

# JURNAL AKADEMIK

Abstract Of A Study Of Small And  
Medium Industries In Sarawak

Dr. Ibrahim Shah  
Nicholas Amin  
Yap Yin  
Iris Syawe Seh Ling

Malaysian Economy: Analysis Of  
Performance In 1990, And Issues  
Beyond

Annie Wong Muk Ngiik

Juruaudit Luaran Dan Juruaudit  
Dalaman: Suatu Perbezaan

Shamsul Annuar Ahamad Ibrahim

Kursus Pra Perdagangan Di ITMCS  
Suatu Tinjauan Ringkas Selepas  
10 Tahun

Abdullah Abdul Latib

Pentadbiran: Dari Perspektif Islam  
Dan Barat

Kamis Ismail

The Implications of NVC In The  
Classroom

Ng Kui Choo

Aspek-Aspek Kemiskinan Di  
Kalangan Setinggan - Satu  
Penyelidikan Khas Di Kampung  
Baru Stutong, Tabuan Jaya, Kuching

Rosita Hj. Suhaimi

Kaji Selidik Kurikulum Diploma  
Sains Kesetiausahaan

Lelawati Abd. Hamid

Keusahawanan Masyarakat Malaysia-  
Ke Arah Kesepaduan Inisiatif  
Usahawanan Dan Insentif Kerajaan

Mohamad Khairi Ismail

ISSN 0128-2635



# THE IMPLICATIONS OF NVC IN THE CLASSROOM

NG KUI CHOO

## INTRODUCTION

In the process of classroom teaching, the teacher is in part communicating knowledge, in part communicating the nonverbal aspects of social skills to the student. Content aside, we see ourselves as excellent communicators, but there often exists an unwitting chasm between how we perceive ourselves and how the student perceives us.

Fontana (1981) sees the teacher and his class as a distinct social unit fraught with undercurrents of social relationships and social attitudes which shape individual and group responses in subtle ways. These undercurrents are manifested in parallel attitudinal differences towards particular teachers; at best, friendliness; at worse, hostility. In order to provide optimum learning environments for the student, it is imperative that the teacher comes to grips with aspects of communication skills that can serve a direct and immediate impact on the learning process.

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is the intact sending and receiving of verbal and nonverbal messages that produce the *desired response*. It presupposes the presence of a listener and speaker; in other words, the teacher and his students or vice-versa. Nonverbal communication (NVC) involves the study of all parts of the communication process except words.

### The Classroom Scenario

As the response to any message depends on the student's ability to interpret what the teacher wants to convey as well as how he does it, the latter should always ensure that there is concord between his nonverbal communication (NVC) as well as his oral communication and to allow as little discrepancy as possible between the two. Although Cooper (1979) maintains that there is usually very little discrepancy between our oral and nonverbal communication because "... most people just aren't good enough actors and actresses to carry it off," studies have shown that contradictions between body language and verbal language do occur and when they do, people tend to believe the former. (Marsh, 1988) The immediate issue is not so much whether incongruities do and should exist, but whether the teacher, on his part, is able to recognize incongruities in both his verbal and nonverbal messages as well as in his student's responses. He needs to reinforce his teaching skills with intermittent but regular feedback on how the students are responding so that he can modify his subject-matter (verbal) and skill (nonverbal) accordingly. This information could be obtained verbally, but a more accurate mode would be to ascertain the answers on the students expressions *per se*.

## ASPECTS OF NVC SKILLS

NVC consists of facial expression, tone of voice, gaze, gestures, physical proximity and appearance. Part of the teacher's social skills lie in his ability to employ and identify the right facial expression, tone, eye contact, even gestures. The teacher's general appearance as well as the distance he maintains from his learners can also affect their responses.

## Facial Expression

The face is a continual source of information. Although certain facial expressions are involuntary, frequent and conscientious practice can help us suppress certain negative emotions in the same way they help us amplify positive ones. Marsh (1988) applauded the Japanese as experts not only in suppressing emotions, but also in masking them. When afraid they cannot keep a neutral expression, they traditionally resort to smiling and laughter.

The seven basic emotional states outlined by Ekman (1972) are anger, depression, anxiety, joy, surprise, fear and disgust. These he distinguishes from interpersonal attitudes (eg. boredom) because they are simply states of the individual. Marsh (1988) further delineates another aspect of facial expressions which he terms conversational signals, used to emphasis or punctuate certain words in conversation. Listeners normally employ nods and smiles, frowns of puzzlement, even raised eyebrows to signal the speaker on. Conversely (and especially in the classroom) some yawners deliberately to dissuade the speaker from continuing.

The most encouraging facial expression is the smile inasmuch as it is not out of context with the situation at hand. It does not require an expert to decipher sarcasm in an insincere smile. Dorai Sinna, principal consultant, of Excel consult, Kuala Lumpur (1991) once mentioned that should one be so unfortunate as to inherit the likes of a bulldog's facial features, the smile may intimidate more than encourage. This need not be the case because the smile that stems from the heart will soften the harshest facial feature.

