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THE IMPORTANCE OF NONVERBAL MESSAGES IN INTERCULTURAL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of non-verbal communication in the intercultural classroom. Communication involves the presentation of ideas and feelings to others. People communicate because they want to influence the understanding of others, the attitude and the actions of others whether they agree or not on the issue. In addition, communication is also a two-way process in which both parties must respond to any information that is communicated. Without realizing it, non-verbal communication is complementary to verbal communication. This non-verbal communication is an important message form as it can interpret the emotion, personality, purpose and social status of a person.

KEYWORDS

Communication, message, process, relationship, culture, nationality, facial expression, classroom, attitude.

INTRODUCTION

What is the message?

Message refers to any set of signals that is interpreted as a whole by a receiver or receivers. During discussions, messages may be entirely nonverbal or a mixture of verbal and nonverbal signs.

It is true that verbal and nonverbal communication among members in the intercultural classroom is the essential process. Nonverbal signals are all the signals contained in a message except the words themselves. These signals may be either signs or symbols and

include such things as tone of voice, gestures and appearance. They serve a number of purposes especially helping to the people who are in the intercultural classroom express how they feel and how they perceive their relationships to others. It is often easier and more convenient to communicate with nonverbal signals in intercultural classroom than to communicate with verbal signals. At the same time, it is very important to correctly understand the thoughts expressed by non-verbal signals. Because such gestures have different meanings for representatives of different nationalities. For example, in Uzbek culture, a smile means that someone is happy, but in Japanese culture, someone who is feeling quite miserable may smile so as not to upset the person to whom is speaking. Moreover, sometimes in the nationas, it shows that the person who has her arms folded across his chest is indicating that he is not interested in the topic that is happening or being discussed at that time. But in other nations, it is considered as an attempt to keep warm. So several categories of nonverbal behavior are especially important to people's understanding of intercultural group communication. Personal appearance, facial expression, eye contact, gestures and body movement, voice are among the major types of nonverbal signals most relevant to intercultural groups. For instance, violating societal norms about dress, grooming, makeup, and accesories can arouse suspicion or even midstrust. Dressing noticeably

differently from other members will almost certsinly be interpreted as a sign that these kind of people do not identify with them. Others may peg this person as undependable and uncooperative, and this person may have to prove himself in other ways in order to be accepted. In addition, eye contact and facial expressions are among the most important nonverbal signals for people who are in the intercultural classroom. For Americans, making eye contact signals that the channel for communication is open. This is why many students look down at their notebooks when a teacher asks a question they avoid eye contact so they won't be called upon to answer. Prolonged eye contact can signal cooperativeness or competitiveness, depending on the circumstances. Most Americans establish eye contact before speaking and continue it intermittently when talking to someone they like. However, people from other cultures are sometimes of fended by Americans direct gazes, while others prefer to maintain an intense, unbroken stare when conversing, which is uncomfortable for Americans. As with other nonverbals, there are numerous cultural factors that influence what a person considers to be appropriate eye contact. In unified and cohesive groups, members tend to look continuously at each other during a discussion. In hostile or tense groups members avoid eye contact. Studies using photographs have shown that people can accurately determine the type of emotion someone is experiencing from looking just at the face and eyes.

Anger, sadness, happiness, support, disagreement, interest, liking all are indicated by facial expressions. Some people have “poker” faces, their facial expressions change very little. They tend to be trusted less than those whose faces express their feelings more openly. Although most of people have learned to control their facial expressions, feelings still show through. Most of them monitor the facial expressions of others because they provide clues about what is going on in the group. Movements of the hands, arms, and body signal many feelings and attitudes. People turn directly toward others they like and away from those they dislike. Leaning toward each other indicates a sense of mutual inclusiveness, whereas leaning away signals rejection. Both tension and status can be revealed with movements. Members who are swinging a foot, twisting a lock of hair, or tapping a pencil may be indicating tension. It may be hard for the other members in the intercultural classroom to know whether the movements indicate frustration, impatience, or annoyance with the group’s progress. Moreover, in the nonverbal communication, nonverbal backchannel sounds, such as “mm-hmm” and “uh-huh” are sounds that people make to indicate interest and involvement when listening. Interestingly, there are cultural variations in the use of the backchannel. Most people from Western European backgrounds use the backchannel less frequently than African Americans, Hispanics, or people with Southern European backgrounds. These differences can cause

misunderstandings in a group if members are not aware of them. For example, a Hispanic member who is used to receiving backchannel responses may believe the other members of the group are not interested in his ideas because they do not respond with encouraging “mm-hmmm” sounds, as he is used to. The other members may in fact be interested, but they express their interest in other ways.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is clear that knowing the facts and reasons about the importance of non-verbal communication, we should take consideration both verbal and non-verbal equally while communicating in our daily life. Our every day success depends upon our capability to communicate effectively, both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal and non-verbal communication actually defines our interactions and our relationships with others, and portrays physical and psychological well-being of a person. Therefore, understanding the different forms and aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, and its vitality in playing roles during any kind of daily interactions is the first step to enhancing positive communication and nurturing relationships. To sum up, these statistics indicate that non-verbal communication is also equally important to verbal communication in this real world.

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