CALIBRATION OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN RELATION TO THE UNDERSTANDING STUDENT'S REPRESENTATION SYSTEM

Cristina Popescu (Mitu)
Lecturer, PhD, "Ovidius" University of Constanța

Abstract: In the educational communication, nonverbal communication is not added to the verbal, but forms a well-structured whole that complements, strengthens, nuances the meaning of verbal messages, and in certain situations it is even more credible than verbal communication. It provides a particularly fertile framework for the development of didactic interrelations, and it should be noticed that not only it cannot be separated from didactic communication in general but also that its place tends to be more and more important.
The main aim of this paper is to determine the effect of the calibration of the teachers' nonverbal communication on success in effective teaching. For a teacher is not enough to use elements of nonverbal language, but he also needs to distinguish the nonverbal communication of the students he directs in order to discover their emotions so as to ensure a constructive educational process. These methods of communication refer to the students' internal representation systems through which they orient, communicate and interpret reality every day.
Techniques and communication skills that are based strictly on nonverbal language are incomplete if the other contextual dimensions of the student are not taken into consideration. Here comes the calibration process related to neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). Through this process we can recognize the student's state based on non-verbal signals. A successful teacher does not only observe, but he also pays attention, feels and evaluates.
The ability to comprehend the other's perspective is also a key element in an effective communication. Once this is understood, the teacher can align to all levels of student thinking and thus can effectively relate. Therefore, harmoniously calibrating neuro-linguistic programming tools with non-verbal communication concepts, the objectives proposed in the course curriculum are much more effective in achieving the desired results.

Keywords: nonverbal communication, calibration, representation system, NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), education

Communication is what makes the world work. It facilitates human connections and enables us to learn, grow and develop. It is not just about talking or reading, but also about understanding what is said, and in some cases, what is not said. Communication is also the most important quality a teacher can have. Most people want to relate better with others and be more charismatic. Life is complex, an amalgam of stimuli and information and nonverbal language is a decisive element in our society. Even if we do not notice the effects, we all respond to facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice of others. In interpersonal communication, words are not enough. Sometimes the desire to use words is just useless (when there is noise, when there is distance between interlocutors, when you do not know the language spoken by the others etc.). There are sufficient arguments to consider the communication as being the most important skill of people.

Nonverbal communication is an element of human communication, being complementary to verbal communication. Clothing, face expression, body posture, body orientation, smell, nonverbal aspects of writing, of speech are signs that people we come into contact with interpret them. The body speaks for itself in its own language. Like verbal

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

communication, nonverbal communication can be shaped in terms of the transmitter, receiver, message, communication channel, effect, feedback, and context of communication.

People need effective communication, not just beautifully lighted words. Studying and observing nonverbal language helps in this context, because it makes it easier to understand the needs, intentions and emotions of the people we come into contact with. Nonverbal communication is a real and powerful form of communication. People have more confidence in this nonverbal language than in words. Body language has features which gives it authenticity and credibility.

The definitions of nonverbal communication are varied and the majority of them are accepted. The difference lies in the way we approach the non-linguistic signal transmission process.

We believe that nonverbal and verbal language work together and support each other in the process of human communication. Nonverbal communication means something else than the words by which we transmit a message. Nonverbal communication is transmitted on silent terms. Its approach starts from a few general principles. Non-verbal communication is culturally determined and it may be in conflict with verbal messages, but on the other hand, the messages are largely unconscious and its channels are important in communicating feelings and attitudes.

Regarding the nonverbal communication in the school environment, it is very emotionally expressive and has its well established meaning. We all agree that good communication between students and between teacher and students has beneficial effects for the educational process (D.S. Saucan, 2002).

Teachers who practice friendly communication are more effective than distant teachers. Establishing direct visual contact between the teacher and the student is the first condition of communication. It is impossible to interpret students' manifestations without looking directly at them. Visual contact allows the teacher to make the feedback of pedagogical action; so he can prevent disturbing the class, give clarity when students do not understand, encourage participation.

Teacher’s movement in class and gesturing increases the student’s interest and make them actively participate in class.

Generally, positive affective relations stimulate learning. Teaching and learning are influenced by the spirit of the group of students and by the nature of the relationships maintained with the members of the group. Supporting this, we argue the need for the teacher to also use an effective nonverbal communication.

But, since the educational process is based on two members, namely educator and educated, then, for a teacher it is not enough to just employ elements of nonverbal language, but he must also distinguish the nonverbal communication of those who guides, in order to understand their perceptions, to discover their emotions and feelings and in this way to ensure a constructive educational process.

