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How does the usage of verbal vs nonverbal cues affect classroom management in my teaching practice?

By: Meghan Keefe

The Purpose of the Study:

This study was performed with the intent to determine which way better helps elementary age students understand rules and directions better, verbal or nonverbal cues. My data was taken from a second-grade classroom over the course of four weeks while student teaching. My goal was to determine through observations and interactions with my students how I could most effectively communicate with them during a busy school day, to ensure that the most learning possible was completed.

What the Research Said:

Finding research pertaining to my initial question was tough because many of the articles I came across when searching this topic were outside of the parameters of my intent. I wanted to see how verbal and nonverbal cues effected a general education classroom, while most of the studies I had found, instead discussed their usage in special education or English language learning classrooms instead. Because of this, much of my correlations to scholarly articles were extrapolated based on a combination of what I read, as well as what I did in my own classroom.



Findings:

- One nonverbal cue my students were utilizing and already familiarized with was signing the letter “T” to ask to go to the bathroom in a nondisruptive way. This allowed whoever was teaching to just look at them and give a nod as an alright without disrupting the lesson at hand, which worked very well for the class.
- Clapping in a pattern and having students clap that pattern back to call class attention back to the teacher was another useful nonverbal strategy.
- Verbally repeating a rule or reminding students of appropriate behavior worked as a better strategy to refocus students when they were distracted during times of work or play.



Conclusions:

My overall conclusion from my data I have collected is that teaching is a profession that of which an integral part is learning by trial and error. Personally, nonverbal cues were more useful when redirecting or talking to a singular student at a time when the class was already quieter. On the flipside from my experience verbal cues were more effective when addressing multiple students or when the classroom was naturally louder already.

The largest application to this is that there is a time and place for different teaching strategies. This time and place are dependent on a wide array of factors such as student mood on a day-to-day, the climate of the classroom, and what material is being taught. Well-established, taught nonverbal cues can be useful and efficient in a classroom if students understand them. However, if a student’s attention is wandering and they are staring out the window, a nonverbal cue would not be as effective to redirect them back to the lesson as a verbal one may be.

Related Resources:

Responding to Minor Misbehavior Through Verbal and Nonverbal Responses, 2012

The Second Derivative Test: A Case Study of Instructor Gesture Use, 2016