BODY LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

An Interactive Presentation

This short file is dedicated to all the teachers who participated in my presentation of "Body Language in The Classroom". I've included extra material which I hope will be of interest to you. I hope that you will enjoy the reading and continue further in exploring this "Whole New World".

Good luck!

Zvi Ophir

"When people smile at me, they love me". Nadav (9 yrs old)

In this file are the following topics:

✓ The Main Points

✓ Body Language Checklist

✓ Try This!

✓ Quotes
A. Main Points of The Workshop (plus a lot of other stuff)

- People are always communicating. Communication - an ongoing process of sending and receiving messages - enables us to share knowledge, express attitudes and demonstrate skills. Explicit and implicit communication occurs whenever teachers and students interact. Successful teaching depends on effective communication in the classroom.

- Body language or nonverbal communication includes: Facial Expressions
  - Eye Contact
  - Touching
  - Tone of Voice
  - Dress
  - Posture
  - Spatial Distance

- The most effective and persuasive communication occurs when verbal and nonverbal messages are in sync, creating communication synergy.

- Even when people do not move, they transmit messages by physique, gender and ethnicity.

- Verbal communication permits instant feedback; nonverbal acts do not. Herein lies the difficulty. We can hear ourselves speak and make corrections. However, we cannot see our own nonverbal messages, so we must rely on instinct and understanding of nonverbal communication as well as feedback from others.

- We use nonverbal communication for the following reasons:
  1. Words have limitations.
  2. Nonverbal signals are powerful.
  3. Nonverbal messages are likely to be more genuine.
  4. Nonverbal signals can express feelings too disturbing to state.
  5. A separate communication channel is necessary to help send complex messages.

- Whenever incongruity exists between verbal and nonverbal messages, the nonverbal will win hands down.

- Teachers should be aware of nonverbal communication in the classroom for two basic reasons: to become better receivers of all students' messages and to gain the ability to send positive signals that reinforce students' learning while simultaneously becoming more skilled at avoiding negative signals that stifle their learning.
• Research suggests that students' nonverbal expressions serve as an important source in the formation of a teacher's impressions, attitudes, beliefs and reciprocal behavioral expressions. **To be a good receiver of students' messages, a teacher must be attuned to many of these nonverbal cues.**

• Not only are teachers often unaware of students' nonverbal behaviors, but they are also oblivious to the nonverbal messages they relay to the students. **Teachers express enthusiasm, warmth, assertiveness, confidence or displeasure through their facial expressions, vocal intonation, gestures and use of space. Teachers reinforce or modify student behavior by their use of smiles, winks, frowns and scowls.**

• **When teachers exhibit verbal messages that conflict with nonverbal messages, students become confused.** This confusion often affects their attitudes and their learning.

• Without words, teachers communicate their feelings, expectations, and many other messages they would never verbally admit.

• The bottom line for teachers is, whether intentional or not, nonverbal behavior tells students what we expect of them. **Positive expectations bring positive achievements. Negative expectations bring loss of self-confidence and failure.**

• **Facial expressions** include:  
  a. **Facial appearance** (muscle tone, skin coloration, eye color and wrinkles) which offer cues that reveal information about race, status and age.  
  b. **Less permanent cues** (length of hair, hairstyle, cleanliness and facial hair) which often relate to an individual's idea of beauty.  
  c. **Momentary expressions** (muscle movements in the forehead, eyebrows, eyelids, cheeks, nose, lips and chin) which signal emotions.

• **Eye behavior** - the eyes are the most dominant and reliable features of the face and provide a constant channel of communication. They serve as the major decision factor in deciphering the spoken truth. Unlike other parts of the face, eyes can both send and receive messages. Teachers usually maintain eye contact and flash visual signals when they want to emphasize particular points. Students' eyes often signal listening and non-listening behavior. Lack of student-teacher eye-contact will often indicate disinterest, inattention, or even dislike for the teacher. Direct teacher eye contact can also express support, disapproval, or neutrality. Teachers can have an individual connection with every student in the classroom by using eye contact.

