Stillness Speaks—An Analysis of Non-Verbal Behavior of Primary School Teachers

Li Xueqian, Xiao Jumei
Huzhou Normal University, Zhejiang, China

In addition to using language to transmit knowledge to students, the non-verbal behaviors of primary school teachers, such as teachers’ attitude and body-posture, also transmit different information to students, presenting multi-dimensional values: establishing students’ behavior norms, stimulating students’ learning motivation, and building a harmonious relationship between teachers and students; in order to further optimize the classroom non-verbal behaviors of primary school teachers, we should improve the unity of non-verbal behavior and give full play to the flexibility of non-verbal behavior.

Keywords: primary school teachers, classroom non-verbal behavior, multi-dimensional value

Introduction

Language expression is the most important element in traditional classroom teaching, which can not only impart knowledge, but also express teachers’ thoughts and emotions. In the actual situation, language will hide part of meaning from the teachers unconsciously, resulting in the difficulty for students to obtain overall information, while non-verbal behavior will serve as a supplementary to perfect teachers’ expression in class. Benny, an American social psychologist, pointed out that non-verbal behaviors, such as movement and posture and expression, are an effective and economical complementary means to replace the expression of words in classroom teaching (Bany & Tohnson, 1986). In terms of primary school classes, appropriate non-verbal behaviors help to make the atmosphere more active, thus apparently improving classroom teaching efficiency.

The Connotation of Primary School Teachers’ Classroom Non-Verbal Behavior

Teachers’ non-verbal behavior in classroom refers to the way in which teachers use various external behavior image factors to convey information. According to social psychology, almost non-verbal sounds and actions can be used as a means of communication (Cheng, 2010). In a certain teaching situation, because of students’ emotion, attitude, teaching environment, and other subjective and objective factors teachers create different look in their eyes, facial expressions and other non-verbal behaviors. Therefore, non-verbal behaviors in the classroom provide help for teaching flexibility.

Facial expression is a kind of non-verbal form in which teachers express their feelings through the overall coordination between facial muscles and organs (We, 2016). Teachers can show their attitude and judgment towards other people through facial expressions. Similarly, students can receive information from teachers by
AN ANALYSIS OF NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

capturing this non-verbal behavior. At the same time, the language of facial expression is also an effective way for teachers to manage the class. It is not difficult to find that teachers always have different facial expressions to express classroom state that they required, according to different discipline in the class. For example, when students answer questions, other students in the class may begin to talk, which makes the classroom noisy. Teachers often choose to frown or stare at a certain student, achieving the purpose of warning students, so as to make the order the call return to normal often. In addition, body-gesture language is a kind of behavior language that teachers lead the teaching content by changing postures while teaching. As far as the teachers’ class teaching is concerned, the teachers’ gesture and body language are the signs of body-gesture language. Body-gesture language plays an important role in guiding students’ behavior in classroom teaching. Whether teachers need to extract students to answer questions or instruct students to read information showed in the class, they need the assistance of gesture language. In this way, appropriate gestures can aid students receiving information more effectively.

Voice assisted language is a kind of non-verbal behavior that teachers transmit information through varied tones. Auxiliary language plays an important role in classroom teaching. Different from facial expressions, the aid of voice mainly focuses on the content of classroom teaching. The change of pronunciation and intonation adds emotional colors to the teachers’ expression, such as question, affirmation, emphasis, etc. According to the different emotional colors, students will realize when should think by themselves, which content is the significant one, and which students’ answers can be learned and noted. Therefore, correct and appropriate auxiliary words in the class can help teaching activities achieve the effect which is twice as much can be accomplished with half the effort. In addition, teachers’ non-verbal behaviors also include teachers’ dressing style and walking routes in the classroom. Although these factors are rarely to be included in teaching design or teaching philosophy, they are very close to teachers’ teaching activities. Therefore, non-verbal behaviors in the classroom are worthy of teachers to apply in teaching activity.

The Multi-Dimensional Value of Classroom Non-Verbal Behaviors of Primary School Teachers

Language performance in the classroom teaching is the main tool for teachers to impart knowledge. Students will acquire knowledge from language performance, filtering and classifying the knowledge in the teachers’ language. However, language is not the only tool in the class, but non-verbal behavior also plays a significant role in the classroom. Some studies have shown that in the whole classroom teaching process, teachers pass 82% of the information through non-verbal behaviors such as actions and expressions, and only 18% of the information is expressed by language (Wang, 2018). It can be noticed that teachers’ non-verbal behavior is more worthy of attention than that of language behavior, and it shows significant multi-dimensional value in classroom teaching.

