CHAPTER

6

Teacher Nonverbal Immediacy

Use and Outcomes

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The central objective of educational systems in U.S. culture is student recognition, recall, and short- and long-term learning. The role of the teacher in educational systems is to create learning environments in which the probability of the desired achievements is enhanced. The definition of student learning varies, however. Many of the aspects that are common include mastery of certain psychomotor behaviors, acquisition of many levels of cognitive understanding, synthesis, and integration, and the development of various feelings and attitudes. Being an immediate teacher can help us meet these goals with our students.

Immediacy is a perception of physical or psychological closeness. If we use effective nonverbal and verbal behaviors with our students to increase perceptions of immediacy, our students feel closer to us. This is an important benefit of immediacy, because our job as teachers will be much easier if our students feel appropriately close to us. Over the past 20 years, research on immediacy has revealed it's connection to a variety of important learning outcomes. This chapter discusses verbal and nonverbal behaviors teachers can use to increase their students' perceptions of immediacy as well as the advantages that immediate teachers have in their classrooms. A number of important generalizations can be drawn from the large body of research on teacher immediacy:

1. Teacher immediacy behaviors can be used effectively to get students to do what we want them to do, so long as we are truly engaging immediacy behaviors and we continue to use nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors throughout the course.

2. Students are drawn to teachers they trust and perceive as competent and caring. Students avoid teachers that they do not trust or perceive as competent, caring, and responsive.

3. Teacher immediacy behavior gives the teacher positive forms of behavioral control, rather than using coercive or antisocial teacher strategies.
4. Immediacy in large part determines the amount power and affect (liking) that a teacher has with students.
5. Students usually will comply with, rather than resist, reasonable teacher requests, if the teacher is liked, respected, and admired by her or his students.

Mehrabian (1971) was first to advance the concept of immediacy. His immediacy concept was stated as: "People are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (p. 1). Mehrabian (1969, 1971) indicated immediacy has verbal as well as nonverbal components, and both can have an impact on learning in the classroom. Richmond, McCroskey, and their colleagues went far beyond the initial attempt of major communication scholars by viewing immediacy as a means of classroom control, as a means of building affect in the classroom, and as a means of increasing student learning that is available to educators. Richmond and McCroskey (2000a) identify ways in which people might use immediacy to increase perceptions of physical and psychological closeness, thereby developing affinity, liking, and control with others.

Within the past twenty years, researchers, scholars, and practitioners have come to realize the relevance of nonverbal communication in the classroom environment. The nonverbal component of the communication process is as important to the positive teacher–student relationship as the verbal component, and often much more important. Earlier research on communication in the classroom primarily was on the verbal interaction between student and teacher.

The author of this chapter has spent twenty years working with and training teaching assistants and teachers on how to be more effective and affective communicators in the classroom environment. The training has stressed the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication. The author has communicated with more than 50,000 teachers, business persons, and government personnel about what usually works and does not work in the learning situation. This chapter is devoted to discussing conclusions about nonverbal immediacy communication and its impact on the teacher–student relationship.

**Nonverbal Communicative Behaviors in the Classroom**

We cannot always physically approach people or things we like or move away from things or people we don't like. However, we do communicate our feelings through our nonverbal behaviors. For example, if someone is saying something nice about us, we are likely to stand closer, listen more attentively, have more eye contact, perhaps even touch. On the other hand, if someone is saying something unpleasant about us, we are likely to lean away from that person, have little eye contact, remain silent, and not touch (unless it is to punch them!). Therefore, we use abbreviated forms of approach or avoidance behavior. These abbreviated forms of nonverbal behavior imply the degree of psychological closeness between
people. The more forms of approach like nonverbal behavior we use, the more we are perceived as nonverbally immediate. The more we use avoidance like behavior, the more we are perceived as nonverbally nonimmediate or unapproachable.

Behavior can be placed on a continuum from avoidance-oriented to approach-oriented (See Figure 6.1). Clearly we would like to avoid the person who wants to use physical violence or be verbally hostile or aggressive (also defined as verbal nonimmediacy) with us. We might approach or let someone approach us who display neutral behaviors, and we are very likely to approach or allow someone to approach us who uses immediacy behavior.

