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## **TEACHER NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR AND COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM**

*“Action speaks louder than words”*

Most of the empirical studies on nonverbal communication in the classroom have a significant presence in fields related to teacher styles. Its role as an important tool for teacher has been well demonstrated in various scientific sources.

Historically, scientific investigation on nonverbal communication and behavior began in 1872 with Charles Darwin's publication *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Since that time, research has identified several different types of nonverbal communication.

According to interesting works of such experts as Miles L. Patterson *“Nonverbal Behaviour: A Functional Perspective”*, Aron W. Siegman and Stanley Feldstein *“Nonverbal Behaviour and Communication”*, nonverbal communication reveals teacher's cues and behaviours including postures, facial expression, eye gaze, gestures, and tone of voice. Such nonverbal interaction shows who the teachers are and how they relate to students in the classroom. Besides, an approach to the study of teacher behavior is based on systematic observation of teacher-student interaction in the classroom in the work of Flanders *“Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes, and Achievement”* [3-4].

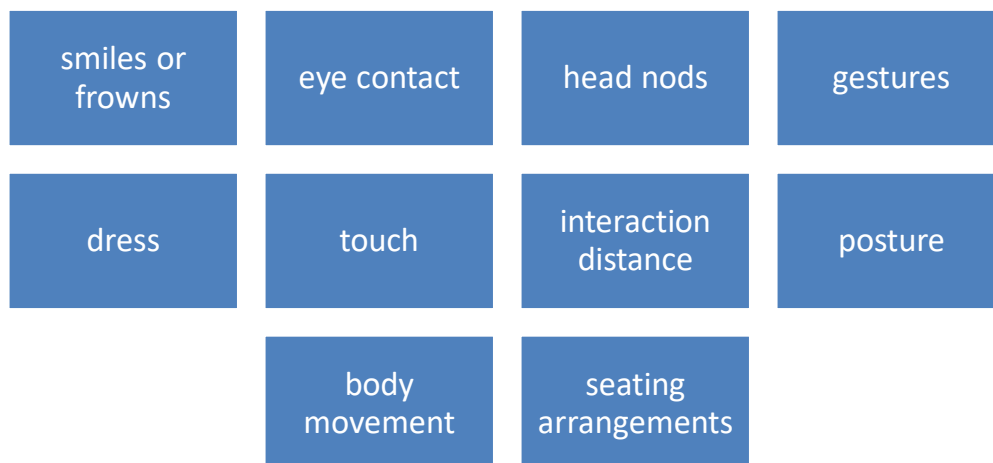
Although the teaching-learning process is ordinarily associated with verbal interaction, non-verbal communication operates as a silent language that influences the process. What makes study of non-verbal communication so valuable and attracting is that some scientists contend that it comprises about 65 percent of the

social meaning of the classroom communication system [1]. As the old saying goes, “Action speaks louder than words”.

Generally, Miles L. Patterson in his study states that nonverbal behavior in the classroom serves five teacher functions [2]:

- 1) *providing information*, or elaborating upon a verbal statement;
- 2) *regulating interactions*, such as pointing to someone;
- 3) *expressing intimacy or liking*, such as smiling or touching a student on the shoulder;
- 4) *exercising social control*, reinforcing a classroom rule by proximity or distance;
- 5) *facilitating goals*, as when demonstrating a skill that requires motor activity or gesturing.

However, other researchers such as Stephens and Valentine in their study of 225 teachers observed 10 specific nonverbal behaviors [5]:



**Figure 1. Nonverbal behaviors of teachers outlined by Stephens and Valentine**

In general, the first four behaviours are easily interpreted by the observer; some smiles, eye contact, head nods, and gestures are expected, but too many make students suspicious and uneasy. Dress is a matter of professional code and expectation. Distance, touch, body movement, posture and seating are open to more

interpretation, are likely to have personal meaning between communicators, and are based on personalities and social relationships.

Different types of these five behaviours, especially distance, touch, and body movement can be taken as indications of the degree of formality in the relationship between the communicators, from intimate and personal to social and public. Teachers should maintain a social or public relationship, that is a formal relationship with their students. Behaviours that can be interpreted as intimate and personal relations should be avoided.

Finally, it is worth concluding that teacher nonverbal behaviour and communication are seen as being so powerful and influential in the classroom. Taking to consideration studies of experienced researchers, facial expressions such as smiles, frowns, nods, eye contact outnumber the proportion of nonverbal communication because the teacher's look is often the first thing we see, even before we hear what they have to say [1-5]. Considering the tone of voice, it can have the powerful effect on the meaning of a sentence. When said in a strong voice, listeners might interpret approval, support and enthusiasm. The same words said in a hesitant tone of voice might convey disapproval and discouragement. That's why the important thing to remember is that various nonverbal behaviours of the teacher can be understood as encouraging and restricting and this in some extent can affect student activity and preparation in the classroom. The point is that teachers in their personal and professional pursuits are to become aware of how their mannerisms influence communication and relations with students.

### **Resources**

1. Aron W. Siegman and Stanley Feldstein. *Nonverbal Behaviour and Communication*. – Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978.
2. Miles L. Patterson. *Nonverbal Behaviour: A Functional Perspective*. – New York, Springer, 1983.
3. Ned A. Flanders. *Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes, and Achievement*. - Washington, DC, 1965.
4. Ned A. Flanders. *Analyzing Teaching Behaviour*. - Reading, MA, 1970.
5. P. Stephens and J. Valentine. *Assessing Principal Nonverbal Communication* // *Educational Research Quarterly*, 1986.