Nonverbal behavior, a communication process poorly understood and controlled by most teachers, can greatly enhance the image of the teacher and the affective learning of students.

Instructor Nonverbal Communication: Listening to Our Silent Messages

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Successful instruction, learning, and communication are inextricably linked. Both communication and instruction are processes that attempt to establish meaning, transmit messages and influence thinking. Both are said to occur when information is exchanged or behavior is altered. The communication process is the primary means by which instruction is accomplished, contributing substantially to student learning. This chapter examines one aspect of the relationship between communication and instruction by emphasizing instructors' nonverbal behaviors that enhance student learning.

Obviously, college instruction can be improved in a variety of ways. Better facilities, better students, better instructional materials, and better teachers improve instruction. In fact, many of these components interact with each other. For example, excellent materials encourage better instruction from teachers which creates greater student motivation. However, in an era of tighter budgets and declining or steady-state financial support for instructional facilities and materials, instructor improvement is a most important resource. Most instructors recognize that teaching becomes more rewarding as one becomes more effective, and most want to improve their teaching.
Influence of National Communication

In an emotional context, the influence of national communication is profound. It shapes the way people communicate, influencing the tone, style, and content of their messages. National communication can reflect the values, beliefs, and cultural norms of a society, impacting how individuals interact and express themselves. In this context, it's essential to acknowledge the role of nonverbal communication, as it complements and often overrides verbal communication, conveying deeper emotional nuances.

Nonverbal Communication

National communication also involves nonverbal cues, which are critical in shaping perceptions and understanding across cultures. These include body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures, all of which can have vastly different meanings in different contexts. Understanding these nuances is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication.

Definition of Terms

In the realm of communication, definitions are fundamental to understanding the various aspects of the field. Terms like "communication" and "national communication" refer to the exchange of information and ideas, either verbally or nonverbally, among individuals or groups. The influence of national communication is significant, as it shapes the way nations perceive and interact with each other, influencing everything from diplomatic relations to economic policies.

Incorporating national communication into our understanding of interaction and communication processes helps us recognize how these processes are influenced by cultural, historical, and social factors. By acknowledging the role of national communication, we can better navigate the complexities of global interactions, fostering more effective and meaningful communication.
is also influenced by the cycle, he or she is in a good directing position to alter classroom communication.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication behaviors serve many functions: they communicate warmth and affect; indicate approval or disapproval of others; define the nature of the relationship; indicate relative power and status; reveal current emotional states; regulate and pace verbal exchanges; provide cues for impression formation; influence and persuade; reveal one's level of tension or relaxation; indicate one's culture, values, attitudes, gender, and background; and influence the performance of others (Rosenfeld and Civikly, 1976). In instructional settings, nonverbal communication also functions to enhance learning, particularly affective learning.

Communication messages have both content and relational components (Watzlawick and others, 1967). The content component is the literal meaning or the denotative verbal translation of the message. The relationship component of a message signals the nature of the relationship and suggests how that literal verbal meaning is to be interpreted. For example, the statement “This material is quite difficult, but with some effort you will be able to manage” is accompanied by very different meanings depending on the relationship of the interactants. When said by one student to another it could be a compliment or an insult. The sincerity of the difficulty claim, the relationship between the students, and the speaker's degree of familiarity with the receiver's ability create differing interpretations of the message's content. If the instructor makes this statement to a student, it might be a challenge, an accurate assessment of difficulty and ability, or a belittling insult. It could suggest that the student recognizes the instructor's power, or it could signal the instructor's concern.

The relational components of messages often alter the meaning of the message in subtle and confusing ways. Nonverbal communication functions as a device to signal how the content or literal component of the message is to be interpreted and understood.

Nonverbal Communication and Learning

Nonverbal communication has its most direct instructional impact on the affective domain of learning, which is concerned with student likes and dislikes, attitudes, values, beliefs, appreciations, and interests. In addition to learning facts and concepts, students also learn attitudes towards the content area and predispositional patterns that motivate them to use that knowledge in their lives. The affective domain centers on these learned attitudes and orientations toward the subject area (Krathwohl and others, 1964).

Although college instructors seldom address this domain directly, affective learning is a valued goal. No matter what discipline we teach, we share the goal of creating lifelong learners. For example, English instructors hope students retain their ability to analyze a play or a novel but also hope to motivate them to attend plays and read novels after they complete the literature class. Few music instructors would claim success if their students learned to recognize the works of classical composers but developed an aversion to classical music in the process. Students who learn the laws of physics or biology in the classroom but never think about them after the semester ends have not been well educated. In any discipline, we are interested not only in cognitive or psychomotor learning, but also in creating positive student affect towards the content area.