Thus, on the avoidance–approach continuum, most of us feel comfortable with most other people in interpersonal encounters at only one point: the immediacy point. At the avoidance end, we do not feel comfortable or want to communicate with someone who is abusive either physically or verbally. At the extreme approach end, most of us do not feel comfortable communicating on an intimate basis with more than a few people. The neutrality point also makes us uncomfortable after a while because there is very little responsiveness by the neutral person. Nonresponsiveness usually is interpreted as a negative response, so we end the conversation.

In conclusion, nonverbal behaviors that denote immediacy are those that improve and encourage interpersonal encounters and communication. Scholars suggest that some common immediacy behaviors include smiling, touching on the hand, arm, or shoulder, moving close to another, making eye contact, facing another, using warm vocals, and leaning toward someone. The remainder of this chapter review these and other nonverbal behaviors and how each behavior can be used to increase immediacy and improve interpersonal relations. To understand immediacy and its relationship to interpersonal communication, it is important to look at specific behaviors that express varying degrees of immediacy.

**Verbal Immediacy**

What people say can cause us to feel either closer or more distant from them. Increased immediacy is produced by verbally immediate or verbally effective messages that show openness to the other, friendship for the other, or empathy with the other. Such simple things as the use of the pronouns "we or us" rather than "you or you and I" can increase the feeling of immediacy. For example, when trying to denote verbal immediacy to a peer, say "we can do this together" rather than "you should try this."
Clearly, one way to communicate feelings of immediacy is through verbal messages. However, there are many nonverbal behaviors that can accomplish the same outcome. Although immediacy is communicating both verbally and nonverbally, the nonverbal component is far more important in most cases. This is because the nonverbal may exist independent of any verbal message, but verbal messages are usually accompanied by a variety of nonverbal messages. Furthermore, if a verbal message suggests immediacy while nonverbal messages are contradictory, receivers tend to disregard the verbal and respond to the nonverbal.

One of the most important ways of increasing immediacy in a relationship is sending verbal messages that encourage the other person to communicate. Such comments as “I see what you mean, Tell me more, Please continue, That is a good idea, This is a team effort, and Let’s talk more about this” create increased immediacy. Contrast these statements with the following comments: “Oh, shut up, You’ve got to be kidding, No way, I thought of that, and that is just dumb.” If you were to hear any of the latter comments, would you want to communicate more? Probably not. You would not feel very close to the person who made such comments, unless it was clear they were joking. Of course, addressing an individual by the name they prefer is more likely to denote immediacy than addressing them by another name such as “Hey You!” Mottet and Richmond (1998) have shown that in relationship development, working with verbally immediate or approach oriented communication strategies are a much more powerful communication tool in relationship formation than avoidance or verbally nonimmediate communication strategies.

In conclusion, as verbal immediacy increases so does the likelihood of a positive relationship. On the other hand, as verbal immediacy decreases the likelihood of a positive relationship decreases. Therefore, if you have not built any affinity or liking and you use verbal avoidance statements, then you have distanced yourself from the other person and virtually guaranteed that there will be no significant relationship or the relationship which exists may be a negative relationship.

**Nonverbal Immediacy**

Immediacy is the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between people. Several studies have been conducted looking at immediacy behaviors of teachers during instructional communication with their students. These studies have found immediacy behaviors to be associated with more positive affect as well as increased cognitive learning and more positive student evaluations of teachers (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000a). This research has suggested the appropriateness of the following communication principle:

The more communicators employ immediate behaviors, the more others will like, evaluate highly, and prefer such communicators; and the less communicator's employ immediate behaviors the more others will dislike, evaluate negatively,
and reject such communicators. We prefer to call this idea the “principle of immediate communication.” (p. 86)

Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) completed a landmark study titled “Half a Minute: Predicting Teacher Evaluations from Thin Slices of Nonverbal Behavior and Physical Attractiveness.” These researchers conducted three studies. In studies one and two, subjects were asked to rate college teachers’ and high school teachers’ nonverbal behavior and physical attractiveness based on ten-second silent video clips. In study three, they investigated whether strangers’ ratings of teachers would predict nonverbal behavior and physical attractiveness from study one and two if even “more thinned slices of the video” were shown. The clips were reduced from ten seconds to five and two seconds. The results were astonishing. The results revealed the following:

