Use of Non-verbal Communication Channels in the Classroom

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Abstract

The ability to identify, understand and interpret non-verbal cues makes communication among people high quality and successful. In this paper, special attention is paid to non-verbal communication in the classroom, with emphasis on the non-verbal behaviour of teachers. In this paper the study of non-verbal behaviour of classroom teachers and final-year-students of the Faculty of Teacher Education is presented. The aim was to detect forms of non-verbal behaviour that are used in teaching situations by teachers and by students. The study was conducted in primary schools according to the Flanders model of interaction analysis. Ten elements that are included in the Flanders model of teaching communication were adapted to the specific needs of this research. The study comprised fifteen classroom teachers with longer working experience and fifteen students in the final year at the Faculty of Teacher Education. The following channels of teacher's non-verbal communication were observed in the study: visual communication, movements within a lecture, use of paralanguage, facial expressions of teachers and teacher's relationship towards students. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between teachers and students - future teachers (t = 0.303 <2.04 limits at a significance level of 0.05) in the use of different channels of non-verbal communication, which differs from previous research around the world and in Croatia (Globočnik Žunac & Bakić-Tomić 2011, Howe, 2002, Napan 1994, Neill 1991, Klinzig and Tisher 1986, Wragg & Dooley 1984, Jacker et al. 1965) which generally confirmed the existence of differences between samples.

Key words: *classroom teaching; Flanders interaction analysis (FIA); non-verbal communication; teacher*

Introduction

In the interaction with other people a person is mostly focused on one's own words and loses awareness of what signals are being sent by the body at the same time. Facial expressions, eyes, tone of voice, gestures, posture or movement, touch and sight are the most frequently used non-verbal communication channels (Rot, 1982). Knežević (2004) states that non-verbal communication is a constant subtext to everything we do; we cannot stop showing facial expressions, posture or tone that conceals our talk. It highlights how this knowledge is important for the social skills to be able to perceive, interpret and respond to emotional and interpersonal signals.

The general ability to read non-verbal cues is accompanied by specific visual decoding skills (especially facial expression), voice and combined (including controversial) characters. "Nonverbal communication within the classroom is very important because the teacher and pupils often have more confidence in the non-verbal than in the verbal message" (Neill, 1991, p.23).

Learning and development of non-verbal ability is relatively rare in teacher study programmes and the attempts to train teachers in these abilities date back to the recent past. "Jecker and colleagues (1965) in their earlier work show that 6 to 8 hours of training led to an improvement of 7 percent perceiving nonverbal signs at students" (According to Neill, 1991, p.184). Klinzing and Tisher (1986) conducted research on non-verbal training of teachers and students (according to Neill, 1991). They gave an overview of opposing direct and indirect approaches of training. Direct national education approaches were related to a particular behaviour, while the indirect purpose in educational approach was generally to affect properties such as the ability to express feelings. The indirect approach by itself proved to be ineffective, as opposed to the combination of direct and indirect methods or the direct method only.

Effective direct training programmes include at least two of the following four components: presentation of theory, practice of distinguishing non-verbal cues, shaping capabilities that are trained and practice of new skills with feedback information. The success of the programme depended on its duration and involvement of the participants. The effects were larger when the revised estimates were made in the classroom than in the situation of the similar conditions. As was assumed, the effects are greater in skills that are directly related to those practiced. These skills were transferred to the classes, and have not been lost even after a longer time (3 months) when the programme participants were re-evaluated. There were cases where a change occurred that was not directly related to the previous practicing (Howe, 2002).

Bakić-Tomić & Globočnik-Žunac (2010) conducted research according to the FIA method adapted for the higher education system. Monitoring of the lecturers was performed in two previously arranged situations: with interaction and without interaction with students. The results were compared according to lecturers' previous pedagogical and psychological education. The results presented greater proposition of interaction with students in both lecturing situations for those lecturers with the mentioned education; what is more, they performed various forms of communication.