• **Vocal intonation** - Sometimes referred to as "paralinguistics" and includes a multitude of components: rhythm, pitch, intensity, nasality and slurring that elicit the "truth" of the message. Vocal intonation - projection, variety, timing and rate of speech - influences how others perceive us and provides evidence about our self-confidence and enthusiasm. Vocal projection is the most important requisite
to effective communication. If vocal intonation contradicts your words, the former will dominate.

- **Touching** - touching is an important aspect of any culture. Tactual sensitivity begins in childhood and greatly contributes to the mental and emotional adjustment of the individual. In the classroom it is a delicate matter. Since teachers are considered superiors in the classroom, they often initiate touching behavior. Teachers have to respect and understand the personal space of the students and not to enter uninvited, even when the student is misbehaving. Positively, touching can also be used to reinforce. Small children learn significantly more when teachers exhibit touching, close body proximity, and smiles of approval. As they grow older, touching behaviors become less appropriate.

- **Body movements and gestures** - we communicate by the way we walk, stand, sit, what we do with our shoulders, hands, arms, and legs, how we hold our heads, and the manner in which we position our bodies toward or away from others. Posture often indicates mood and attitude. The body tends to move in harmony with words. We lean forward when we like someone or if the topic being discussed is interesting. On the other hand, we lean away from individuals we have negative attitudes towards, or from topics that do not interest us. In the classroom, students receive nonverbal messages of enthusiasm or boredom communicated through a teacher’s body orientation. An observant teacher can also tell when students understand material presented or when students have trouble grasping major concepts. Inappropriate postures and gestures of a teacher will diminish a lesson’s delivery. All body movements should be used to accentuate and confirm verbal messages.

- **Use of space** - or, proxemics, is a subtle component of body language that indicates territory to which access is allowed or denied to other people or objects. Classroom layout and aesthetics can directly impact students’ learning. Classroom environments can create moods and establish how much communication takes place. The position of a teacher’s desk may serve as a barrier to prevent students from entering his/her space and thus inhibits interaction. In straight row seating, most student interaction is greatest in the front and middle rows.

- **Personal space** - the social distance in which we do not expect strangers to intrude. The amount of space varies from culture to culture and individual to individual and changes size and shape, depending on the situation. The four categories of informal space established in the USA are:
  1. **Intimate** - reserved for close relationships, sharing, protecting and comforting (0-15 cm.).
  2. **Personal** - used for informal conversations between friends (15-40cm.).
  3. **Social** - accepted for interaction between strangers, teachers and students and business acquaintances (40 cm. - 4 meters).
  4. **Public** - Used for one-way communication by lecturers (4 - 25 meters).

The distance between a teacher and students is a critical factor in the communication process. Teachers share feelings of acceptance or rejection by the distance they maintain between themselves and their students. Teachers have a
tendency to get closer to those they like.

"The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives. To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others."