There were no significant differences in the accuracy of judgments based on video clips 10s, 5s, and 2s in length. In addition, there were no significant differences in the accuracy of judgments for the two samples of teachers. . . . Moreover, judgments based on 30s exposures (three 10s clips of each teacher) were not significantly more accurate than judgments based on 6s exposures (three 2s clips of each teacher). (pp. 437–438)

Ambady and Rosenthal suggest that the human ability to form impressions is strongly supported by their studies. In fact, as has always been suggested in the nonverbal literature, impression formation takes place very early in a relationship. Often, these initial impressions determine the communication that follows. They conclude that based on molar nonverbal behaviors shown in very brief (less than 30 seconds) silent video clips, we evaluate our teachers as accepting, active, attentive, competent, confident, dominant, empathic, enthusiastic, honest, likeable, not anxious, optimistic, professional, supportive, and warm. Subjects observed specific nonverbal behavior such as symmetrical arms, frowning, head nodding, head shaking, pointing, sitting, smiling, standing, strong gestures, head touching, upper torso touching, walking, and weak gestures. They conclude the following:

Teachers with higher ratings tended to be more nonverbally active and expressive. They were more likely to walk around, touch their upper torsos, and smile. Fewer effective teachers were more likely to sit, touch their heads, and shake rather than nod their heads. These results suggest that teachers with higher ratings showed more nonverbal expressiveness and involvement than fewer effective teachers. (pp. 436–437)

They also suggest that teachers “should be made aware of the possible impact of their nonverbal behavior and perhaps even trained in nonverbal skills” (p. 440). The researchers caution, however, that these judgments are most accurate for the affective side of teaching.

We have stated for years that the primary function of teachers’ verbal behavior in the classroom is to give content to improve students cognitive learning.
The primary function of teachers nonverbal behavior in the classroom is to improve affect or liking for the subject matter, teacher, and class, and to increase the desire to learn more about the subject matter. One step toward that is the development of a positive affective relationship between the student and teacher. When the teacher improves affect through effective nonverbal behavior, then the student is likely to listen more, learn more, and have a more positive attitude about school. Effective classroom communication between teacher and student is the key to a positive affect toward learning. As communication improves between teacher and student, so does affect. When teachers are trained to use verbal and nonverbal communication in the classroom more effectively, student–teacher relationships improve and so do the students’ affective and cognitive learning. When positive affect is present, cognitive learning increases.

The nonverbal behavior of the teacher communicates meanings to students. For example, the teacher who rarely looks at a student when talking is communicating that he or she is not very interested in that student. Students’ nonverbal behavior communicates meanings to teachers. The student who is always yawning might be bored, tired, or both. The teacher should review the context and determine whether the student simply is tired or whether the teacher is so boring that he or she is putting the student to sleep.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on discussion of the various types of nonverbal behavior and how each affects the student–instructor relationship. I direct primary attention to the teacher’s behavior and how this might influence communication with the student. The reason I take this approach is that it is the student’s perceptions of what the teacher does that determines how effective the communication is. If a student perceives that a teacher is using coercive power, then he or she will respond in a negative fashion. If a student perceives that a teacher is using immediacy, then he or she will be more responsive to the teacher. When a student perceives that a teacher does not like her or him, the student most likely will learn to dislike the teacher. The remainder of this chapter centers on how teachers and students can use immediate nonverbal behaviors to express affect and liking. All the examples discussed can be applied to the typical classroom setting.

Instructor Appearance

Appearance sends important messages in the classroom setting. An instructor’s attire influences the way students perceive that instructor. Teachers who dress very formally are seen by students as competent, organized, prepared, and knowledgeable. Teachers who dress casually or informally (not sloppy) are seen as friendly, outgoing, receptive, flexible, and fair.

We have found that when teachers dress very formally, it makes students feel as if the teacher is not receptive to their needs and not likely to communicate with them. The teacher is perceived as competent but not as receptive. The teacher who dresses casually is perceived as open, friendly, and more immediate but perhaps not as competently as the teacher who dresses more formally.
Therefore, our advice is to dress formally for a week or two or until credibility is established. Then dress more casually to project the image that one is open to student–teacher interaction. The teacher who always dresses formally may communicate that he or she does not want much student–teacher interaction, even though the dressing behavior may simply reflect the teacher’s clothing preferences. Whatever the teacher’s motivation, the students’ perceptions are what counts in the classroom.

