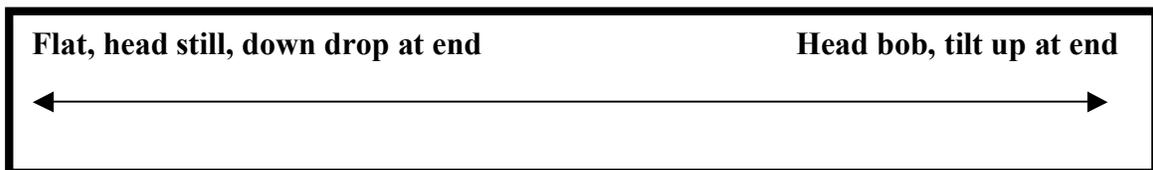
Five nonverbal communicative intelligence skills to get students attention

1. Choose Voice –

We all have a range of voice tone and rhythm we use in the classroom (and in everyday life). We have a management voice, a teaching voice, and many others. By becoming more familiar with our own range of voice patterns, we can consciously and deliberately broaden our voice range to influence a

greater number of students. You may already recognize how some students respond to your voice and others do not. The purpose to become more aware of the range of your voice is to give you the freedom to “choose voice” in-the-moment to increase your level of influence to get more students’ attention.

Think of a continuum line across this paper from left to right. On the left side is a voice pattern associated with delivering information, instructions for an activity, or making an important point. You recognize the tone of this voice pattern as one having a relatively flat rhythm. Visually this voice pattern is recognized by two conditions. First, the head remaining relatively still while speaking and second a downward drop of the head with the last word of the sentence.



Still not sure what this is? Think of the reporter Stone Phillips or news anchor Brian Williams (amongst many others in that industry). When they speak on an important topic, they remain fairly still and their chins drop at the end of each sentence. Grinder calls this voice pattern “credible.” It is a voice tone associated with something important. Try this:

Exercise 1A: Choose Voice – Credible

Say the following sentences aloud. At the end of each sentence drop your chin as you say the last word. You will notice your voice drops and can be perceived as being serious or important.

- Today our topic is the civil war
- We will study important battles
- Including Gettysburg

What do you notice about your voice as you do this exercise?

When might you use this voice pattern in your teaching?

The other end of the voice continuum is on the right, and it is recognized as a voice with rhythm. Grinder labels this voice pattern as “approachable” because it is often associated with seeking information from someone. When seeking information, we are often approachable so they will be more likely to provide what we are seeking. In English, this voice pattern is associated with asking a question or permission.

The approachable voice is one of relationship. The visual evidence of this voice pattern is a head that bobs and, at the end of the sentence the head tends to tilt upward a little. Watch social conversation or the opening segment of any local news program. The two newscasters will greet each other with a friendly voice pattern before shifting to a credible voice when they deliver the news. The following exercise lets you practice this voice pattern in a very contrived manner.

Exercise 1B: Choose Voice – Approachable

Say the following sentences aloud. As you say each sentence, bob your head up and down (this produces rhythm). At the end of each sentence lift your chin as you say the last word. You will notice your voice lifts.

- Today our topic is the civil war
- We will study important battles
- Including Gettysburg

What do you notice about your voice as you do this exercise?

When might you use this voice pattern in your teaching?

The reason to practice this pattern in a contrived way is to increase your consciousness of it. Since nonverbal patterns are hardwired in our brains and part of our natural language pattern, the easiest way to become aware of the pattern is to practice it in a contrived and artificial manner.

2. Pause

The pause is the single most influential pattern you will ever use. According to M. Grinder this skill has the greatest influence on listener's metabolism and attention. A well-crafted and well-timed pause influences the brain to become more attentive. The brain, that 3-pound mass of highly organized tissue, is a beautiful organ. Like any organ, it has functions. One function is to recognize patterns and to attend to patterns that change.

In the classroom, having 35 students all paying attention at one time and every time you want it, is an amazing feat! The pause can increase the probability of getting all to pay attention at once because it represents a change in a pattern. The key to pausing is *timing* along with *stillness*. The most effective pauses are those associated with standing still (see skill 5) and using a frozen gesture (see skill 3). To focus just on the pause, try the following exercise using the same script as that in exercise 1.

Exercise 2 : Pause

Say the following sentences aloud. This time at the end of each sentence pause 3 seconds before you say the next sentence. If you do this using a credible voice, you will "hear" the silence and notice the affect it has on your message.

- Today our topic is the civil war
- We will study important battles
- Including Gettysburg

What do you notice about the pause as you do this exercise?

When might you use the pause in your teaching?

3. Frozen Hand Gesture

Gestures are an integral part of the messages in our communication. Without gestures, part of the meaning of what we say is lost. We use gestures for many purposes. They can accent important points, or visually add context to the words we speak. They also indicate a relationship to the person with whom we are speaking. Kendon's book, Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance (2004) links gesture to the spoken word so tightly, they are considered part of the same mental process; dependent on each other to make the intended communication complete.