Klinzig and associates suggest that teachers can use their newly acquired skills with excessive enthusiasm so as to distract the message. When the pupils are interested in doing work, either because of their interest in the content or because of the research method and debate used, the effect of teacher non-verbal strategies is much smaller. This especially applies to primary education where children are more willing to learn (according to Neill, 1991). Wragg & Dooley (1984) conducted a study in classrooms where teaching was performed by students at teacher colleges. Most of the bad behaviour in classrooms where students taught was of non-verbal nature. In 76 percent of lessons in which inappropriate behaviour occurred, for 24 percent of cases non-verbal behaviour was totally inappropriate to the task. The most common non-verbal reaction was moving near the pupil who performed problems, which occurred in 20 percent of the segments of the lecture when the teacher responded. A facial expression was used in 8 percent of cases, a pause in 7 percent of cases and gestures in 5 percent of cases (Neill, 1991).

By comparing the research focused on students and research focused on teachers, it can be concluded that successful teachers use more gestures, while the use of gestures by less successful teachers was more like that of the students. In Wragg and Dooley's research students moved the pupils in only 3 percent of cases and touched only in 1 percent. Teachers' verbal attempts to establish control over the class opposed the challenges of non-verbal students (Neill, 1991). However, one of the teacher's tasks is to be able to estimate exactly what is happening in the classroom, and in order to do this the teacher must firstly be aware of own abilities and non-verbal behaviour which will help to perceive and correctly interpret non-verbal signals of the pupils (Napan, 1994).

The frontal approach is most effective when one needs to explain complex concepts to students. Once the students get used to the frontal form, they do not interrupt the teacher even when they do not understand. Therefore, for the evaluation of content interpretation, teachers must largely rely on facial expressions of the pupils. Teachers who are not very skilled at it repeatedly used phrases that children did not understand. Aiming at the full realization of the lecturing task, it is important to empower teachers to recognize and correctly interpret non-verbal signs sent by pupils (Howe, 2002). Through facial expressions a teacher consciously or unconsciously conveys to the pupils one's own attitude about the content of that teaching. By using disinterested facial expressions and body movement a teacher leaves the impression that the content taught is not understood or is not interesting, and unknowingly says that the course content is considered optional. Also, the teacher's attitude suggests indifference and detachment from students and encourages students to be inactive during the lesson. Students are good observers and easily perceive every detail of the teacher's behaviour and movement. Therefore, in order to avoid situations in which students take over the course of the lesson, it is imperative that teachers are aware of non-verbal cues that are used in class and messages sent to students (Howe, 2002).

There are three options regarding the development of non-verbal abilities of student teachers:

1. "Natural born teacher" model. According to this model, students can, at the very beginning of their studies, have the skills required for the teaching profession. This may be the result of selecting only those students who possess these capabilities. In this case, their ability at the end of the training was identical to that at the beginning.

2. Another possibility is that the ability of students is "learned" after completing their studies, they are the result of the experience gained during their studies. If that was really the case, there would be no connection between the non-verbal expression skills at the beginning and end of the study. Students' skills at the end of their studies would depend only on what the student has learned during the study.

3. The third possibility is the existence of interaction between the knowledge, skills and abilities at the beginning and at the end of the study. In this case the students do not yet possess all the necessary specific teaching skills. They are still in varying degrees aware of non-verbal expressions and can detect and support the observed teacher's ability or are self-aware enough to discover and build on their own results and mistakes. The differences between successful and less successful students increased as more experienced students at the beginning of the study were to have the advantage of gaining new experiences that build on their foundations (Neill, 1991).

Research Methods

The aim of the study was to observe the work of teachers and student teachers in the classroom focusing on their non-verbal behaviour. The study also sought to determine which forms of non-verbal behaviour in teaching were used by experienced teachers and by students in their final year of the teacher training college to see how they varied. Qualitative research was conducted.

Research Hypotheses

1. Visual communication of experienced teachers and students is significantly different.
2. Movement of teachers differs from movement of the student teachers – teachers spend more time moving around.
3. Buzzwords in speech are more common among student teachers than experienced teachers.
4. Facial expressions of teachers in the classroom are different from the expression of student teachers.
5. The relationship of experienced teachers towards pupils is different from the relationship of student teachers.