**Gesture and Movement**

Small children often use gestures and movements to explain what they cannot say verbally. As they mature, they tend to use fewer simple hand gestures and increase their use of complex hand movements. In this culture, we tend to use more gestures when we are excited or giving complex messages. On the other hand, we use fewer gestures when we are bored or transmitting a simple message. Therefore, in the early grades children are likely to use more gestures and movements than verbal messages to communicate. However, about the time children reach twelve, they should be acquiring the adult norms and using more complex gestures and a wider variety of verbal messages.

In the classroom, *adaptors* are probably the most common gesture used by students. The classroom is an anxiety-producing situation for many students. Observe a typical classroom and you will find students chewing pencils, biting their nails, picking at their desks or notebooks, pulling at their hair, smoothing their clothing, and clicking their pens. A classroom that has an inordinate amount of student adaptive behavior is one in which the anxiety level is high or the teacher is boring. Students use more adaptors in classes where they feel anxious or bored. These behaviors are often perceived as a form of misbehavior and are punished. The student who is constantly clicking her or his pen is perceived by the teacher as disruptive. Students may not even realize they are engaging in such behavior until they are reprimanded for it.

Adaptors are more prevalent during the first few days of school, near holidays, and near the end of school. Students unintentionally use more adaptive behavior at these times. Teachers also tend to use more adaptive behavior the first few days of a new school year. It is anxiety-producing for most teachers when they are meeting new classes for the first time. Teachers who use more adaptors are perceived as nervous and anxious.

There are also people (both students and teachers) who gesture very little in the classroom. Students and teachers who gesture very little might be perceived by the other as boring and unanimated. The teacher’s delivery style should be animated and dynamic, and gesturing is one method of achieving this. The animated and dynamic teacher can keep the class interested in the subject for longer periods of time. Nonanimated, boring teachers put their classes to sleep.

Instructors who have an open body position communicate to their students that they are receptive and immediate, whereas teachers who fold in or keep a closed body position are perceived as nonimmediate and unreceptive. Students
with similar positions are perceived in similar ways by their teachers. Students who slouch in their seats when talking to the teacher are perceived as bored, rude, or even arrogant. Teachers expect students to look interested. One of the best indicators of interest is body position.

Both students and teachers use adaptive gestures, but they should strive to decrease their reliance on such activities. Teachers should consciously work to be more animated and dynamic. This will improve student–teacher interaction and make the classroom a more exciting environment.

**Facial Behavior**

Teachers’ facial expressions can affect how students feel about the classroom environment. The teacher who has a dull, boring facial expression when talking is perceived by the students as uninterested in them and the subject matter. This type of teacher is likely to have more classroom disruptions because students become bored with the teaching style. Teachers must have pleasing facial expressions, ones that show that they are interested not only in the subject matter, but also in their students. Pleasing facial expressions are often accompanied by positive head movements.

The teacher who uses positive head nods in response to a student’s comments is perceived as friendly, concerned about the communication between teacher and student, and immediate. An instructor who rarely nods, or uses more negative head nods than positive quickly stifles teacher–student communication. Not many students volunteer to talk when they realize that their teacher will not respond in a positive or at least encouraging fashion. Positive head nods are a means of stimulating student–teacher interaction and student responses. Students who use similar head nods help promote student–teacher interaction and help the teacher know whether students have understood the content.

Smiling has long been associated with liking, affiliation, and immediacy. The teacher who smiles and has positive facial affect is perceived as more immediate and likeable than the one who does not. Students react more favorably to the teacher who smiles than to the teacher who frowns a lot or does not smile much. Similarly, teachers react more favorably to the student who smiles than to the student who frowns or does not smile much. They each perceive the other as more open to communication. Therefore, the student–teacher relationship is improved by smiling. Students from kindergarten through graduate school respond better to teachers who smile.