Anthony Robbins.
# Body Language Checklist

## Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are your verbal and nonverbal messages consistent?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your nonverbal messages indicate a consistent treatment of students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your nonverbal messages encourage all students to participate in class activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your nonverbal messages project warmth and enthusiasm?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your nonverbal messages project confidence, fairness and friendliness?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you provide positive nonverbal feedback to students?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you consider cultural and gender differences before judging students?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACIAL EXPRESSIONS</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do your facial cues convey positive expressions when interacting with students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you smile to provide reassurance and approval?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you aware of your facial expressions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you able to interpret students’ facial expressions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you able to &quot;read&quot; students’ faces when they need help?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>EYE BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you make eye contact with all your students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your eyes convey a message of caring?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do students look at you when you are talking?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can you tell when students don’t understand by looking at their eyes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can you tell if students are bored with a topic or need a break by studying their eyes?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOUCHING</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you pat students on the back or arm to congratulate them for performing well?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use a firm handshake when greeting parents or classroom guests?</td>
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### VOCAL INTONATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is your voice loud enough so all students can hear you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you vary tone and pitch to emphasize words?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your voice project confidence?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can you tell when students are sincere by listening to their vocal qualities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use your voice to reinforce student responses to questions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you speak at a moderate rate (not too slowly and not too rapidly)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your voice project enthusiasm for the subject matter being taught?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you pause to encourage student contributions?</td>
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### BODY MOVEMENT AND GESTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are aware of students' positive and negative body movements and gestures?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you cognizant of students' posture in the classroom?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you lean forward when listening to students' questions and comments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are your gestures natural and consistent with your verbal messages?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you stand up straight without slouching, in the front of the class of students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your body movements and gestures communicate confidence and self-assurance?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use hand motions to provide direction to students?</td>
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### USE OF SPACE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you maintain a consistent space between you and all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>You maintain a neat and clean teaching environment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use different travel routes in the classroom to interact with all students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the arrangement of classroom furniture allow for effective communication?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the work space project a comfortable and welcome feeling?</td>
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### DRESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your attire represent a professional image appropriate for your school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you wear clean and acceptable clothing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you wear suitable jewelry or accessories?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From "BODY LANGUAGE – An Illustrated Introduction for Teachers", Patrick W. Miller, Ph.D., [www.pwmilleronline.com](http://www.pwmilleronline.com)
Try This!

- The best way to understand your students’ basic behavior is to observe them over an extended period of time. When you interact with them, begin to notice – really notice – how they look when they are relaxed and comfortable. How much eye contact do they make? What kind of gestures do they use? What body postures do they assume? Once you know what is normal for them, you will be able to quickly and accurately detect even minor shifts when their body language is out of character.

- For one day make a mental note of the eye color of every student you meet. You don’t have to remember the color, just notice it. With this one simple exercise, you will dramatically increase your skill at building rapport with your students.

- Each of us gives and responds to hundreds of facial expressions daily. You are part of an emotional chain-reaction effect in your personal and professional lives. For one full day, make a conscious choice to spread only positive emotions. As you go through the day, notice how other people’s negative emotions may try to contaminate your good mood. The trick is not to let them do so. Instead, simply acknowledge what is happening, regroup, and get back on track.

- The next time you talk to one of your students where you’re trying to encourage the other person to speak more, nod your head using clusters of three nods at regular intervals. Research shows that people talk three to four times more than usual when the listener nods in this fashion. You’ll be amazed at how this nonverbal signal can trigger such a positive response.

- The next time someone is talking to you, pretend that you didn’t quite understand and ask him/her to repeat something that they just said. Watch to see if he/she adds gestures that they hadn’t used before. People realize on an unconscious level that gestures help clarify and convince.

- When you see a small group of people talking, look at their feet to see who’s really connecting with whom. If all the feet triangulate or point to the common center of the group, it is an integrated conversation. If not, you’ll be able to tell by the feet positions who is really in and who is being excluded.

- If you want to enhance interaction in the classroom, don’t put any object between you and your students. Move out from behind your desk when you want a real dialogue and stay behind the desk only when maintaining control is more important than exchanging information.
BODY LANGUAGE QUOTES

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."
William Arthur Ward

"You never get a second chance to make first impression."
Will Rogers

"Of those who say nothing, few are silent."
Thomas Neil

"Don’t worry that children never listen to you:
Worry that they are always watching you."
Robert Fulghum

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said."
Peter F. Drucker

"What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"High expectations are the key to everything."
Sam Walton

"People seldom notice old clothes if you wear a big smile."
Lee Mildon

"The question is not what you look at, but what you see."
Henry David Thoreau

"High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectations."
Jack Kinder

"A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations."
Patricia Neal

"We usually get what we anticipate."
Claude M. Bristol

"They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel."
Carl W. Buechner

"One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say."
Will Durant