Establish a Code of Conduct

As a group whose cognitive thinking has not yet been developed, primary school students maintain a high level of curiosity and sensitivity to any personnel and activity in the school. Especially, they have a subtle feeling for the teachers’ behavior language, but cannot effectively screen the received behavior information, or even blindly imitate the wrong behavior language or behavior language which is improper the development of primary school students. Bandura, a behaviorist psychologist, put forward that social facilitation effect refers to
that learners evoke the existing response of the behavior library by watching the model behavior (Cheng, 2019). Therefore, teachers need to control their own behavior in the classroom consciously, give play to the power of models, set up correct code of conduct, and prevent their unconscious non-verbal behavior from delivering negative effects. For example, if a teacher picks up the garbage on the ground in the class, students are more likely to form the behavior imitation. Gradually, students internalize the behavior models from the teachers into moral cognition. It can be said that this kind of non-verbal behavior greatly prompts students’ behavior standards, which is more efficient than simple reprimand or meaningless repeated exhortation from teachers.

**Stimulate the Learning Motivation of Students**

Students are the main part of classroom teaching. Teachers should try their best to let students play the initiative consciousness to gain knowledge and skills. The non-verbal behavior in classroom directly affects the students’ sense of vision and hearing, which can greatly activate the sterile language teaching and stimulate students’ learning motivation. When transmitting teaching information, non-verbal behaviors of teachers are mainly regarded as the function of complementing and reminding. For example, teachers often use some sign language and descriptive body language to supplement language information to achieve the purpose of transmitting information. When teachers talk about the important content, they can remind students to pay attention to the key content by non-verbal behaviors, such as pausing and increasing the volume. The audio language can be appropriately replaced by non-verbal behaviors when teachers present lessons, for example, tapping the blackboard by fingers to prompt students to pay attention to the content on the blackboard. Teachers’ non-verbal behavior is greatly intuitive and stimulating, which can directly arouse and evoke interests and enthusiasm of students in learning. At the same time, the expressions, actions, eyes, and other non-verbal behaviors of teachers can exaggerate students’ learning spirit by a wide range of means, such as hint, infection, and identification, which can exert a subtle influence on students’ emotions. When the teacher’s voice is full of emotion and cadence, students will soon be brought into the lively atmosphere of classroom, feeling the classroom with interest and participating in the lessons. However, when the teachers stepped on the platform inflexibly, lacking expression, or completed a class with a simple tone of voice, pupils would lose the interest of the class quickly and their attention would be gradually diverted to other places.

**Construct Harmonious Relationship Between Teachers and Students**

The combination of teaching and learning is not only reflected in cognition, but also in the interaction between teachers and students. The classroom is the main place for teachers and students to communicate. As the leader in the class, non-verbal behaviors of teachers, such as the look in the eyes, will enhance sense of participation of students during the lessons, feeling that they are the irreplaceable members of the class. Therefore, they will be more motivated to participate in discussion and answering questions in the class. These expectations require teachers of primary schools to take full advantage of performing non-verbal behavior in the teaching process, which can also be called a procedure of communication. Meanwhile, some performances of students in the class are also the non-verbal behaviors as the feedback to teachers’ teaching methods. Nowadays, most schools in China still take exam-oriented education as the tenet and the only purpose is impart the most practical exam-oriented education. In the process of education and teaching, it pays too much attention to the instrumental knowledge, neglecting the development of emotional attitude and values of students, which also leads to the difficulty in cultivating the emotional bonds between teachers and students. As non-verbal communication in class is a timely way for teachers and students to communicate with each other, it can
improve the efficiency of the class. Also, teachers’ non-verbal behaviors in the class affects emotional attitude of students imperceptibly. The unconscious encouragement from teachers may get the affirmation, so as to construct a positive form of getting along with each other and construct a harmonious teacher-student relationship.

**Strategies for Optimizing Classroom Non-Verbal Behaviors of Primary School Teachers**

The non-verbal behavior teacher in the class is not a widespread concept, so that teachers should try to integrate non-verbal behavior into the teaching process with creation. Many senior teachers are more used to their previous teaching habits. Fresh teachers are eager to acclimatize themselves to their new posts, leading to the state of imitating existing teaching methods. Therefore, teachers’ colleges should set up corresponding courses for pre-service training when cultivating normal students. In terms of in-service teachers, schools can improve the use of non-verbal behaviors by organizing some skills competitions.