**Eye Behavior**

Eye behavior of instructor and student can affect the interaction between the two. Students who look away, avoid teacher eye contact, or look down when the teacher calls on them are perceived as uninterested, shy, or unwilling to communicate. None of these are very positive perceptions. We know that people like to have eye contact when communicating with another. Eye contact might be one of
the biggest indicators of student interest in the classroom environment. Students who do not have eye contact with the teacher are perceived as uninterested. Teachers are the same as other people. They want people to whom they are talking to look at them and to have eye contact with them. If that does not occur, it is taken as rejection of the content and also as a personal rejection.

Some instructors seldom have eye contact with their students. This usually suggests to the students that the teacher is not interested in them and that the teacher is not approachable. Teachers who have little eye contact with students often are very shy, and probably should not be in the classroom at all. When there is little eye contact between students and teachers, students do not know when to talk, when to ask, or how to approach the teacher. This is a common complaint on college campuses. It often is directed toward some international instructors. The students complain that the instructor never looks at them when lecturing. This behavior may be the result of the instructor’s cultural upbringing. In some cultures, it is considered inappropriate for instructors and students to have direct eye contact. Regardless, this lack of eye contact inhibits effective communication in instruction.

In conclusion, eye behavior is a significant indicator of the relationship between student and teacher. Students who have eye contact with their teachers are perceived as more interested and better students. Teachers who look at their students are perceived as more animated, more interested, and more immediate.

**Vocal Behavior**

Recently we surveyed students to determine the nonverbal behavior that students liked or disliked most about teachers. Overwhelmingly, students felt that the monotone voice was the most objectionable behavior of a teacher. They felt that the monotone voice projected the image of boredom, noncaring, and nonimmediacy. They also said they learned less when the teacher had a dull or monotone voice. They were less interested in the subject matter and liked the class less when the teacher had a monotone voice. Students want the teacher to have a lively, animated voice.

Of all voice qualities, the monotone voice seems to draw the most negative criticism from both teachers and students. Both say that they perceive the person with the monotone voice as boring and dull. Students who use the monotone voice in class are not helping themselves at all. Instructors want students who sound interested in the class.

The author of this chapter had a professor who taught philosophy of education. He droned on and on in a monotone voice for two and a half hours every class period. The class had more than 100 people in it, and most dozed off. He was the worst model that an education department could employ to teach prospective teachers about how to be an effective and affective teacher. The most significant criticism the students had about him was not his competence, but his monotone voice.
There should be a sign placed in all classrooms that says “Laughter is encouraged in this class.” Students do not get the opportunity to laugh in our classrooms. No one ever said learning had to be boring. A really good teacher laughs with the students and encourages and allows laughter when something occurs that all can enjoy. For example, the author of this chapter was lecturing one day and during the lecture she moved backwards to reach for her notes. She tripped over the garbage can behind her and fell in and got stuck. The class was stunned and then broke up laughing. She also laughed and finally some students helped her out of the garbage can. Had she not laughed, or criticized them for laughing, the class would have suffered. Laughing also allows students to release tension and to relax. Research completed more than sixty years ago by Barr studied good and poor social science teachers and found that good teachers laughed more and allowed laughter in the classroom, whereas poor teachers did not. Many things have changed since then, but it is certain that the role of laughter in the classroom has not. Teachers who laugh and encourage laughter from their students are still more immediate than those who do not.

Space

How a teacher or student uses interpersonal space with the other communicates how they perceive the other. The teacher who stands behind the desk or podium and rarely approaches students or allows them to approach her or him is perceived by students as unfriendly, unreceptive, unapproachable, and nonimmediate. This does not help improve student–teacher relationships.

The student who backs away when the teacher approaches, or will not allow a teacher to stand or sit close to them, will be perceived in a similar manner by the teacher. The student might even be perceived as uninterested in learning and hostile to the classroom environment.

Space communicates in the classroom environment. The teacher who withdraws from students is perceived as nonimmediate and noncaring. The student who withdraws from the teacher might be perceived as uninterested or hostile. We need to look beyond these perceptions to find out whether another problem is present.