In the classroom, you can use gestures to gain attention of students in a way represents influence rather than power or authority. As an experienced teacher, you know the power gestures. These may be the pointed finger with an outstretched arm, or the palm down to silence a student. The intention for using the gesture as described below is to learn how it can be used to gain attention independent and separate from direct management. The gesture is the visual pattern that says, "pay attention" and can accompany a voice pattern that says, "this is important." The gesture and voice are done without direct power and they accomplish getting a student's attention without the direct use of power.

Exercise 3: Frozen gesture

The gesture to use in this exercise is with both arms. Bring the hands up so the elbow is at 90° and the palms are down. Okay, now put your arms at your sides, straight down.

As you say, “Class.” bring your arms up to the 90° with your palms down and freeze the gesture, snapping it into position as the “s” sound ends.

Next, say “Class.” again, this time bringing the arms up to the 90° angle but with palms up. Be sure to snap the gesture into a frozen position as you end the “s” sound.

What do you notice about the perceived “message” between the two variations of the exercise?

When might you use a gesture in your teaching?

4. Incomplete sentence

The *incomplete sentence* is a sophisticated and powerful skill. Its sophistication is based on the number of individual skills necessary to implement to the entire strategy. The power of the strategy is in the influence it has on student’s attention. A well-crafted *incomplete sentence* will get the attention of students that are not paying attention or in need of management. If you are an experienced teacher you will recognize this skill as being similar in pattern to the *extended silence*.

An appropriate use of the incomplete sentence might be during a lecture segment. You may find yourself talking about a topic and notice a couple of things. First, you may notice a few students that look as though they are no longer paying attention. They are not being disruptive; they just have that look that says, “I am no longer listening.” You may also notice a student or two that

begin to side-talk, text-message, or pull out a paper to read. You can go direct management and ask them to stop, but what do you do with the students whose minds are just wandering? The answer is in this skill. Like the previous skills, this is anchored in the idea of shifting patterns to get the brain to pay attention.

Exercise 4: Incomplete sentence

The key to this skill includes:

- Selecting a multi-syllable word (you cannot interrupt a single syllable word)
- Looking “intelligent” when you interrupt your self
- Taking a step (this adds another pattern shift)
- Starting the sentence over from the beginning

Say the following sentence and interrupt with the first syllable of “Explore.”

What you say

As we exp

What you do

- * Hold a gesture at 90° and pause 2 seconds.
- Drop your gesture to your side and take a small step (being silent)

As we explore Gettysburg

- * Gesture with both arms at 90° and use a slightly different voice tone than before

What do you notice if you interrupt the word “we” and do the same exercise? How is it similar and different to interrupting “Explore?”

5. Freeze body

This pattern is an eloquently simple skill, yet not often used. Standing still is challenging for some teachers. After all, with dozens of students in the classroom, one may think that moving is essential to sustain control. Well, movement is critical; the question goes to intent.

What is your intent in the moment? If it is to get the student's attention, standing still can be very effective. The reason standing still is effective can be connected to the model of learning styles by Rita Dunn (1988). Using her model, we know we have visual, auditory, and kinesthetic students in our classrooms. Generally, the visual students are cued in to you and you have their attention. Auditory students hear a lot in the classroom, and they also key to your voice. In fact, the auditory student is often the first to react to the *incomplete sentence*.

Exercise 5: Freeze Body

This one is easy to do, the key is to notice the influence it has on student attention.

Let's do this one in a way that is least recommended first to get a sense of how not to do it. Then we will practice it in a way that is most recommended.

What you say

Let me say, the most important point...

What you do

Walk while you say the sentence

Let me say, the most important point...

Walk as you say, "Let me say," then stop and say "the most important point"

What do you notice about the two different patterns?

How might the most recommended way influence students in your classroom?

The kinesthetic, respectfully, is generally focused on the rich variety of stimuli in the environment, and may often not pay much attention to you. Without these skills, they may take a lot of energy to bring back to reality. Interestingly, if you are moving and talking, a kinesthetic may be watching more than listening. To get them to listen and focus, standing still with a frozen stance can be very effective. An effective *freeze body* implemented when delivering important content can enhance student memory and focus for all three learner types in your class.

Conclusion

The five skills described in this article are only the beginning of a set of communication patterns you can learn and use in the classroom to increase the effectiveness of your teaching and the quality of student learning. The good news is that teachers trained in nonverbal classroom management spend more time on content, less time on management, and have more energy at the end of their work day.

For additional information on trainings in nonverbal communicative intelligence, contact Sierra Training Associates on the web at www.sierra-training.com. You can also contact us to inquire about training and workshops centered on nonverbal intelligence in the classroom, for presentations, meetings, or customized to address your specific goals.

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