

THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING PROCESS.

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Abstract: Nowadays non-verbal communication has been used in many fields. With the continual reform of language teaching and learning methods, teachers have great challenge in organize the classes in English and create English-learning circumstances. However, with students' limitation, teachers have to simplify their teaching language with the help of facial expression and body movements. This article gives information about how important tool is the body language for teachers in the classroom. Moreover, it has been an essential part of non-verbal communication between students and teachers.

Key words: non-verbal communication, body language, gestures, deliver, message, verbal communication, teaching and learning process, students, teachers, posture, eye contact, hand gestures

Before speaking the importance and the usage of body language in our classroom, we need to look through the definitions given to the phrase. Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary defines the phrase 'Body language'-the process of communicating what you are feeling or thinking by the way you place and move your body rather than by words.¹

According to Xiaoling Yang, body language means action, expression and posture with something meaningful. In classroom teaching, the teachers' body language can help to increase the effect of sound language. It is an important method for teachers to learn about the students by noticing the students' body language.

¹ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, International Edition, 2000.

Teachers can get feedback information by watching the students' expressions in their eyes, on their faces and noticing their actions, as to adjust and organize the teaching in class timely and effectively. ²

Teaching is a profession that requires effective communication. Only through effective communication, you can teach well and help your students learn excellently.

A qualified teacher needs not only profound knowledge and good eloquence, but also dignified and harmonized body language. Just like the educationist, Makarenko said: "If a teacher is no expressions and not good at express to people, it's not a qualified teacher." ³ Now, communication becomes effective only when there is a perfect blend of verbal and non-verbal means of communication. With non-verbal means like facial expressions, body postures, hand gestures, and verbal messages become clear and better understandable. For example, if someone asks you which direction should he go in to find the washrooms and you say- right. Then, he will take a second to think and then start moving in the right direction. However, if you say right and point in the right direction, he will immediately start moving in the right direction, even without thinking for a second. This is how magical the effect of non-verbal means of communication is.

We cannot become inspiring teachers unless our body language is right. More than that, we can use body language to control what happens in the classroom. We often pass judgment on people without even speaking to them. We must not make the mistake of assuming that students do not do the same sort of thing – they do! It is interesting to note that about 80 per cent of our face-to face communication is carried out non-verbally. ⁴ We send out signals to students in a number of ways: from the clothes we wear to the smiles and frowns, we put on. Do take time to observe

² Xiaoling Yang The Use of Body Language in English Teaching, Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 7, No. 12, pp. 1333-1336, December 2017

³ Arends, R. Makarenko. Learning to Teach (The Fourth Edition). New York: The McGraw-Hill companies, Inc, 1998.

⁴ Keith West, Inspired English Teaching, London, 2010 p.3

people in the staffroom, in your local pub or in a restaurant. You will notice little gestures and habits, such as the way people run their hands through their hair, scratch their ears or purse their lips. It all seems obvious – on the surface! However, if we know why people do these things, we can become communicators that are more effective. If we can recognize body language, we can improve our performance. Remember, whether we are the sage on the stage or the guide on the side, at least 30 pairs of eyes are constantly observing us – usually.⁵

We all have non-verbal skills and if we are able to develop these skills, we can motivate the students we teach. In this article, you will gain a knowledge and understanding of body language and non-verbal skills that will help you in your classroom teaching. After all, a great English teacher needs to be, among many other things, a great communicator!

The face. There is a familiar phrase used these days: ‘grinners are winners’. Unless you present your class with an insane, vacant grin, you will find this is true. Your face is a broadcaster to your class. You need to make sure it conveys the right message. In today’s classroom, it is a good idea to smile at those you teach when you walk into the room. Your smile conveys confidence and friendship.

Basic emotions. There are six basic emotions. All of which are expressed at some time in a classroom. If you can ‘read’ these basic emotions, you will be able to control your own facial expressions and understand those of the students. These basic emotions are surprise, fear, sadness, disgust, anger and happiness.

Surprise. When we are surprised, wrinkles appear on our forehead. Usually, our eyebrows curve and often are raised. In addition, our eyes become wider and the whites of our eyes become more pronounced. Our jaw drops slightly and our teeth part.

⁵ Keith West, Inspired English Teaching, London, 2010

Fear. Our face expresses fear by tensing the muscles under our eyes. Our mouth opens and our lips draw back. Our eyebrows rise and become drawn together. Wrinkles appear in the middle of our forehead.