Touch

Touch is a form of communication that can be very useful in establishing and maintaining an effective teacher–student relationship. Touch can be used by the instructor to reinforce a student for a job well-done. It can be used by the teacher to substitute for the verbal reprimand or control without ever saying a word. For example, the teacher who walks up and touches the child on the shoulder who is misbehaving has gotten her or his attention. The child knows that he or she should stop what they are doing. Touch should be an acceptable form of communication in the teacher–student relationship. Touching a student on the arm, hand, or shoulder should be acceptable. This type of touch can be a very effective means of communicating a message without ever uttering a word.
CHAPTER 6 / Teacher Nonverbal Immediacy

Teachers should remember that some students are touch-avoidant and are very uncomfortable when touched. A teacher who encounters a touch-avoidant student should leave him or her alone and not try to relax the student. In addition, some teachers are touch-avoidant and do not want to be touched. These teachers should not teach at the elementary levels. The student or teacher who is the touch-avoidant might be perceived as nonimmediate and perhaps even aloof. If a person is touch-avoidant, other nonverbal cues can be used to communicate immediacy and establish an effective student-teacher relationship.

In conclusion, teachers or students who withdraw from another’s touch might be perceived as nonimmediate or touch-avoidant. Teachers and students should both be aware of the touch norms in schools and communities and be cautious about following them. Teachers should use touch as a form of reinforcement, not a punishment. Lastly, many classes such as physical education, art, and music, allow for a great deal of touch. Teachers in these classes should use appropriate touch as a form of communication.

Environment

Many classrooms are not conducive to student–teacher interaction. They have drab and dreary classrooms and very little can be done to improve the environment. Much of what I discuss here, however, can be adapted to any classroom in any school.

Attractive classrooms are much more likely to keep students and teachers attentive and reduce hostility. Many studies have revealed that ugly environments produce hostile communication among participants. Think of the worst schoolroom in which you had a class. Think of all the ugly aspects and how you felt while in that environment. It is more difficult to keep students’ attention when the environment is ugly, too hot or cold, not well-illuminated, painted dingy yellow, dark brown, industrial green, battleship gray, or is unclean. These are dark, foreboding environments that say to students “don’t plan on any fun here, shut up, sit, and listen.”

It is a shame that in a country so affluent, many classrooms are still in the dark ages. Teachers and students usually must continue to accept this. However, many teachers redecorate their rooms at their own expense to make the environment more conducive to learning and enjoyment of learning.

There are optimal seating arrangements for different types of teaching. Traditional row and column arrangements are useful for listening, note-taking, and lecturing. Modular seating is best for student group interaction; this arrangement allows the teacher to move from group to group to give assistance. The circular, horseshoe, or open-square arrangement is particularly useful for encouraging classroom discussions between students and teachers. If a teacher can use the above arrangements in different learning situations, it will improve student interest and communication between student and teacher. Some of these classroom settings do, however, increase the noise level, which must also be considered.

Music can be used to counteract student boredom and to establish a comfortable classroom atmosphere. We have found in our research that teachers can
use music as an effective reinforcer for good behavior, as a reward for completing a task, and for relaxing the students. Elementary teachers have long known the power of music in the classroom. They use it to relax students, to generate conversations, to reward, to excite, and to lull students to sleep. Teachers at any level can use music on occasion to create a better classroom environment. For example, if a teacher wants to spice up a unit on French history, he or she might play the music of the age. If a teacher wants to teach a unit on careers and employment, then he or she can play records about various positions people have held.

"The only good classroom is the quiet classroom." Unfortunately, this is the motto of many school systems. Students at any age should be encouraged to participate in classroom discussions and talk on occasions. The teaching strategy of teacher lecturing and student learning has long since lost its appeal for both segments. Teachers who allow some student talk are perceived by students as more responsive to their needs and more immediate and approachable. I do not mean that classrooms should be noisy without any purpose, but student talk is essential to student growth and development. The teacher should set up situations in which students can talk without being reprimanded. Group exercises, projects, and similar activities allow for student talk without decreasing the content. Of course, the teacher should not use such activities for content. They should be used as a means of teaching content.

Whether the students are younger or older, allowing for student–teacher interaction is an effective means of improving communication between teacher and student. Talk can also be used as a reward for good behavior. If students sit and listen, and take notes as they should, then the teacher should do a group exercise or open the class for discussion. Allowing for talk time gives students a chance to relax and release tension, and makes them feel better about the classroom environment. Those who do not want to talk, however, should not be forced to or punished for not talking.