In didactic communication, during a lesson, a teacher constantly resorts to nonverbal communication means that form a structured whole with a verbal message. Two kinds of teacher's movements are distinguished in the education process: learning moves that concern preparation of materials for teaching, using a marker, writing the title of the lesson on the board, etc. and personal moves that do not directly influence the process of teaching and learning. These refer to movements of relaxation, of finding a comfortable position, etc. To all these are added the facial expressions that can express joy, satisfaction, sadness, pity, compassion, disapproval.

For a complete message received from students, it is absolutely necessary for a teacher to also add information sent through nonverbal behaviour. Equally, the teacher's communication must be a complete one, it is not enough to reproduce verbal information, but

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

he has to anime the information, to give them depth, support them with gestures, mimics, voice tones and all other ways of nonverbal communication.

Gestures include much more than simple movements of hands or other visible parts of the body. Voice intonations can record attitudes and feelings as significant as clenching fists, shaking hands, raising the eyebrows. We respond to gestures with great vivacity, and we may even say that we do it according to an elaborate and secret code that is not written anywhere, it is unknown to anyone and is understood by all.

The face defines identity, expresses attitudes, opinions, and states of mind, it shows our relationships with others, it is the visual brand of every human being. Extremely expressive, the human face has very mobile features and because it speaks for itself with eloquence and candour, the vocabulary has only a few words to express the multitude and diversity of its gestures. From the emotional point of view, it is stronger than the word. Among the movements of the teacher can be included: the indication of the table, fixing the eye to a particular student, deliberately looking towards the class, looking at a socket and handing out a student's extension, moving the head in an affirmative or negative way while a student responds, etc.

In turn, students also resort to non-verbal responses in class. Some of the concrete gestures observed by the students include closing the fists, which is equivalent to hostility, anger or stress, the head resting on the palm means boredom, but the palm (fingers) on the cheek, on the contrary, shows interest. Frown, on the one hand, signifies anger, but on the other hand it is also a gesture made at the time of concentration, a gathering of thoughts in the central area of the forehead.

When a student crosses his arms is a defence, protection, symbolizing shyness; on the contrary, the arms released, the open arms denote relaxation, availability for communication, self-security. These student moves have a feed-back value for the teacher, but only when the teacher interprets them correctly. Any movement of the eyes or eyelids, as well as any dilation of the pupil, contain important information. The look provides the most nuanced expressions and the most real emotions. The most hidden intentions can only be controlled with great difficulty. We prefer visual contact rather than provide information that we perceive to be too intimate. When the teacher addresses a question to the students, he does not have to name a person, even if he knows the names of all the students in the class, but he notices the expressiveness of the eyes. Through such behaviour he realizes who knows and wants to answer, but also those who do not know the answer to the question.

Conscious observation of our own actions as well as of others is the most appropriate way to better understand the communication methods of the most complex and most interesting being in the world - man. Then emotional affective feelings are transmitted more easily through nonverbal communication, with the exception of teachers who are endowed with oratory skills and empathic qualities. In verbal communication, the message is explicit, while in the nonverbal is implicit, spontaneous, and at times out of control of consciousness. We can refer here to a series of aspects of emotional behaviour that is the result of combining instinctual, innate elements with conditioned and socio-cultural ones.

External reality is encoded inside through the five senses: sight, smell, touch and hearing. The human body is provided with a large number of sensitive receptors, which are the only way to get information. Through these five means we are able to gather information from the outside, which we then encode in a certain way on the inside through mind and spirit, and also interpret them by giving them personal meanings.

In NLP, the sensory systems are one of the most important concepts. Information is taken from the environment through the senses of the eye, hearing, touch, taste and smell. We call the world that we express ourselves internally and externally, the VAKOG

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

(visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory). Throughout life, due to the unique life experiences of each individual, people have formed a predominant representation system.

These five senses build in us the personal map that guides us to the outside world and are new patterns by which we think. We rely on these five senses to collect information from the environment, which our brain encodes according to the channel we received that information. For example, the information received through the visual field will be coded as images, the audible ones will be coded as sounds and words, and what we receive through feelings or kinaesthetic is coded by the brain as emotion. This process of storing and encoding information begins from childhood, and as we grow and mature, we will develop a preference for the predominant use of a particular channel. For example, suppose you want to convince a kinaesthetic person, a shy student to meet his colleagues. The language you will use should contain specific sensory predicates to help you create an effective communication rapport, basically an emotional connection. Kinaesthetic persons use and prefer language like: it feels good/bad, I have a gut feeling about this, how do you feel about this? And also word like: feel, care, touch, love, soft, carry etc. Using such a language you will help the kinaesthetic to feel the conversation and thus you will gain sympathy. Kinaesthetic communication is very powerful. It transmits a lot of information about a person's character and emotion.