**Improve the Consistency of Non-Verbal Behavior**

The behavior of teacher in the class is the way to transmit information and communicate emotion under the interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, teachers should achieve the consensus of teachers and students, let students participate in it to avoid “monologue”. First of all, primary school teachers need the coordinate and unify their interior and exterior. It means that the non-verbal behavior that appears in the class should be sincere, natural, coordinating, and unified (Yang, 2015), reflecting internal cultivation, uphold the principle of sincerity over skill. If teachers have the love educational business and concern for the growth of students, the behavior shown from inside to outside will set a positive external behavior model for students, so that students themselves can feel the care from teachers. In other words, a teacher who has achieved the consistence of internal and external non-verbal behavior has sent messages to students at the moment entering the classroom, even if he does not say a word, which can build a smooth emotional bridge. Secondly, the non-verbal behavior in the teaching process also needs the cooperation of language behavior. Only when the two are unified can we better convey information and exchange emotions with students. For example, if teachers praise students in class only by giving them thumbs up, which lacks the positive tone of praise or the tone, is flat and lacks emotional color. It is difficult for students to really feel the praise of teachers. Then, this kind of non-verbal behavior cannot play a role in encouraging students.

**Allow Flexibility in Non-Verbal Behavior**

On the one hand, teachers should adjust non-verbal behaviors according to different teaching contents and integrate non-verbal behaviors into them according to the classroom practical situation, so as to improve the teaching efficiency. For example, guiding students to read texts with intensive emotion, and guiding students to change the level of tone by gestures. According to the teaching content and the specific situation of the class, the teacher can adjust the changes of expression, posture and gesture, and transmits knowledge information and emotion through these behaviors, so that students can experience the emotion contained in the teaching content. On the other hand, personal situation of students will also affect the use of non-verbal behavior. For example, two students who are dozing off in classes, but one of them has to stay up late to finish their homework because of their low learning efficiency, and the other has to stay up late because they are addicted to games. Then teachers cannot simply attribute these cases to students’ carelessness in class and use the same non-verbal behaviors to rectify them. For example, the teacher can choose to tap the desk or shoulder to remind the former
to concentrate, while the latter can adopt a stricter alerting way. In addition, according to the non-verbal behavior of students in the classroom, teachers can also reflect on their own teaching design, teaching methods, etc., but not blindly finding students’ problems, ignoring the problems of the class and themselves. In addition, in the class, teachers also need to flexibly choose appropriate non-verbal behaviors according to the real-time classroom atmosphere. For instance, teachers react by shaking heads when most students are discussing in a pleasant atmosphere, the learning motivation of students will be reduced. When students need to concentrate on thinking, but teachers choose to go back and forth, which will distract students’ attention and reduce the efficiency of the class. Therefore, in terms of the application of non-verbal behavior, teachers should grasp the principle of flexibility, consider the self-monitoring of non-verbal behavior and avoid unconscious harm, which lay the foundation of promoting the healthy growth of students.

Conclusion

In a word, because of the special age of group consist of primary school students. The classroom non-verbal behavior of primary school teachers is a very important part of the teaching process. At the same time, how to use non-verbal behavior is also a part of teaching skills. The non-verbal behavior in the classroom can illustrate teaching quality of teachers and enrich the teaching content. As far as teaching effect is concerned, teachers’ non-verbal behavior can make students feel the state of teachers’ class more intuitively, attracting students’ attention in time, and enable students to acquire knowledge better and gain more positive examples. As far as students’ learning motivation is concerned, using non-verbal behaviors, such as eyes and gestures can show full respect from teachers for students and treat students as equal individuals like themselves (Kong & Geng, 1993), so that students can participate in the classroom without worries. At the same time, students can acquire the encouragement and criticism of teachers to themselves timely, finding out the good or bad performance of themselves in the class from teachers’ non-verbal behaviors, and carry out self-correction. Therefore, non-verbal behavior in class teaching plays a positive role in classroom teaching results, students’ learning motivation and the relationship between teachers and students. After all, teachers should use non-verbal behavior in the classroom appropriately and give full play to its value.

References