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REDIRECTION OF STUDENT ATTENTION USING VERBAL AND NONVERBAL CUES

by

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and Instruction in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out if a teacher's verbal or nonverbal behavior is more successful in redirecting a student's attention in the classroom. Three specific student behaviors were observed---daydreaming, distractive talking, and doing assignments for another class. Three twelfth grade English teachers in a Duval County high school gave the observer permission to visit their classrooms and observe on ten different occasions over a period of eight weeks. Observation sheets were kept and tallied on each teacher. A total for all three teachers was then tallied and analyzed according to a chi-square routine.

The results of the chi-square analysis showed no significance in the data at the .05 level. It was concluded that even though the results showed no significance, the raw data showed a definite unique pattern for each teacher in the way that they successfully handled behavior problems in their classrooms.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Is a teacher more likely to successfully redirect an individual secondary school student's focus of attention during a large group learning activity when that teacher uses verbalization as his/her primary mode of communication for the redirection, or when that teacher uses non-verbal behavior (e.g. eye contact or gentle touching) as his/her primary mode of communication for the redirection?

RATIONALE

It has not actually been proven that students respond more positively to non-verbal cues than to a teacher's verbalization, but it is the researcher's belief that most students would. Why would this statement seem true?

Mehrabian (1978) has suggested that only seven percent of a message is sent through facial expressions and vocal intonation. (pp. 53-54) This idea would suggest that one's non-verbal message carries much more impact than one's verbal message carries.

Another reason for teachers' using more effective non-verbal behavior in the classroom is to keep students from being embarrassed. Calling a student by name or singling him out in class as a behavior problem is usually embarrassing for the student. On the other hand, some students crave attention even if it is negative. Non-verbal communication instead of verbal may not keep all students on task, but if research shows that more respond positively to a teacher's touch or eye contact, then teachers could improve classroom discipline while saving the student's self-esteem.

A teacher's touch is a good way to communicate warmth, trust, and sensitivity to one's students. (Hughes, 1981, p. 53) If a person feels good about his school, his teacher, and most importantly, himself, he will be more likely to try difficult tasks. He may realize he can make mistakes without feeling like a failure. He will not be afraid to try if he knows the teacher

is not going to verbally intimidate him. The teacher and the student may find the classroom a much happier, better disciplined, and more productive place to be when the teacher learns to talk a little less and listen a little more.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

"For the umpteenth consecutive year, 'lack of discipline' is the number one concern of parents sending their children to public schools, according to the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude toward Public Schools." (Lehmann, 1981, p. 41) There is some disagreement among educators about what is "good discipline." All disciplined classrooms do, however, share certain features. According to Lehmann, these are some of them: mutual respect, clear expectations, organized teaching and learning, materials geared to learning style and ability, warmth and caring, opportunities to release tension, and clear communication. (Lehmann, 1981, pp. 41-43) For the purpose of this paper the areas of warmth, caring and clear communication will be emphasized and discussed.

Lehmann notes that learning to communicate clearly, both verbally and non-verbally, is difficult for teachers because it requires us to be honest, to be vulnerable, to take a risk. That is a scary place to be when we are concerned about discipline. Discipline problems are reduced though when communication is clear. "Good discipline" is really a cry for high quality and compassionate teaching." (Lehmann, 1981, p. 44)

Much has been written about how clear communication is important to classroom discipline. The research studies done for this paper will emphasize

non-verbal communication and its relationship in the classroom. Few research studies on the effect of non-verbal behavior on secondary students were found, but much general information on the impact of non-verbal behavior in the area of communication was found.

There are several categories of non-verbal behavior. Wilbur and Wilbur (1980) lists these different categories: kinesics (eye, head, hand, leg and foot movements), paralanguage (speech length, intonation, voice quality, verbal reinforcers, speech error rate, pause/hesitations, etc.), and proxemics (distance and angles between individuals, learning positions, touching, etc.).