The instructor's communicative behavior in general and nonverbal behavior in particular has a significant impact on affective learning. In one study (Andersen, 1979), almost one-fourth of the variation in both student liking for the content area and student desires to take future courses in the content area was a function of the instructor's nonverbal behavior. Over half of the variation in student liking for the instructor was the result of the instructor's nonverbal communication. These nonverbal messages of liking and affect require further discussion.

Nonverbal Liking and Affect. The communication of liking or positive affect is largely a nonverbal phenomenon. Instructors seldom verbalize their feelings, yet students seem to know instructors' attitudes toward students, content areas, and the general teaching process. Students infer these affective data from the instructor's nonverbal behaviors.

Factor-analytic studies indicate that positive affect is communicated through a cluster of nonverbal behaviors, labeled immediacy behaviors (Andersen, 1979; Andersen and others, 1979a). Immediately behaviors increase arousal and sensory closeness, and communicate social accessibility. The nonverbal behaviors most closely associated with the immediacy cluster include eye contact, smiling, vocal expressiveness, physical proximity, appropriate touching, leaning toward a person, gesturing, using overall body movements, being relaxed, and spending time with someone. Andersen and Andersen (1982) provide a detailed review of nonverbal immediacy as it functions in instruction.

In short, immediacy behaviors communicate feelings of warmth and support and engender feelings of interpersonal attraction. Individuals behave in immediate ways when involved with others; they like, and they like others who also behave in immediate ways. Immediacy is a spontaneous manifestation of positive affect and is processed, often unconsciously, as such. In classroom settings, instructors who use nonverbal immediacy behaviors manifest greater liking and affect towards their students and engender higher student affect. The climate of positive affect extends beyond the interactants to the subject matter and the discipline (Andersen and Andersen, 1982).
can accommodate the data or thought if it occurs that occurs, then occur, that occurs. Here’s another example of a conditional statement: an if-then statement. This statement is: "If it is raining, then I will take an umbrella."

For conditional statements, there are three basic types: if-then, if-and-only-if, and converse. If we have a statement of the form "If A, then B," where A and B are propositions, we can form the converse by reversing the order of A and B, so that the statement becomes "If B, then A," with A and B now reversed. However, the converse of a conditional statement is not necessarily equivalent to the original statement. For example, consider the statement "If I am in the library, then I am reading a book." The converse of this statement is "If I am reading a book, then I am in the library." While these two statements are true in different situations, they are not necessarily equivalent. Therefore, it is important to carefully analyze the implications of conditional statements when applying them to real-world situations.
Finally, a supportive and productive classroom climate can be enhanced through the instructor's nonverbal messages of power and status. The literature on attraction suggests that we like those who are of high status and power and who are in a position to reward us (Berscheid and Walster, 1978). Yet we dislike persons who verbally proclaim their worth and power. Nonverbal communication can be a non-offensive means of reminding others of power and status. Behaviors associated with dominance, power, and status include eye contact (even staring), relaxed but not slumped posture, expressive and expansive gestures, touch initiation, classic clothing and personal artifacts, expansive use of space, and poised, straightforward posture. New instructors, teaching assistants, and others less confident or experienced in their teaching, tend to behave in nonverbally submissive ways. Since many women are often socialized to be nonverbally submissive, they may profit from assertive nonverbal styles. Assertive behaviors signal the instructor's importance and credibility; students tend to respond appropriately. Thus, instructors perceived to have high power and status have less need for classroom control and are free to interact with students without fear of losing control and respect.

Conclusion

Nonverbal communication is largely responsible for establishing relationships among persons in the classroom and elsewhere. This chapter describes how nonverbal behavior by instructors can directly alter teacher image and have an impact on student affect and learning. Through nonverbal messages, individuals signal how they feel towards each other. Instructors who generate high student affect not only improve their self-esteem, feel liked by their students, and receive higher student evaluations; they also generate more affective learning for the subject matter and their academic discipline. In the short run, higher affective learning enhances the popularity of the subject matter and increases student enrollments. In the long run, higher affect is the avenue to lifelong learning, more general support for education, and a better society. Thus, whether for pragmatic reasons such as increased student enrollments and increased funding, or for philosophical goals such as a better-educated society, the mechanisms that generate high student affect should remain a central concern. Nonverbal communication by instructors is a primary method of generating and sustaining student affect.

References


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