Study Sample - Respondents

The study was conducted on a sample of 15 classroom teachers with more years of teaching experience (with a minimum of three years of work experience) and 15 students in their final year of studies at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb. Teachers who

participated in the research came from the following primary schools: Ksaver Šandor Đalski (4 teachers), Dragutin Domjanić (2 teachers), Tin Ujević (4 teachers), Davorin Trstenjak (4 teachers) and Eugen Kumičić (1 teacher). During the research student teachers were teaching lessons in the following primary schools: Tin Ujević (5 students) and Davorin Trstenjak (10 students). The monitoring was conducted in a way that every three seconds the researcher noted observations relating to non-verbal communication. The participants in the research were not familiar with the purpose and method of monitoring in order to maintain a more natural behaviour and avoid acting.

Research Instruments

The study was conducted according to the models of Flanders (Flanders Interaction Analysis - FIA). It represents a system of interaction analysis in the classroom. The

Table1. *Non-verbal communication channels observed in the survey*

Visual communication	**Looking at the class**	While talking a teacher/student communicates to the class in general, looking at all and not setting an eye on a single pupil.
	Looking at the pupils	While talking a teacher/student does not communicate to the class in general but is focusing on a single pupil making a visual contact with only one at the specific time.
	Looking into the distance	While talking a teacher/student looks at an imaginary point in the distance and is not making visual contact with the pupils. A teacher is looking through the window.
	Looking at the board/papers	While talking a teacher/student is focused on papers, notes, book, board and other equipment and is avoiding visual communication with the pupils.
Movements	**Walking in front of the class**	A teacher/student does not enter the space among the pupils, is standing in front of the board and has more difficulty making visual communication with pupils in the back of the classroom.
	Walking through the class	A teacher/student walks among pupils, has control over the class; makes better visual contacts with pupils.
	Body movements	A teacher/student waves arms, swings at the standing point or walks back and forth.
	Sitting	A teacher/student talks while sitting at the teacher's desk.
Paralanguage	**Buzzwords**	A teacher/student uses catchphrases at an unconscious level.
	Intonation	A teacher/student changes voice pitch by emphasizing key points in the content of lecture.
	Quiet/loud voice	A teacher/student uses a quiet or louder voice to emphasize something important.
Facial expressions	**Serious**	Serious facial expression by which a teacher/student is not making contact with the pupils.
	Smiling	A teacher/student smiles, is open and warm towards the pupils.
	With a grim	By using a grim a teacher/student achieves authority and creates a cold approach to the pupils.
Relationship toward pupils	**Use of nicknames for pupils**	A teacher/student uses nicknames and not names or even creates new ones.
	Physical touch	A teacher/student touches a pupil by placing a hand on the shoulder or head as to commend.
	Use of humour	A teacher/student gives funny examples while lecturing, using metaphors or cartoon characters.

Flanders tracking model consists of ten categories of communication that include all communication options. There are seven categories that the teacher uses when speaking and two categories used by students when they speak. Since the model involves encoding at a constant rate, a potential share of time in one or more categories was calculated (Flanders, 1970). For the purposes of this research only those categories that relate to non-verbal communication of teachers with students were tracked. The research variables are shown in Table 1 through non-verbal communication channels.