Koch (1971) becomes even more specific by listing at least thirty-five non-verbal observables. The non-verbal behaviors that he found could be observed were the following:

1. Gestures
2. Hand movements
3. Foot movements
4. Voice variations
5. Silences
6. Facial expressions
7. Eye language
8. Head movements
9. Nose movements
10. Lip movements
11. Postures
12. Gaits
13. Body shape and tonus
14. Skin: pallor, flushing, sweating
15. Tics
16. Territoriality shown
17. Proximity used
18. Handwriting
19. Art, drawing, doodling
20. Laughter
21. Breathing
22. Tactility
23. Prearranged signals

24. Clothes, hair, jewelry
25. Occupational stigmata
26. Use of time
27. Lack of essentials
28. Lack of expected reaction
29. Status moves or acknowledgment
30. Room appearance and arrangement
31. Modality for presenting lesson visual, auditory, kinesthetic
32. Rituals and stereotyped behavior
33. Scratching, self-stroking
34. Toying with objects
35. Hesitations (p. 289)

Miller (1980) says that non-verbal communication is important in the classroom for two reasons. One, teachers will become better receivers of student messages and two, teachers will learn to send positive signals to students which reinforce their learning. Smiles, frowns, nodding heads, etc. can help teachers know if students are understanding what is being presented to them orally. Miller also believes that the power to motivate or depress learning lies in our non-verbal behavior in the classroom. (p. 15)

In 1971 Suzanne Perry Loss conducted research involving a group of six trained observers. These observers travelled to Philadelphia to observe and record non-verbal classroom behavior of seventeen junior high school home economics teachers in seven different schools in that city. Ms. Loss was examining the notion that certain teaching styles create a climate which promotes self-directed learning, while other styles may thwart such self-direction. Self-direction was broadly conceived in her study as giving the student greater responsibility for learning in the classroom. "The study hypothesized that the teachers' non-verbal behaviors in the classroom reliably describe real feelings and attitudes." (Loss, 1973, p. 23)

The Loss Observation System was used to analyze the non-verbal behavior of teachers and students during the teaching-learning process. The Loss System had thirteen categories, each representing a continuum of behaviors ranging from those that facilitate self-directed learning to those that do not facilitate such learning. Also, the Loss System consisted, first, of a grid which the observer used during the teaching-learning process and, second, a complementary instrument for collecting descriptive data. Each of the thirteen categories had five sets of possible behaviors. The investigator would observe for five minutes then record observations for five minutes. This pattern was maintained throughout the observation period. Essentially, these categories cover the observable non-verbal forms of communication which take place among students and teachers during the process of teaching and learning. (Loss, 1973, pp. 23-24)

The findings, after an analysis of the observations of the seventeen home economics teachers, showed that the teachers who facilitated self-directed learning were not significantly different statistically from less facilitating teachers with respect to their non-verbal behavior in the classroom.

One of the outstanding findings of this study was that teacher and student non-verbal behaviors are highly interdependent. For example, a teacher's smile could evoke smiles from the class; on the other hand, the class could evoke that smile from the teacher. The non-verbal behavior of one was inextricably linked with the non-verbal behavior of the other.

Robert Koch in 1970 helped conduct a systems analysis for the Psychology Department of George Peabody College. A junior and a senior high school in

Davidson County, Tennessee, were selected for the analysis. Koch's part in this analysis was to observe the extent and nature of the non-verbal communication that occurred in randomly selected classrooms. He conducted teacher and student interviews and conducted informal conversations to supplement the one hour classroom visits. (p. 288)

The results of Koch's observations were based on the behaviors of twelve teachers while teaching classes. A trait or non-verbal signal had to occur regularly to be reported. Koch used as a guide the list of thirty-five non-verbal observables mentioned previously in this paper. (Koch, 1971, p. 291)

In Koch's raw data conclusions he found that in general there was much more positive than negative non-verbal communication in the two schools that were observed. Positive signals used by the majority of teachers were eye contacts, frequent smiles, and appropriate dress. (p. 291)