The way a person uses words gives us a framework on how he has built up his internal reality and how it gives meaning to things. On our internal map, words function as symbols for the images, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations we have experienced at some point. It is a good exercise to begin to observe carefully how people describe various events using different patterns of thought. Equally useful is the observation of one's own language, we can identify preferences for certain ways of accessing and expressing concepts about the world. If one understands how a person perceives information, a lot of nuances and features can be found in this outcome. What is effective in communicating with some people can be quite inefficient in communicating with others. While some wonder why their interaction with others does not bring the desired result, others use in their everyday life knowledge of the specific representation system.

In the following, we present a short exercise in order to identify the sensory preferences of a student. The guide (the teacher) asks the explorer (the student) to write a clear reminder of the last vacation (any other type of significant experience can be used) and helps him in this narrative with questions, requests for details, etc. Simultaneously, he writes the predicates used by the explorer (the student) in his story. Most likely, the preferred representation system will translate into the highest frequency of predicates of a certain type at the language level (the story). A necessary caution refers to not informing the explorer about the purpose of the exercise, case which may affect its effectiveness.

Although visual indicators are not the only way we can learn how the student thinks, they are the easiest to notice. If we know how and where to look, the specific posture, mimics, gestures, breathing and skin colour can also provide us with a series of information about how people think.

The ability to use these indicators is essential for educators; they can learn how students think and so discover how they could change and improve that. Recognizing the senses that other people prefer to perceive the world and using this information in the process of establishing relationships with our peers, professionally, personally or socially, can exert a tremendous influence on how they respond to us. But the real challenge in this regard is to discover how can we use the signals transmitted by our body both for our benefit and for others.

The process that allows us to move from the personal map to the interlocutor's map and recognize the different states of others is called calibration. Calibration is the essence

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

of nonverbal communication, that is, how to notice the changes and differences of nonverbal behavior that people manifest in their relationship with you.

In NLP, the term calibration means the process by which a person reads a person's answers (access pointers). It is not about guessing, it is about developing what it is called sensory acuity in order to communicate effectively. In communication it is critical to observe the state of the one next to you.

For example, sadness can be calibrated (observed and measured) to a specific person by slouching, looking down, breathing heavy, flexing temple and mouth muscle. Calibration involves the association between access indices and internal cognitive and emotional processes.

In order to develop their calibration skills, we present a basic exercise for teachers.

There is a group of three people, so that Student A (the explorer) will be able to associate with that state, Student B (the guide) - will calibrate Student A and Student C (observer) - will notice the process between Student A and Student B without interfering in any way. After each round, they will change the roles, so Student A becomes Student B, Student B becomes Student C and Student C becomes Student A.

The process is similar for each representational system (VAK). The time for each exercise is 7-8 minutes plus two minutes for feedback.

Calibration of the visual system

- Student A thinks a person who likes (a good friend, perhaps a loved one), and creates in his mind a picture of that person as if he were now in front of him. Student A does not speak, just imagines the pleasant person as if he were now in front of him.
- Student B observes the indices given by the Student A and calibrates (mimics, breathing, gestures, etc.). Student B asks Student A to break the state (asks him something like how many windows are in this room? - Breaking the state involves bringing the person in here and now. Student A thinks of a person who does not like and so he creates in his mind a picture of that person, as if he were now in front of him. Student A does not talk. Student B calibrates carefully.
- Student B asks Student A to break the state.
- Student A randomly selects either the pleasant or the unpleasant person and thinks of it, without telling Student B who is the person he is thinking about.
- Student B also calibrates and guesses who is the person whom Student A was thinking about-the pleasant or the unpleasant one.
- Student B says how he figured it out - what were the clues he noticed.
- Student C provides feedback - if he noticed anything other than Student B, what he liked in the process, what would he do differently. Repeat the process until B guesses (until it calibrates correctly). Change roles and repeat the process.

Calibration of the auditory system

- Student A and Student B sit in the chair (or stand) back in the back, without seeing and without touching in any way! C notes.
- Student A thinks of a pleasant person as if it were in front of that person and at the same time counts from 1 to 10 out loud. It is essential to focus on the pleasant person, as if she/he were in front of him. Student B calibrates the hearing aid.
- Student B asks Student A to break the state and think of an unpleasant person and at the same time to count aloud up to 10. Student B calibrates the auditory.
- Student B asks Student A to break the state and to randomly choose a person - be it the pleasant or the unpleasant one, without telling him and thinking about it as he counts again from 1 to 10 out loud.

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

- Student B calibrates and guesses who is the person who Student A was thinking about.

Feedback session follows, and then repeat the process until Student B calibrates correctly two times. Change roles and repeat the process until all three were in turn Student A, Student B and Student C, just like in the previous exercise.

