

Course Topic: Teaching Culture**Course Instructor:**

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Course Synopsis:

In this highly interactive course, we examine the cultural complexities of nonverbal communication. We define the purposes of nonverbal communication in social settings and the ways in which it can be misunderstood in intercultural contexts. We then discuss the significance of paralinguistics in nonverbal communication. Gestures, facial expressions, head movement, and eye contact are explored as modes of nonverbal communication that convey specific social messages. Next, cultural differences in personal space, posture, physical contact, physical appearance and displaying emotion are reviewed to further develop an understanding of the subtle dynamics of nonverbal communication.

Course Agenda:

1. Purposes of Nonverbal Communication
2. Paralinguistics
3. Gestures, Facial Expressions, Head Movement and Eye Contact
4. Personal Space, Posture, Physical Contact, Physical Appearance and Displaying Emotion

1. Purposes of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is defined as communication without words that reinforces, or in some cases, replaces the spoken word. A large portion of our communication is done without words. Words account for only 7% of communication, tone of voice accounts for 38%, and body language accounts for 55%. In addition to replacing and supplementing our words, nonverbal communication conveys our mood and feelings and helps us manage our social and professional relationships using agreed upon signals and symbols. Nonverbal communication also helps us convey social status, job status, group membership and personality or appearance.

Activity 1A: Which of the following behaviours fall under nonverbal communication?

Paralinguistics	Gestures	Facial Expressions
Head movement	Eye contact	Personal space
Posture	Physical contact	Physical appearance

When used incorrectly, nonverbal communication can be misunderstood and as a result, a person's personality and character can be judged negatively.

Activity 1B: Take a moment to think about an instance when your own nonverbal communication was misunderstood negatively.

2. Paralinguistics

Paralinguistics refers to changes in the delivery of our speech. This includes voice tone, voice volume, word and sentence stress, enunciation, rate of speaking and the use of pauses and silence.

Activity 2A: Match the different ways of speaking with how each may be interpreted.
Note: there may be more than one answer for each.

Speaking very softly.	You are excited.
Speaking very loudly.	You are tired.
Speaking very quickly.	You are nervous.
Speaking very slowly and carefully.	You are afraid.
Speaking hesitantly.	You are angry.

3. Gestures, Facial Expressions, Head Movement and Eye Contact

Gestures, facial expressions, head movement and eye contact each impact nonverbal communication in a variety of ways. These modes of interaction convey particular messages about a person's comprehension, comfort level and confidence in social situations.

Gestures and Facial Expressions

Gestures and facial expressions tend to convey our emotions, not just specific messages. Particular gestures and facial expressions can be interpreted differently in North American culture.

Activity 3A: How would you communicate each of the following messages to someone without talking? In which cases did you use gestures? Facial expressions? Both?

1. Yes.	10. I don't care.
2. No.	11. He's crazy!
3. Hello.	12. Goodbye.
4. Come here.	13. Be quiet/still.
5. Go away!	14. I want three.
6. This tastes delicious!	15. I don't know.
7. Perfect! Excellent!	16. Wait a second.
8. I agree.	17. Calm down.
9. That's very expensive.	

Activity 3B: How would you convey each of the emotions or states below using only facial expressions?

Anger	Love
Nervousness	Happiness
Shock	Boredom
Tiredness	Drunkenness
Excitement	Fear

Head Movement

While head movement may be considered a gesture, it is useful to examine the meaning it conveys separately from other gestures. Head movements may convey yes, no, interest, rejection, snobbery, distaste, shock or boredom. The meanings conveyed by different head movements are not the same in every culture.

Activity 3C: How would you convey each of the following messages using only head movements?

Yes
No
I'm interested
I'm shocked
I'm bored

Eye Contact

Eye contact can convey specific emotional messages, including confidence, arrogance, social status, interest and nervousness. The meanings conveyed by different types of eye contact are not the same in every culture.

Activity 3D: What messages are conveyed with each of the following types of eye contact:

Direct eye contact
Looking over someone's shoulder
Looking at the ground
Staring
Shifting your eyes to many different points of contact

4. Personal Space, Posture, Physical Contact, Displaying Emotion and Personal Appearance

Personal space, posture, physical contact, displaying emotion and physical appearance are all important elements of nonverbal communication. Each mode conveys unique messages in social settings that reveal information about how a person is feeling and what they are thinking.

Personal Space

The technical name for personal space is *proxemics*. A person's personal space will vary according to who the other individual is. For example, we let friends in closer than strangers and spouses/girlfriends/boyfriends in closer than friends. The size of personal space also varies by culture. The average personal space in some cultures is smaller than that in other cultures.

Posture

Postures communicate different nonverbal messages in social settings.

Activity 4A: What message is communicated by each of the postures listed in the left hand column below?

Posture	Possible Message
Sitting on the edge of a desk or table	
Standing up straight	
Standing with shoulders hunched over	
Leaning against a wall	
Sitting draped over a chair	
Standing up straight with hands on hips	
Standing with your weight more on one leg	
Standing up straight with hands clasped behind your back	
Standing up, leaning forward slightly	
Standing up, leaning backwards slightly	

Physical Contact

Physical contact is referred to as *haptics*, or the study of the rules that a culture has for touching. *Haptics* answers the questions of who can touch whom in specific situations and how, as well as the rewards and punishments for this behaviour. Using a type of physical contact that is not appropriate for a specific situation can result in serious consequences.

Activity 4B: Look at the situations described below. Decide if each scenario would be acceptable or is frequently seen in your culture.

Scenario	Your Culture
Two adult women walking down the street holding hands.	
Two adult men walking down the street holding hands.	
An adult man and woman walking down the street holding hands.	
Two female children walking down the street holding hands.	
Two male children walking down the street holding hands.	
Two adult men giving each other a hug as a greeting.	
An adult man giving an adult woman a kiss on the cheek as a greeting.	
Two adult men giving each other a kiss on the cheek as a greeting.	
A boyfriend and girlfriend kissing in public.	
A boyfriend and girlfriend hugging in public.	
An adult touching a child on the head.	
An adult touching another adult of the same gender on the arm.	

Context and relationship are the most important factors when determining how acceptable an action is. We can consider whether the context is urban vs. rural, professional vs. social, etc. We can also consider several relationship factors such as whether it is a formal vs. informal relationship, how long the pair have known one another and the age of the participants.

Displaying Emotion

Another aspect of non-verbal communication, how emotion is displayed in public, can also cause similarly serious consequences if not appropriate for a cultural context. While individuals may have different levels of comfort with emotional display, there are accepted cultural codes for the display and exchange of emotion in a public domain.

Activity 4C: Look at each emotional situation described below. Decide if each scenario would be acceptable or is frequently seen in your culture.

Scenario	Your Culture
Yelling in anger at someone in public.	
Screaming in excitement in public.	
Crying in public.	
Throwing something in anger in public.	
Laughing loudly in public.	
Dancing with joy in public.	

Physical Appearance

We make enormous judgments about people based upon physical appearance, as it is a significant form of non-verbal communication. There is variation across cultures in terms of acceptable physical appearance and the messages it can send.

Activity 4D: Answer these questions about physical appearance for your culture.

What type of clothing do women wear for daily life?
What type of clothing do men wear for daily life?
What clothing is considered formal?
What clothing is considered informal?
What types of hairstyles do women have?
What types of hairstyles do men have?
What accessories do women wear?
What accessories do men wear?

In general, physical appearance is a statement of identity and independence or conformity to a group. You must look at the context and the message that is being perceived. You may intend to send a certain message but a different message may be perceived.

Thanks for participating!

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