R. Lewis Hodge (1971) believes that eye contact is generally perceived by students as positive. The student will generally interpret eye contact as a sign that the teacher is personally interested in him. One should not accept a specific non-verbal behavior as having a specific meaning though. The real meaning of teacher-student eye contact must be tested out by each teacher for each classroom situation and each individual student. (Hodge, 1971, p. 265)

In conclusion, the majority of researchers used some kind of checklist to observe and record non-verbal behaviors in their studies. The researchers also noted that the interpretation of the non-verbal behavior depends on the

sender of the message and the receiver of the message as well as the observer who records the behavior. An operational definition of both verbal and non-verbal behavior will be used in this particular study.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Non-verbal behavior -- Behavior or language the teacher uses to redirect the student's attention without mentioning the student's off task behavior

Verbalization -- Language the teacher uses to try to redirect a student's attention that mentions the student's off task behavior

CHAPTER III
PROCEDURES

Overall Design

The emphasis in this project was to find out which method, verbal or non-verbal, was more effective in redirecting a student's attention during a large group learning situation. Only three observable off task behaviors were used in this study. They included: (1) daydreaming, (2) distractive talking, and (3) doing assignments for another class. Students and teachers in twelfth grade Language Arts classes in a Duval County senior high school were involved in this project. One twelfth grade humanities class, one composition and contemporary literature class, and one English 12 class were observed to find out what methods the three teachers used to redirect a student's attention in their classes. These classes were selected because of convenience for the observer. A checklist of the three observable behaviors were used during each forty minute classroom visit. The classes were observed over an eight week period. Then the data gathered were compiled and analyzed.

Sampling

Students involved in this project were mostly twelfth grade students. There were a few eleventh grade students taking senior English classes. The English 12 teacher was called Teacher A; the composition teacher was Teacher B;

and the humanities teacher was called Teacher C. All of the students and teachers as well as the observer are from one Duval County senior high school on the westside of Jacksonville, Florida.

The school principal was made aware of the project and his permission was obtained before beginning the observations of teachers and classes. Also the observer received permission from Teachers A, B, and C to come into their classes, but the teachers were not told what the observer would be looking for so that the results and conclusions of the observations would be more valid. These particular classes were chosen because of convenience for the observer.

Instrumentation

A checklist was developed for use when observing teachers and students in the classes. The checklist appears in Appendix A. The observer visited one class per day alternating with Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C's classes for a period of eight weeks. At the end of the eight weeks, each class had been visited ten times. Each class session was approximately forty minutes in length.

The observer sat quietly and unobtrusively near the rear of each classroom and observed and made notes on the checklist for most of each class period. A separate checklist was used for each teacher each day so thirty checklists were needed in all. The teacher conducted his/her class as usual. If a test was being given in the teacher's class on the day his/her

students were to be visited, the observer found out beforehand and visited another teacher's class instead and made up the missed classroom visitation another day.

At the end of the eight week period, the observer compiled and analyzed the data that had been gathered on each teacher separately.

Data Analysis

A chi-square routine was used to test the following null hypothesis:

H_o: The ratios appearing in the rows of Table B are independent of their column denigration ($\alpha < .05$)

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

For a period of eight weeks the observer watched and tallied observations in each of the three teachers' classes. After ten classroom visits with each teacher, the data from ten individual observation sheets on each teacher was tallied to get totals in the three different areas--daydreaming, distractive talking, and doing assignments for another class--and also to get the total number of times each teacher used verbal or non-verbal redirection successfully or unsuccessfully. Then a final tally sheet was made of the raw data results combined from all three teachers in all the areas observed.

The results from this final tally sheet were then computed using a chi-square routine. The results of the computation showed the actual value of $x^2=8.531$. In order for the data to be significant at the .05 level, the value of x^2 would have to be 19.675 or greater. Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

A look at each teacher's individual tally sheet shows a certain pattern in their responses to student behavior. For example, teacher A was more successful using verbal redirection in her class than non-verbal--eleven (73%) successful verbal compared to five (56%) successful non-verbal attempts at redirection.

