

# T3 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

## Use more than words

By Leanne Miller

A teacher can't get his students' attention and his volume starts to rise. He glares at them and tells them to look at the board. Some do; most don't. His volume increases again: "Don't look at me; look at the board." Some kids squirm; most still look at their teacher.

While telling the students to look at the board, the teacher's nonverbal message, conveyed by his eyes, is to look at him. No one is going to look away from a teacher in this situation. The teacher has sent a mixed message and increased the likelihood of having to discipline some students.

**Gesture, voice, breathing, eyes, posture, can enhance learning**

Teachers trained in nonverbal classroom management spend more time on content, less time on management, and have more energy at the end of their work day. That's the contention of American teacher and education consultant Michael Grinder and other experts.

Grinder studied more than 6,000 classrooms to identify the behaviors of teachers who manage them well. He discovered that matching verbal and nonverbal messages is essential in effective management and instruction. From his research, Grinder developed a training program and resources to preserve relationships and gain compliance in the classroom.

Expanding on Grinder's and others' work, American education specialist Kendall Zoller developed Nonverbal Communicative Intelligence (NCI). NCI includes the systematic use of gesture, voice, breathing, and other nonverbal signals to enhance communication.

"Everything we do as teachers has an influence in the classroom," says Claudette Landry, a former teacher, vice-



### What's inside

#### Lessons from a coach

Anne Swant says that taking time to listen gives a coach the edge.

Page 5

#### Voice of a teacher leader

Bill Ferriter takes a lesson from a role model.

Page 6

#### Focus on NSDC's standards

We need to apply our knowledge of how humans learn.

Page 7

#### Research brief

Researchers study the teaching of multiple-meaning words.

Page 9

#### NSDC tool

Professional development IQ test can spark conversation.

Page 12



National Staff  
Development  
Council  
800-727-7288  
www.nsdc.org

principal, and curriculum consultant with the Toronto District School Board. “By speaking loudly, we inadvertently communicate that students should also speak loudly. NCI teaches us skills, methods, and strategies to increase the congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication.

“NCI does not itself build a healthy classroom,” Landry said. “Rather, it supports and extends the methodology the teacher already uses. By preventing escalation, it helps preserve the relationship and routines teachers have already developed with their students.

“NCI is about getting students’ attention for teaching and learning, and then ensuring they stay on task,” she continued.

First, teachers identify each student’s dominant learning style: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Primary students tend more toward the kinesthetic, adolescents toward auditory; older children and adults are more visual, Landry explained. “It’s the auditory and kinesthetic students who need more managing in the classroom, and NCI helps train them to be more visual and therefore more compliant.”

Congruency is one of the most important elements of NCI. “Don’t send mixed messages,” Landry explains. “If you want students to look at the chalkboard, tell them to look, point to it, and then you look at the board too. Don’t look at them.”

**Getting attention**

**Above, pause, whisper:** One effective attention-getting tool is “above, pause, whisper” and was originally described by Grinder. Class volumes fluctuate every five to seven seconds. Don’t try to talk over students when they’re loud. Wait a few seconds for the next lull and then speak. Make sure your volume is two notches above that of the students so that you interrupt them. Once you have their attention, pause a few seconds and then start your message in a whisper. This lowers the group’s metabolism, allows you to hold students’ attention, and lets them hear your message.

All teachers have a range of voices. Grinder discovered two types effective in classroom management.

**Credible voice:** The credible voice has little

modulation. Tone drops at the end of sentences. The speaker’s chin lowers a bit at the end of sentences.

Keep head, body, face, arms, and hands still when using the credible voice. Nothing should distract from what you are saying. Actions, voice tone, and words all communicate the same message. Use the credible voice when giving instructions, delivering teacher-centered lessons, and covering important content. Use it when you want to hold students’ attention and don’t want questions or comments.

**Approachable voice:** The approachable voice is the opposite of credible and uses modulation. Intonation regularly rises and falls. The voice has rhythmic, even melodic tones. The head moves up and down, arms and hands move and are open. The approachable voice invites discussion, encourages participation, and makes students feel warm and welcome.

Try it yourself and hear the difference in this sentence: “Boys and girls, I’d like your attention now please.”

**Stand in one spot:** Landry also advises consistently standing in the same spot when you want students’ attention. “This lets the visuals see you and the auditories hear you. Regularly using this technique trains students that this is the time for them to be attentive. After a while, when you stand in that spot, you will have their attention without having to say a word.”

**Teaching the content**

**Freeze body:** Body language speaks volumes, so if you want your students to be still, be still yourself. A still body also helps deliver content. Zoller talks about the impact of “freeze body” on students.

Try this. Using your credible voice, walk and say: “Boys and girls, today we are going to talk about a very important year in Canadian history: 1867, the year Canada became an independent country.”

Now say it again, but pause and freeze your body before you say 1867. The words may be the same, but the impact is significant. You’ll have even more impact if you hold the pause for a few seconds.

The visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners

For further information about NCI, visit [www.sierra-training.com](http://www.sierra-training.com) and [www.michaelgrinder.com](http://www.michaelgrinder.com) or contact Claudette Landry at [claudette@sierra-training.com](mailto:claudette@sierra-training.com) or Kendall Zoller at [kendall@sierra-training.com](mailto:kendall@sierra-training.com)



Reprinted with permission from the March 2008 edition of *Professionally Speaking*, a publication of the Ontario College of Teachers. All rights reserved.

are watching and listening. If your body language and emphasis match your words, you are more likely to connect with all your students, and your message will have more impact.

The freeze-body technique is especially effective with the easily distracted kinesthetic learner. Zoller argues that if you are moving and talking, kinesthetics may be watching more than listening. To get them to listen and focus, it makes sense to stand still and talk.

“An effective freeze-body implemented when delivering important content can enhance memory and focus for all three learner types in your class,” Zoller said.

**Pausing:** Pausing is another nonverbal technique.

“Tony, can you please tell us one of the main differences between coniferous and deciduous trees?” Silence. “Tony, do you remember yesterday we talked about pine trees and maple trees? Do you remember which is deciduous and which is coniferous?” Silence. Gentle pushing: “Tony, what kind of tree is that right outside our window? Do you know?” Silence.

The teacher keeps asking Tony questions to help him answer the first one correctly. Landry said that if Tony is a kinesthetic learner, this type of pushing is the least helpful thing a teacher can do. “Kinesthetics need more time to retrieve and process information, as much as six seconds more than other children,” Landry said. “The best thing you can do is wait.”

She encourages teachers to ask one good question and then keep quiet and let Tony think. Bombarding him with questions shuts him down. He doesn’t know which question to answer, and his thinking becomes muddled.

When teachers give students three or more seconds of undisturbed wait time, the outcomes include longer and more correct responses, fewer I-don’t-knows, and more volunteered answers.

**Show, don’t say:** Another technique is show, don’t say. “Class, you have this many minutes to complete this activity.” Don’t say the number; hold up two fingers.

“Class, turn to this page please.” Write 27 on

the board, point to it, and look at it, not at your students. Keep looking at the board for a few seconds and don’t say the number. The students will look up to see the number. There’s always one child who will ask what page. Just point to the board.

This show-don’t-say technique encourages auditory and kinesthetic students to become more visual.

NCI encourages teachers to associate instruction with actions and train students to read their gestures. By practicing such congruency, teachers show students what they want done.

At the start of a new year or semester, teach students your gestures. Associate them with words for the first few weeks and soon students will know what you mean when you hold up a stop hand or when you fan your hands to show opening a book. Gestures save your voice and lower exasperation levels.

**Transition to independent work**

**What, why, how:** Landry said to manage students during the transition from teacher-centered to independent work and avoid common interruptions, use the sequence what, why, how to introduce all activities.

- **What.** Boys and girls, today in science we are going to ...
- **Why.** We are going to do this to follow up on what we talked about yesterday ...
- **How.** Now look here please (point to and look at the board, screen, flip chart) and we’ll read what you are going to do.

**Visual exit directions:** This last tool is called visual exit directions. Write clear and complete instructions on the board before the lesson. When the inevitable questions arise, avoid eye contact and say nothing. Instead, point to and look at your written instructions.

Through repetition, students will learn the routine and will eventually stop asking many questions.

**The most important 20 seconds:** Follow visual exit directions with the Most Important Twenty Seconds (MITS). Ask if there are any questions. If something is applicable to everyone, put it on

**NSDC’S BELIEF**

Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

**At the start of a new year or semester, teach students your gestures. Associate them with words for the first few weeks and soon students will know what you mean when you hold up a stop hand or when you fan your hands to show opening a book. Gestures save your voice and lower exasperation levels.**



1. Get everyone's attention before starting your lesson.
2. Begin each class by telling students what will happen and what they will do.
3. Don't stay at your desk. Circulate and monitor progress as students work.
4. Remember that values are caught, not taught. Courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, in control, patient, and organized teachers model ideal behaviors. "Do as I say, not as I do" teachers send mixed messages that confuse students and invite misbehavior.
5. Avoid confrontational escalation. Intervene or correct misbehavior quietly,

**TRIED AND TRUE**

The September 1986 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* outlines some tested and true strategies that many teachers have no doubt been practicing for years.

6. Name offenders naturally as you teach. "And you see, Corey, this map of Africa shows ..." Corey hears his name and gets back on task, and the intervention doesn't interrupt others.
7. Explain and enforce clear expectations consistently. Refer to your rules as

expectations and tell students how you expect them to behave in your classroom. Use rules that describe the behaviors you want, not those things students cannot do.

8. Avoid escalation by providing clear descriptions of what you want students to do. Focus students on the desired behavior, not the misbehavior. Say, "I want" or "I need" or "I expect you to ..."
9. When you see good behavior, acknowledge and praise it, both verbally and nonverbally. A nod, a smile, or a thumbs-up reinforces behavior and does not distract others.

the board. Then say something like, "I trust you can now get to work on your own and complete this task."

Wait 20 seconds, silently. Stand still and watch your class. Use open body language: look around, keep your arms at your sides and align your hips and feet. Discourage talking; answer no questions. If students ask questions, do not make eye contact. Point to and look at the board or the textbook for answers.

Once again, you ensure congruency between your words and your actions. Used with visual exit instructions, MITS enhances the transition to independent learning by ensuring kinesthetics follow teachers' instructions, not their body movements.

While waiting, keep still and silent. If someone starts to speak, look quickly at the student, then look away and make a stop sign.

**Use the eyes:** "Save eye contact for positive interactions, positive relationships," Landry said. Avoid eye contact for negative interactions, when you don't want to talk to students, or when you

don't want to escalate a situation.

When a student interrupts you or a classmate or when a problem arises, use a visual sign like holding up a stop hand. Avoid eye contact. Use your eyes and look where you want your students to look.

When Susanna drops her book on the floor, look at her, say her name, then look at and point to the book. Don't say anything else, and avoid further eye contact.

When Vince creates a problem, call out his name and make a stop sign, but don't look at him and don't say a word. By not making eye contact you're not allowing the problem to become personal.

Nonverbal intervention without eye contact will decrease unwanted behavior and preserve the student-teacher relationship.

Using these strategies effectively and consistently requires practice and thought. However, this approach can help teachers improve how they manage their students and classrooms. ♦

**When Vince creates a problem, call out his name and make a stop sign, but don't look at him and don't say a word. By not making eye contact you're not allowing the problem to become personal.**