## Tone

Our tone is a strong indicator of our attitude towards the listener. Again this is a case of not so much what one says as how one says it. The listener listens to more than mere words – the teacher who smiles benevolently at his students as he acknowledges, "Well, since you guys apparently know so much already, why don't we hear from you instead?" is, on top of curbing student response, throwing them an open challenge to question him. Sarcasm, accusal, even cutting remarks are most effective in hammering the message home on the one hand; on the other hand, they also send most learners scuttling for cover, thus hindering the learning process.

Pleasure and displeasure, praise and blame, pity and envy as well as encouragement and accusal are some common attitudes reflected in the tone, consciously or unconsciously.

## Eye Contact

Because eyes are receivers as well as transmitters of information the way we look at people – a cursory glance, a hostile look or a blank expression – can greatly affect the outcome of our first encounter with them. The teacher who maintains eye contact with his student is at once warning him that he is an object of attention. At the same time, the eyes manifest the nature of that attention – hostility, friendliness, warning or reassurance. With subtle manipulation of eye contact – holding the student's gaze, then looking away intermittently – the teacher can easily have all four corners of the classroom under his observation – and control.

## Gestures

We employ gestures to add emphasis as well as punctuation to our oral communication. Most times we gesture involuntarily as is the case when we gesture dramatically over the telephone even though the listener obviously cannot see us. While it is acknowledged that gestures can add emphasis to a point, it must be noted that over-gesturing can make a ringmaster of the unwary teacher as bemused students get too carried away with his antics to fathom his message.

The gesture of touch can help foster interpersonal bonds, but as Cooper (1979) warns, touching (among individuals) is a repressed mannerism because certain parts of the body are considered taboo. Touching signs are indicators of reassurance but they can also hint at a lack of confidence or insecurity. For instance, the teacher who fidgets endlessly with his marker pen or trouser pocket while trying to explain some abstract point is unconsciously signalling his incompetence.

Although most gestures are universal, cultural nuances do exist. Among the Chinese, the Foochows consider it a cardinal insult to be pointed at with the middle finger, while yet others view the indexfinger with the same abhorrence. A better alternative for the teacher would be to refer to his students by name and not by gestures.

## Proxemics

The distance we maintain with others is related to our feelings towards them and can affect our relationship with them. Marsh (1988) outlines four territorial zones – the intimate zone (intimate ones), the personal zone (friends and social acquaintances), the social zone (business associates) and public zone (speaker and audience). We are “drawn” irresistibly to those we are attracted to while we distance ourselves from hostile ones. During social functions, friends tend to cluster together while outsiders hug the borders of the social circle.

In the classroom setting, the teacher could try maintain better proximity with his students by subtly pacing the room instead of hugging one corner. Most language teachers divide their classes into smaller units and then merge with the various units to relax the constraints of a rigid classroom setting.

## Appearance

Our first impression of a new acquaintance is usually physical. As role-model, the teacher's appearance should always be exemplary. Clothes make – and unmake – the man. Apparel and grooming are an integral component of the cultured personality. Executives at the top rungs of the corporate ladder “indicate” their status with tailored suits and ties; and salespersons are almost always impeccably dressed. Dress-sense is none less *le riguer* in the classroom. The well-groomed teacher usually exudes more poise and confidence than his dishevelled colleague. Shabbiness can demotivate as much as flashiness can solicit unnecessary distractions.

Another aspect intergal to the teacher's appearance is his posture. The best tailored suit will still resemble a sack if one does not possess good carriage. Our postures indicate our various personalities. Stooped or bowed shoulders indicate that one is burdened or inconfident. Retracted shouders can make one seem domineering or defensive. To assert his maleness, a man automatically pushes out his chest.

Posture can betray the unwary teacher who is experiencing his first-day-blues, for a his verbal assurances to the contrary. It can also intimidate: the teacher who wishes to encourage student response should not pose arms akimbo, legs astride, because such stance suggests autocracy, if not egocentricity.

## CONCLUSION

Whilst there no need to inject drama into every lesson plan the main thrust is that meticulous awareness of NVC skills is indispensable to the teacher who wishes to assert his presence and reinforce his subject-matter. NVC aids the communication process by providing emphasis and introducing a degree of redundancy *a fortiori* because the undiscerning body seldom lies. Hence, our effectiveness in communicating an understanding human feelings lies at the heart of effective nonverbal communication.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Cooper, K., **Nonverbal Communication For Business Studies**, New York: ANCOM, 1979.
2. Dumont, Raymond A., **Business Communications**, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1990
3. Fontana, F., **Psychology For Teachers**, London: Macmillan Publishers, 1981.
4. Henning, James H., **Improving Oral Communication**, New York: Macgraw Hill Book Company, 1979.
5. Kohut, Gary F., and Baxter, Carol M., **Business Communications**, Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1987.
6. Marsh, D., **Eye To Eye**, London: Sidgwick and Jackson Limited, 1988.
7. Wells, G., **How To Communicate**, London: Macgraw Hill Book Company, 1978.
8. Williams, B., **Communicating Effectively**, Wellingborough: Thorsons Publishers Limited, 1977.