On the other hand, teacher B used non-verbal methods more often and was much more successful with non-verbal attempts at redirection. Her non-verbal methods never failed to be successful--four (4) daydreaming, nine (9) distractive talking and one (1) doing assignment for another class.

Teacher C's results showed her using non-verbal methods more frequently than verbal methods even though her non-verbal attempts at redirecting the student's behavior was not always successful. She used non-verbal behavior a total of fifteen (15) times with twelve (12) out of the fifteen (15) times being successful in non-verbal redirection. Teacher C only used verbal redirection twice in the ten classroom observations, but both times she was successful.

Overall the three teachers observed used more non-verbal than verbal redirection with their students and were more successful than not with this method.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Even though the null hypothesis is not rejected and no significance was shown at the .05 level, this study is still significant for several reasons. Looking at the individual teacher's tallies shows a definite pattern or a certain way that each teacher handled her behavior problems. The raw data showed that two out of the three teachers used non-verbal techniques much more frequently than verbal and with greater success. Since the students who were observed were twelfth graders, one might think they would respond more favorably to verbal methods. As the observer watched these seventeen and eighteen year old young adults, she was amazed at the response the teachers got from looking at or gently touching these students. Sometimes if the student was spoken to, as in teacher A's class, he would respond positively and correct his behavior, but he was just as likely to ignore the teacher's request to stop talking or act as if he didn't even hear her. Non-verbal methods of behavioral response seemed to be preferred by the teachers observed in this study and seemed to work better with these young adults than the traditional verbal methods of redirection.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that teachers are unique in their ways of responding to student behavior or misbehavior. Non-verbal methods may work better for some teachers than others.

Other factors that the observer noticed that influenced the student's response to the teacher's attempt at redirection were the general rapport in the classroom between the teacher and her students, the atmosphere of the class--formal or informal--and also how the teacher felt that particular day.

There were several limitations of this study. Only three English teachers were observed during a short eight week period of time. Only three particular types of distractive classroom behavior were observed and a total of approximately seventy-five (75) twelfth grade students were involved. Another limitation was that sometimes the observer found it difficult to decide if the teacher being observed was using verbal or non-verbal responses to students according to the operational definition used in this study. Subjective judgement could not be completely eradicated.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST
AND
INDIVIDUAL TALLY SHEETS
FOR TEACHERS A, B, AND C

APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Daydreaming	Distractive Talking	Doing Assignment for Another Class
Verbal Successful		11	
Verbal Unsuccessful		4	
Non-Verbal Successful		5	
Non-Verbal Unsuccessful		4	2

APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Daydreaming	Distractive Talking	Doing Assignment for Another Class
Verbal Successful	1 /	5 ~~||||~~	2 ||
Verbal Unsuccessful		4 ||||	
Non-Verbal Successful	4 ||||	9 ~~||||~~ ||||	1 /
Non-Verbal Unsuccessful			

APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Daydreaming	Distractive Talking	Doing Assignment for Another Class
Verbal Successful		2	
Verbal Unsuccessful			
Non-Verbal Successful	3	8	1
Non-Verbal Unsuccessful	2	1	

APPENDIX B

TOTAL TALLY OF OBSERVATIONS ON ALL TEACHERS

TOTAL TALLY
TEACHERS A, B & C

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Daydreaming	Distractive Talking	Doing Assignment for Another Class
Verbal Successful	1	18	2
Verbal Unsuccessful		8	
Non-Verbal Successful	7	22	2
Non-Verbal Unsuccessful	2	5	2

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

	Daydreaming	Distractive Talking	Doing Assignment for Another Class
Verbal Successful	1 / 3.04	18 / 16.13	2 / 1.83
Verbal Unsuccessful	0 / 1.16	8 / 6.14	0 / .07
Non-Verbal Successful	7 / 4.49	22 / 23.81	2 / 2.70
Non-Verbal Unsuccessful	2 / 1.31	5 / 6.91	2 / .78

x^2=8.531 actual value