Calibration of the kinaesthetic system

- Student A and Student B stand either back in the back without seeing either face to face with eyes closed. At the same time they only touch their palms. Make sure you have a comfortable position so there is no hand tension that could influence the correct calibration. Student C notes.
- Analogously to 1 and 2, Student A thinks first of a pleasant person and says nothing. Student B will calibrate just based on palm information (heat, some tension etc.). Student A and Student B do not see each other and touch only the palms. Student A does not talk.
- Student B asks Student A to break the state and think of the unpleasant person. Student B calibrates kinaesthetically.
- Student B asks Student A to break the state and choose the pleasant or unpleasant person to think about, and then Student B will calibrate and guess again to what person Student A was thinking about.
- Analog feedback session as at 1 and 2. The process is repeated until Student B is calibrated correctly two times. The roles are changed so that all three participants are Student A, Student B and Student C in turn.

It is essential for a good communicator to become aware of these access indices and to know their meaning for the respective person (the person who manifests them). People already have this capacity developed at a certain level. However, it is not a conscious skill, one might just got the impression, feel that the person next to them is sad or happy. At the same time, an inadequate development of calibration ability can lead to misinterpretation. For example, one can consider that you are sad, when in fact you are focused.

It is an ability that we naturally use, being even very well developed in some directions for each person. Each of us has a particular sensitivity to certain types of emotions or situations that we can easily recognize. It is a process that can be realized or not and it is based on the observation of some aspects of nonverbal conduct and voice. Frequently, we mistakenly identify the states of others and responsible for this failure is that we pay too much attention and credit to the verbal plan. Another source of these errors is the inter-individual differences in expressing certain emotions.

NLP's creators began to shape the great therapist Milton Erikson and thus concluded that there are some general indications that are valid for all people indicating changing internal states such as: voice tone and volume, the shape and details of the lower lip, the fact that it is wrinkled or not, its fine moves in relation to the superior lip, muscle tension in the face and forehead, then facial colour that reveals the tone of the face muscles, around the eyes, lips, then the colour of the skin and cheeks, the eyes, eye accessing cues and pupil dilation, breathing pattern (upper chest, middle, lower). All these non-verbal indices manage to create a kind of legend of the personal map and ease our work when communicating with someone. Thus, calibration is the natural process of each of us by which we can decipher the unconscious, nonverbal reactions during an interaction by associating the visible behavioural indices with a specific internal response.

We learn to calibrate not to manipulate, but to understand and communicate better, because what you find inside is reflected on the outside. Our condition of people involves communication. However, we do not always communicate what we intend. NLP provides practical tools for anyone who wants to become a good communicator. Language is

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)

the means by which we think and give meaning to things around us. However, the process of conversion of experience into language implies, in some ways, distortions. Practicing NLP we recognize what people assume when they speak and use a language of precision in order to improve mutual understanding. On the other hand, the ability to understand the other's point of view is the milestone in NLP. Once we understand it, we can align the interlocutor at all levels of his thinking and thus we can relate effectively. Calibration is an art. Sometimes even if a teacher thinks that a response is not quite honest, it can be determined by a question that the student does not understand. For this case, the teacher asks helpful questions.

Everyone can develop their ability to build effective communication relationships. To accomplish this, however it takes study and practice, as well as in any other area where you want to be efficient. Through verbal / nonverbal communication we can develop an emotional climate in which the role is not only the teacher's behaviour but also his collaboration with students and completed with the contribution of both sides. The methods by which we can better understand students and through which we can help them to become more open, depend on us. The benefits will be revealed to everyone as they learn to receive and provide a model of communication according to each situation or person whom they interact with.

Therefore, didactic communication also includes those informational flows, whether intentional or not, verbal or nonverbal, which portray a multidirectional universe, thus favouring an adequate psychosocial climate for studying.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bandler, Richard, Vremea schimbarii, Editura Vidia– Colectia NLP, Bucuresti, 2008
2. Chelcea, Septimiu, Comunicarea nonverbală: gesturile şi postura, Ed. Comunicare.ro, Bucureşti, 2005
3. Chiru Irena, Comunicarea interpersonală, Ed. Tritonic, Bucureşti 2003;
4. Dilts, Robert B., Changing Belief Systems with NLP, Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications, 1990
5. Dobrescu, Tatiana, Dimensiuni ale comunicării prin limbajul corpului, Ed. Tehnopress, Iasi, 2006
6. Ezechil, Liliana, Comunicarea educationala in context scolar, Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, 2002
7. Mlodinow, Leonard, How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behaviour, First Vintage Books Edition, United States of America, 2013
8. Rinvolucri M.& Baker J.,Unloking Self-expression trough NLP, Delta Publishing, 2005
9. Panisoara, Ion Ovidiu, Comunicarea eficienta, Polirom, Bucuresti, 2004
10. Saucan, Doina-Ştefana, Comunicarea didactica. Expresivitate şi stil, Editura Atos, Bucureşti, 2002

BDD-V4829 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:00:09 UTC)