Lighting can also influence the relationship between teacher and student. A classroom that is poorly lit or too bright can cause fatigue and eye strain. Eventually, even boredom and hostility emerge. Thompson gave three guidelines for lighting in the classroom.

Maintain high levels of illumination. When students must expend energy just to see, they will have little left to understand what is being said. All areas of the room should be balanced in brightness. Factory and assembly-line workers have their work well illuminated. Industry has known for a long time that eye fatigue plays havoc with production schedules. To avoid sharp contrast, the visual field around the task should be only one-third as bright as the work area. No part of the visual field should be brighter than the immediate vicinity of the task. Avoid glare either from direct light sources or from reflecting surfaces. (p. 81)

Imagine sitting in a classroom and trying to absorb content when the temperature is 90 degrees with 90-percent humidity. About all you can do is sit very still and keep wiping the perspiration from your body. Many classrooms are kept
too warm, both in the summer and in the winter. In the summer, they are too hot because they are not air conditioned and the humidity is high. In the winter, they are hot and dry. Both climates are disruptive to the learning and communication process between student and teacher. When a room is too hot, people become antsy and irritable. When a room is too cold, people cannot concentrate either.

The optimal classroom temperature is 64 to 70 degrees. This assumes that the room is not too dry or humid. Many classrooms do not have temperature controls, but if the room is painted a cool color, it will seem cooler. However, we know that when it’s 90 degrees outside and 100 degrees inside, no one will feel cool even in a light blue room.

During the winter, humidity should not fall below 30 percent or be allowed to rise above 50 percent. As humidity moves above or below these levels, student illness and absenteeism increases. Todd-Mancillas summarize Green’s (1979) results drawn from 3,600 students in grades one to eight in eleven different schools in Saskatoon, Canada:

Results indicated that children attending schools with classrooms humidified ranging between 22% and 26% experienced nearly 13% greater illness and absenteeism than children attending schools with classrooms having humidity levels ranging between 27% and 33%. . . (p. 85)

Green also cautions against excessive humidity, as allied research also indicates that increased respiratory infection’s result from humidity levels in excess of 50 percent. If teachers cannot control the temperature in their classrooms, then they should vary activities so that students do not notice the temperature as much. In other words, they should give the students plenty to do and think about other than the temperature. In cold months, if the room is too cold, they should have the students move around and talk a lot. In warmer months, if the room is too hot, they should have group discussions and activities that help direct attention away from the temperature.

The furnishings in a classroom can often determine how students feel about the environment. Ugly furnishings do not improve communication between the student and teacher. Granted, many schools do not have money to purchase new desks, chairs, equipment, and curtains. However, schools that are more attractive are generally taken better care of by the students. Teachers and students can improve the classroom by bringing in artifacts to improve the environment. “Hard architecture” often interferes with a student attention span and learning. Examples of hard architecture are hard chairs, sharp-edged tables, desks, and uncomfortable work tables. “Soft architecture” often encourages student attention and learning. Soft architecture sends signals of comfort and welcome. Examples of soft architecture are ergonomic chairs, chairs which are softer, chairs which lean back when we move, rounded tables, and comfortable looking classroom furniture.

In conclusion, the instructor who makes optimal use of the environment he or she has is likely to get along better with the students. Affect will improve for
the teacher who cares about the classroom environment. Maximal use of space, seating, lighting, color, sound, noise, temperature, and furnishings improve communication between student and instructor.

**Scent**

The odor a person exudes can encourage others to approach or avoid that person. Teachers should avoid wearing overpowering scents in the classroom. Overpowering scents can affect student attentiveness, learning, and health. Some students have allergies and cannot be near strong scents or odors. Teachers should be sensitive to this even if other students are not.

**Time**

Teachers must use time to their advantage. Time can be used to reward students for good behavior, to control students, to make the classroom more interesting, and to learn about others. Teachers often spend too much time on one unit. Most adults can only listen effectively for about twenty minutes. It also is important to remember the use of time discussed in Chapter 2. Teachers should keep students’ attention by using a variety of methods and activities to teach content. Students will be less likely to notice time if you keep them busy doing interesting things with the material they are learning. Keeping in mind how students learn best, it also is important to make time for previews and reviews of content.