Results

Table 2. *Comparison of mean time (in minutes) non-verbal communication of teachers with experience and student teachers during a 45-minute lesson*

Observed non-verbal communication between teachers and students in the classroom		Teachers with experience	Student teachers
Non-verbal communication channels	Observation variables	Average in minutes	Average in minutes
Visual Communication	Class observation	7.08	6.54
	Student observation	21.52	24.47
	Looking into the distance	0.34	0.15
	Looking at the board / paper	11.06	8.74
	Other	5.00	5.01
Motion	Walking in front of the class	25.70	24.53
	Walking through the class	9.91	10.47
	Body movements	4.86	6.21
	Sitting	4.40	3.79
	Other	0.13	0.00
Paralanguage	Buzzwords	0.30	0.71
	Intonation	0.41	0.09
	Quiet / loud talking	0.91	0.37
	Standard speech	43.38	43.83
Facial expression	Serious	34.63	35.27
	Smiling	5.00	4.32
	Grim	0.35	0.45
	Other	5.02	4.96
Relation with students	Using a student's nickname	1.70	0.00
	Touching students	2.97	0.42
	Using humour	1.67	0.05
	Standard speech	38.66	44.53

The differences between the average time that the teachers and students were using during one lesson, according to the list of observed variables, non-verbal communication channels are not statistically significant (t = 0.303 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05).

Discussion

The results obtained show that both classroom teachers and student teachers establish visual communication mostly with pupils individually, up to the average of 21.52 minutes during a lesson by teachers and 24.47 minutes by student teachers. Teachers observe the entire class as a group only 7.08 minutes on average and student teachers 6.54 minutes average during whole lesson. Student teachers mostly communicated visually with the class at the beginning (greetings and lesson announcements) and at the end of the lesson (greetings). Rarely was there visual communication established with the whole class during the lesson, and when it occurred, the reason was disturbance in the classroom, so the student teachers tried to attract attention of all students by observing the whole class.

Time spent looking at the board or the papers (11.06 minutes by teachers and 8.74 minutes by student teachers on average during the lesson) is longer in both cases than the time spent to communicate with the class as a whole. In addition, looking at the board and the notes (papers) also includes looking at the book and students' notebooks or watching a Power Point presentation that the individual student teacher used in the class. Looking into the distance is really short compared to other elements of visual communication, and in this study it mostly referred to the guidance of teacher's views toward some imaginary point.

We can conclude that the first hypothesis was not confirmed, i.e. there were no statistically significant differences in visual communication between experienced teachers and student teachers (t = 0.226 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05).

According to the results, teachers moved most of their time in front of the class, up to average of 25.70 minutes during a lesson and as for student teachers the average was 24.53 minutes. In relation to the movement in front of the class, moving through the class was rare (teachers – 9.91 minutes on average during a lesson, student teachers – 10.47 minutes on average during a lesson). Student teachers moved through the class when they communicated with pupils sitting in the last rows, and when the pupils individually solved a task or responded to questions on the teaching ballot. Other forms that were observed: body movements, sitting and standing were applied for a maximum of 5 minutes on average, throughout the lesson by teachers and for a maximum of 6.20 minutes by student teachers.

The study showed reasons why teachers' movements were mostly limited to movements in front of the class. The reasons are: arrangement of desks in the classroom made it difficult for teachers to move between pupils, small number of pupils in class so the teachers did not need to enter the space between them, teachers' judgment that the pupils hear and experience more when they stand or move in front of the class. Situations in which the teachers were sitting were rare: when they wrote grades in the class book, during oral examination of pupils and when having discussions with pupils. Body movements were present for some of these teachers most of the time while some teachers did not show any. The most common body

movements were: hands behind back, arms crossed on chest, counting using fingers, shaking hands when explaining course content and motioning with the hand towards a specific pupil.

The most common body movements that student teachers used were shaking hands when explaining course content, hands crossed in front of the body, hands behind back, leaning towards the pupil who speaks, crossed arms, counting using fingers, hands pointing to a specific student, placing a finger on the mouth (to appease the students - "Shhh"), hand on chin, hands in pockets. Some of the student movements were closed or negative: crossed arms, crossed palms and hands in pockets. By leaning towards the pupil who speaks, putting hands behind back and motioning with the hand to a particular pupil, student teachers demonstrated their readiness and motivation for the lesson and the openness and warm attitude towards the pupils.

