Most communication is non-verbal. 
From a 1967 study by Albert Mehrabian, University of California professor.

EDMT903 – COMMUNICATION FOR TEACHERS
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Introduction

There are two main forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal communication. This report will explore non-verbal communication, specifically what non-verbal communication is, what it looks like, and its cultural implications. These aspects will be covered throughout the report, specifically under the subcategories of kinesics, haptics, object communication and proxemics. It is important to note non-verbal communication has many more subcategories exploring nonverbal forms of communication, however this report will be limited to the four mentioned, and each will only be able to briefly cover its aspects. The accompanying website will provide further references for teachers to explore non-verbal communication in their teaching practice.

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-Verbal Communication is the most-significant form of communication in schools. It is important to note that it is estimated non-verbal communication attributes between “fifty-five and seventy per cent of interpersonal communication” (Lyons et.al 2011: 75). Lyons et.al (ibid) explains, “communication is multi-channeled” through both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, and the individual’s interpretations of non-verbal communication can vary depending on cultural implications. Non-verbal communication has many subcategories, however this report will focus on kinesics, haptics, object communication, and proxemics. Together these subcategories cover the use of gesture, facial expression, body positioning, and the use of space.

Non-Verbal Communication and Cultural Implications

“Different cultures have different non-verbal signals and sometimes these have very different meanings”(Lyons et al 2011: 76). Misinterpretation of non-verbal communication can occur as a result of cultural differences. Lyons (et.al 2011: 76) exemplifies this through the meaning of head gestures in India as opposed to Western countries. The notion of waving your head side to side in India is indicative of acceptance and approval. In comparison, the same notion in
Western countries is representative of ‘no’ and disapproval. This example signifies how ethnical and cultural factors, and the application of non-verbal communication need to be taken into consideration when teaching a class of students that may derive from a range of cultural backgrounds.

**Kinesics**

Kinesics is the study of facial expressions, eye contact and gestures (Simonds and Cooper 2014: 128). Kinesic behaviour is indicative of liking and disliking, trust and is representative of the perception students have of their teachers.

**Facial expression**

Facial expressions are signals conveyed through the mouth, eyebrows and eyes. Facial expression is the most well-known and easily identifiable form of non-verbal communication (Lyons 2011: 76). Facial gestures in the classroom are very significant in informing the emotional environment of the classroom. Roger (1998: 58) signifies the importance of a smile in the classroom stating, “a smile can disarm, defuse tension, encourage, motivate and humanise”. Facial expressions are important to everyday interaction because they acknowledge the presence of people, and in the case of the school environment, students. This collaborates with the need for teachers to establish communication with all students by establishing presence and relationships through effective non-verbal interpersonal communication (Simonds and Cooper 2014: 55).

**Eye Contact**

Another form of non-verbal communication that correlates with the establishment of presence is eye contact. Lyons (et.al 2011: 76) identifies that eye contact “has the function of regulating the flow of conversations”. It communicates concepts of “interest, the degree of intimacy, relative status and the display of personal characteristics such as shyness and assertiveness” (ibid). The use of these concepts in effective communication strategies is significant to all educators. This notion is epitomised in the process of attention seeking and tactical ignoring. Rogers (1998: 59) exemplifies this through a situation where a
student seeks attention to disrupt class proceedings. The teacher in turn addresses this issue by engaging in brief eye contact assisted with no active verbal communication. Rogers (ibid: 69) identifies the notion of tactical ignoring through the use of eye contact, which establishes the statement that the teacher is not ready to pay attention unless the student conforms to the behavioural expectations of her classroom environment. Simonds and Cooper (2014: 121) agree with the use of eye contact in the regulation of conversational flow identifying that "eye contact can be used to recognise a student while not inviting them to participate verbally".

Prolonged eye contact also has the ability to create anxiety and hostility amongst students. Simonds and Cooper (ibid: 129) identifies, “students are more comfortable with a person who, when speaking, listening, or sharing mutual silence, looks at them fifty per cent of time than someone who looks at them one-hundred per cent of the time”. This epitomises the importance of using moderate eye contact allowing the teacher to regulate the classroom easily. Simonds and Coopers example also emphasises the strength of eye contact in managing a classroom. The "evil-eye" is a perfect example of non-verbal communication where teachers use eye contact as a means to stop disruptive behaviour (ibid). Beebe (in Simonds and Cooper 2014: 130) recognises, “eye-contact has a significant effect on the retention of information, attitudes towards the teacher, attention and classroom participation” which is evident through his research.

**Gesture**

Gesture, the movement of body parts that imply meaning, can be used to convey messages to individuals without or in conjunction with verbal communication. In conjunction with verbal communication, gestures can provide communicators with an effective means to convey specific messages. Rogers (1998: 57) identifies the raise of an eyebrow in conjunction with asking a student, ‘what are you doing’ improves the message put across to the student. Gestures can also be used as an effective class management strategy. Rogers (ibid: 56) identifies, “a simple signal of a thumb and forefinger turning [as if twiddling a volume knob] can be an effective non-verbal cue delivered across a classroom to two students talking
loudly during on-task learning”. The most common gesture used as a form of student self-regulatory behavior is raising a hand to ask a question. All the examples used above are indicative of how gesture as an example of non-verbal communication, can be applied in the school environment effectively.