Finally, if we as educators expect our students to take our classes seriously, we should always be ON TIME, if not a little early. By being a little early, it gives us an opportunity to interact with students as they enter the room, students who otherwise might never talk with us. If we are consistently late to our own classes, it sends the message to the students “that we are not interested in our content area or concerned about the students.” Therefore, students may begin being late for our class. If this occurs, we asked for it!

**Outcomes of Teacher Immediacy**

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed possible teacher and student nonverbal behavior that denotes immediacy or nonimmediacy. Obviously, the immediate teacher is perceived more positively than the nonimmediate teacher. Many of the results reported here is a direct result of Richmond and McCroskey (2000a, b) and their associates. There are significant advantages to be gained from teacher immediacy in the classroom:

- Increased teacher immediacy results in increased liking, affiliation, and positive affect on the part of the student. Immediate teachers are liked far more than nonimmediate teachers.
Increased teacher immediacy results in an increased student affect for the subject matter. Students who become motivated to learn the subject matter because of the immediate will do well in the content and continue to learn long after the teacher who motivated them is out of the picture.

Increased teacher immediacy results in increased students cognitive learning. Students with immediate teachers, attend more to the subject matter, concentrate more on the subject, retain more of the content, and when challenged can correctly recall more of the subject matter than students with nonimmediate teachers.

Increased teacher immediacy results in increased student motivation. It seems that the primary way that immediacy produces learning effects may be as a function of it increasing student motivation.

Increased teacher immediacy results in reduced student resistance to teachers’ influence attempts or teachers’ behavior modification attempts. Immediate teachers seem to have more referent, respect, or liking power, hence students tend to comply with or conform to the wishes of the more immediate teachers. Nonimmediate teachers have more difficulty getting students to comply with or conform to their wishes.

Increased teacher immediacy results in the teacher being perceived as a more competent communicator, one who listens and cares. Nonimmediate teachers are usually perceived as ineffective, if not incompetent communicators.

Increased teacher immediacy results in the teacher being able to reduce or alleviate student anxiety about the classroom situation. A more immediate teacher is perceived as a more caring, sensitive teacher, hence the student feels less apprehensive about the overall instructional environment.

Increased teacher immediacy results in an increased student to teacher communication and interaction. Some teachers might see this aspect as a negative. It is not. If students communicate more with their teachers, then the student might get the information he or she needs.

Increased teacher immediacy results in a reduced status differential between student and teacher. This does not mean the teacher is on the same level as the student. It simply means the student won’t be so intimidated by the teachers’ higher status. Therefore, the student might be more willing to ask clarifying questions about the content with fear of the teacher.

Increased teacher immediacy results in higher evaluations from one’s immediate supervisor. While this may seem unusual at first, it is really very simply to understand. Administrators like teachers who have good classes with few problems. Immediate teachers have good classes with fewer problems than nonimmediate teachers. Hence, administrators will find immediate teachers to be the more effective teachers.

In conclusion, nonverbal immediacy behaviors are some of the most valuable communication tools instructors have available to them. These nonverbal
immediacy skills can help teachers and students have happier, more productive, classroom experiences.

Potential Drawbacks of Teacher Immediacy

Immediacy has a plethora of positive results. There are a few drawbacks that teachers should know. Immediate teachers might encounter some personal or professional problems with their colleagues. They might be perceived as not having control over their classrooms. Immediate teachers have control over their classrooms. Some of their peers just do not see it.

Immediate teachers might seem as if they are pushovers to some students. Immediacy does not mean “let the students do whatever he or she wants.” It means “be approachable.” Immediate teachers must still be firm and have standards.

Lastly, not everyone can be immediate in the same way. Select the behaviors you are most comfortable with and use those. To be immediate, you do not have to perform all the behaviors we have identified as immediate in this chapter, but you do need some of them. If you try to use behavior that makes you uncomfortable, you will appear awkward and uncomfortable rather than immediate. False immediacy is worse than none at all.

The primary function of teachers’ verbal behavior is to give content to improve students’ cognitive learning. The primary function of teachers’ nonverbal behavior is to improve students’ affect or liking for the subject matter, teacher, and class and to increase the desire to learn more about the subject matter. In conclusion, teachers who use nonverbal immediacy behaviors with students have students who simply put learn more, both about the content and atmosphere of the classroom environment.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


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