Sadness. The inner corners of our eyebrows draw up and our lips quiver. Sometimes, tears fall. I hope that this will not happen to us but we should be able to recognize when our students are sad.

Disgust. Our upper lip is raised and our nose usually wrinkles. Our cheek muscles raise and our brow lowers.

Anger. Our eyebrows narrow. Sometimes our eyes appear to be ‘popping out of their sockets’. Usually, our lips are closed tightly together and some people’s nostrils flare.

Happiness. The corners of our lips are drawn back and raised. Our teeth are usually exposed and wrinkles appear on the outer edges of our eye sockets.

We smile! Smile is the most frequent using in teaching, “teacher’s smile can conquest students’ mind.” Smile can not only build the interaction between teacher and student, create a harmonious classroom atmosphere, but also convey the feeling what can’t express by word, let students feel the teacher’s love.

In English teaching, the use of smile is particularly important. As most of pupils, study is difficult and boring, and their English knowledge of is limited. So they usually feel anxious, nervous. Teacher’s natural smile in the classroom can ease the students’ pressure on learning English, and help students to create hopeful and optimistic mind.

Posture. Posture is also important. Our posture can send out positive or negative signals. It can convey to students how attentive we are. If you are slumped in your chair with your shoulders rounded and if your eyes do not remain in contact with your class, what message is that sending to the class? You cannot expect to hold their attention! You will certainly look defeated and your body language will convey a negative attitude to your class. They may subconsciously (or

consciously) feel that you do not care or that you are tired and lack energy. Students respond better to teachers who seem full of energy and tireless.

If you cross your arms or legs, you are sending out defensive signals. Other body language signals, such as fidgeting, jiggling money or keys, twiddling thumbs or biting your fingernails can all send the message that you are nervous, weak or insecure. Students will quickly respond accordingly! It is much better to stand up or sit up straight and look at the members of your class with an appropriate expression, which is looking attentive and interested in what they are doing.

Eye movement. Eye movement can indicate a great deal about the person talking or listening. A teacher will look sincere if his/her eyes move upwards. Eyes also move upwards if one is talking about the past. If eyes move from side to side, it indicates that the person is talking about the present or delivering a speech. It is interesting to note that if eyes never move upwards to retrieve information, the likelihood is that the person is making it all up! You can, by focusing on the eyes, tell when a student is likely to be lying.

Be aware that winking usually means complicity. It can also have sexual connotations, so it is best avoided in the classroom. Excess blinking can give a message of nervousness. Normally, people blink 10–20 times a minute. If you blink too much, students may see you as dishonest or incompetent. If you do not blink much, students will read this as not taking on board what is being said.

Hands. According to scientists, there are more nerves between the brain and the hands than any other part of the body. If you are calm, confident and self-assured, your hands will move very little. They may hang limply at your sides. A hand held flat, with the palm out, usually suggests ‘I don’t know’. If hands are quite active, it suggests a teacher is jittery, nervous or uneasy. Clenched hands means a teacher is tense, frustrated or angry. If you are sitting at a desk, your hands should be resting calmly on the top. If you are at the front of the room, facing your class, keep one hand in a pocket or keep it slightly active. Holler and Beatie found that

gestures increase the value of our message by 60%, the best most charismatic speakers and influencers know the importance of using hand gesture” (Vanessa Van Edward). The expert Vanessa Van Edward found that the most popular TED talkers used an average of 465 hand gestures during their speech ⁶

Further hand signals. If a student is speaking and you do not want that person to speak, gain eye contact with him/her and place a finger to your lips, nodding at the person. Alternatively, engage the student’s attention and use a ‘zip closed’ action across your lips. The student will soon get the message that you require quiet. Again, much better than shouting across a classroom.

Body language as a supplementary method of teaching English is vivid. It can help students to understand, enliven the classroom atmosphere, and improve the students’ interest of learning English and the quality of classroom teaching. In teaching, if teacher can use the body language correctly, properly and naturally, it will help to exploit the complex thinking of students. The body language can also help teachers to get students ready for class, make the emotion of students active, enliven the classroom atmosphere, and strengthen teaching effects.

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⁶ Vanessa Van Edward, in www.scienceofpeople.com

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