It is also important to consider the implications of certain gestures. Some students for example can be offended and disrespected by being pointed at by a teacher. Sometimes constant performance of gestures can be distracting from the content being addressed in the classroom (Lyons 2011: 102). Gestures provide teachers and students with an effective means to communicate messages to each other. A balance of kinesics in conjunction with verbal forms of communication is important to ensure a comfortable learning environment for students.

**Haptics**

Haptics is the notion of interaction through touch. The non-verbal form of communication, touch, carries ethical and moral implications in educational practice (Simons et.al 2014: 130). This is important to consider when applying haptics as a non-verbal strategy to communicate and reflects why haptic interaction occurs more between same sex pairs. Haptics however, can be used effectively to indicate “support, tenderness and encouragement” thus improving students cohesion and engagement in the school environment (Lyons et.al 2011: 76).

Touch can be used effectively to counter external factors of student disengagement. This can be applied to a hypothetical situation where a student is distressed about a personal issue. In this circumstance Simonds and Cooper (2014: 130) outlines, appropriate application of haptics can be used to provide emotional support for the student. Geng (2011: 21) emphasises that touch can be an effective tool in order to control students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Geng (ibid) elaborates that touching a student with ADHD on the shoulder can be used as a successful attentive device, calming the student. It is also important to consider that secondary teachers application of haptics is
mostly prohibited. Older students and their perception of haptics shifts from being perceived as academic and emotional support to being seen as a ground of intimacy that could result in immanent litigation (Lyons et.al 2011: 77).

Haptics also carries cultural considerations in its application in social interaction particularly in the school environment. Lyons (ibid) emphasises, forms of touch carry implications that are specific to individual cultures. The notion of touching the top of a head in many cultures can be deemed offensive, same can be said for the notion of an Islamic woman coming in contact with a male hand, which is considered a breach of comfortably (ibid). This is an example of how cultural norms restrict the way non-verbal forms of social interaction can be applied between teachers, students and even more so between genders.

**Object communication**

Object communication refers to an individuals clothing, such as professional or casual clothing, as well as "hairstyle, architecture, and symbol" (Pan 2014: 2628). These aspects of nonverbal communication can be understood through appearance and the presentation of self.

**Appearance and Self Presentation**

Appearance and self-presentation are both aspects of nonverbal communication. Lyons et.al (2003: 75) explains inferences can arise from “sociocultural factors such as appearance, style, body size, racial markers and ethnic markers”. Each of these elements can be read as messages indicating position in society, for example a tailored suit compared to a dirty, stained shirt with holes. There are various interpretations for nonverbal messages such as appearance and self-presentation. Teachers should be aware that individuals derive from different cultures and various socioeconomic backgrounds and as a result interpretations of personal appearance and choice of presentation vary (ibid).
Proxemics

Another sub-category of nonverbal communication is proxemics. Proxemics is a term specifically entailing the space or environment “in a given situation” (Pan 2014: 2627). It can also be identified as the study of how space is utilised and applied (Simonds and Cooper 2014: 122). This can refer to the teacher’s proximity to students or objects, and the use of space by walking around. Pan (2014: 2628) explains it also refers to “furniture, architectural style, interior decorating, lighting condition, colors, temperature, noise and music”. The positioning of the body in a classroom can communicate a lot without the need to use words. Rulan (2015) suggests one way a teacher can test the way their body language or position affects their students:

“…Standing in the doorway as your students shuffle in. This close contact sets up a naturally occurring single file line that calms them before they enter the classroom and enables a positive learning environment before they even sit down”.

This test can give a teacher control of a classroom without the need for verbal communication.

Rogers (1998: 56) warns to be careful not to over step boundaries of space “when we come into a students personal space, it is important not to crowd, not to put fists on the table in some display of power”. Doing either of these things can be seen as a sign of anger or aggression. Rogers (ibid: 55) also cautions against the over use of movement, such as when a teacher paces “the front of the classroom and students track the teachers pacing... [students] consequently find it difficult to listen to the teacher”. This means movement for the sake of movement can be distractive, not effective. According to Rogers (ibid: 56), tone and body posture can all convey “indecision, a lack of confidence, [and] non-assertion”. This can also be seen when teachers are walking around during instruction for no effective purpose. It is recommended that when a teacher is giving instruction, it should be done from the front of the room, as this space
“signals that here, up-front is where we engage the whole class's attention to remind or for active teaching or class discussion” (ibid).

**Conclusion**

Non-verbal communication has many aspects. It is an important form of communication especially for teachers in the management of their classrooms. This report has provided an overview of four subcategories; kinesics, haptics, object communication and proxemics. Together these four subcategories have provided information and examples regarding facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, self-presentation and the use of space. This report is accompanied with a website which we hope teachers will find helpful as it contains further references including TED talks explaining the importance of non-verbal communication in their teaching practice.

Website Link: [http://communicatingasteachers.weebly.com/](http://communicatingasteachers.weebly.com/)
Reference:


