Voice

Arguably your voice is the most essential tool in creating a presence in the classroom. All too often, students complain about instructors who are too soft spoken, mumble, or speak in a monotone. Additionally, the way you use your voice can convey different meanings, and thus, evoke different responses from your student. A negative message said with a concerned tone, will be received and acted upon differently than the same message stated in an authoritarian, cold manner.

Whether your class is composed of ten students or one hundred, if you cannot effectively convey your message to them, they will not take you or the course seriously. Here are some tips on what you can do with your voice to help avoid these pitfalls.

Breathe Well.

The way you breathe will affect the production of your voice. Correct breathing will help you increase the volume of your voice without changing the pitch. Additionally, good breathing will allow you to never to run out of breath when you are speaking. The Department of Early Childhood Education and Development (2013) indicates that the following are the keys to breathing and speaking:

- Focus on exhaling rather than on inhaling. This will make inhaling more automatic and relaxed.
- Release your breath during or just before you speak. This will increase the amount of breath that you have.
- Pausing as soon as there are signs that you are about to run out of breath so you will automatically inhale when you begin to speak again.

For specific exercises to aid you, view this link.*

Additional tips to remember:

- Turn and face the class before you speak.
- Speak at an even pace. Avoid speaking too quickly, especially in large rooms.
- Open your mouth wide enough to be heard.


Introduction

Each one of us can recall a professor who elicited excitement and anticipation upon entering the room and standing before the students. This instructor was also able to keep us actively engaged in listening and thinking throughout the class even though we may have initially had little interest in the subject. It might be difficult to describe just what it was about this individual that was magnetic and authentic enough to hold our attention. Some might simply state he or she “had a certain presence” or “a way of engaging me,” or was a “motivational force for me.”

We as instructors, standing before students who have a host of other options besides attending our class, must recognize that our posture, movements, gestures, attitude, and energy contribute mightily to the teaching and learning experience. We have to develop a presence that is at once true to who we are and that invites our students to go on the journey with us.

Although it may come easier to some than others, cultivating a presence in our classes is an important undertaking to which we all should attend. In this paper, I will cover how to use your voice, body, and the learning space to create an unforgettable presence that will enhance the teaching and learning experience for both you and your students.

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Tone and Inflection

The tone and inflection of your voice expresses a great deal to students and has the power to be motivating or the cause of disengagement. Your voice rising at the end of a sentence suggests something different than the accent being placed elsewhere. Speaking in monotone with no inflection conveys boredom and disinterest which will not encourage students to say or engage more than they have to.

Think about what you want to convey to students and use the appropriate tone. For example, if you want to communicate concern, a quiet voice used one on one might be best. In a heated debate, a calm but loud voice can settle things down. It can be useful for you to record your voice or have someone listen to what you are saying to understand what you sound like when you are speaking. This will help you vary your tone to convey your intended message.

Nonverbal and Body Language

Every facial expression, gesture, and moment conveys a message. Students easily pick up, thus it is important to be aware of your nonverbal behavior and intentionally use movements and gestures to express what you wish. Here are a few suggestions regarding your nonverbal body language:

- Use arm and hand gestures while talking to the class, especially to emphasize a point.
- Smile at the class.
- Use pauses to emphasize points.
- Smile and nod to encourage students to speak more.
- Move towards students when they are speaking.
- Maintain open body language in your interactions with students (no cross arms or body turned away from students).
- Be cognizant of your facial expressions.

Conclusion

As stated above, it is as important to be concerned with how you communicate with your students as it is with what you communicate to them. Our voices, body and nonverbal gestures, as well as the classroom space can be used as tools to help us facilitate deeper learning. We just have to develop and employ them to this end.

References

Ferlin McGaskey, 2014