We can conclude that the second hypothesis was not confirmed; there were no statistically significant differences in movement between teachers and student teachers (t = 0.972 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05). As for the elements of paralanguage that were observed in the study, teachers used an average of two minutes while in the classroom, and student teachers averaged 0.71 minutes during the hour lesson. Only a few teachers used catchphrases in their speech. Most often, "Thus", "Bravo", "Let's hear it," "Good." Catchphrases used by teachers in their speech were not too common so that their use did not interfere with the content and pupils' understanding.

Student teachers used catchphrases less than teachers. The most commonly used were: "Excellent", "Right", "OK", "Bravo", "Good". Catchphrase "OK" was posed as a question to pupils (in order to check whether they understand), or as feedback to pupils' given responses. In other cases, the use of catchphrases did not interfere with the understanding of course content and therefore neither with the lesson hour.

The intonation (less than half a minute in an hour on average) and elevated tone of voice by student teachers and teachers was used in rare situations in order to highlight a key concept of the teaching content, or for interpretive reading of literary works. An elevated tone of voice was used only in situations when the student teachers tried to calm those pupils who did not behave well which was also very rare.

We can conclude that the third hypothesis was not confirmed: catchphrases in speech were less common with student teachers and therefore the difference was not statistically significant, but random (t = 0.134 <2.04 for 0.05 that is with a 95% probability estimates).

During the lesson, teachers were serious for most of the time - 35 minutes; they smiled for 5 minutes, and were grim for less than 1 minute. Student teachers were serious for 35.27 minutes and smiled only for about 4.32 minutes during the lesson. If we take into consideration the fact that pupils look at the teacher's face for at least 80% of the lesson, then we can conclude that these results are not satisfactory. This poses the question why were the teachers in classrooms serious for such a long time? Did

they want to establish and maintain authority over the classroom with seriousness or was it just lack of motivation and desire to work? A serious expression on a teacher's face leaves an impression of indifference, lack of motivation, and negatively affects the classroom atmosphere. When pupils were asked when they felt most relaxed in class and when they felt fine in class (Young, 1994), one of the most common response was when the teacher was in a good mood and when the teacher smiled. A smile costs nothing and yet means so much! During the research, teachers had a smile on their face in situations where the answers and comments encouraged the students to laugh. A smiling face was most prevalent near the end of the lesson, and only a few teachers began the lesson with a smiling face. In a situation when the teacher laughed, students were more relaxed and the atmosphere in the classroom was cheerful.

We can conclude that the fourth hypothesis was also not confirmed; faces of teachers in the classroom did not differ significantly from the facial expressions of student teachers. Both groups were very serious for most of the lesson and they did not smile enough (t = 0.181 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05). Only a few teachers used pupils' nicknames, the reason being that most of the pupils did not have nicknames. If they did they didn't used them in school. Pupils who had nicknames, and allowed being addressed by them were called by their nicknames by other pupils and teachers.

Student teachers did not establish a relationship with pupils with nicknames, but by touching pupils and using humour in rare situations. The reason none of the observed student teachers did not address pupils by their nicknames is that student teachers did not even know the names of all pupils in the class where they conducted their teaching lessons, yet alone their nicknames. In addressing the individual pupil, student teachers called the pupils by name (if they addressed him/her) or with body movements motioned to the pupil. Touching pupils and using humour was applied by teachers in less than 5 minutes on average during the lesson. Situations in which teachers touched pupils, putting their hands on the shoulder or patting them on the head were when pupils asked the teacher for help, and when it was necessary to warn the individual pupil to calm down without interfering with the rest of the class. Situations where tactile communication between pupil and student teachers occurred were the following: when a pupil came up to the student teacher to seek help, when the student teacher placed a hand on the pupil's shoulder or head giving the pupil information to be pacified, or when encouraging pupils to do something.

The research results indicate that teachers used humour in the classroom for the least amount of time (an average of 1.67 minutes per lesson). Teachers who used it did so in situations where a concept or an event from a poem or a literary work could be related to an actual event or when they got answers from pupils which were funny in the first place. Teachers often used humour at the beginning of the lesson (for motivation) and in the central (main) part of the lesson. Student teachers used humour in the main part of the lesson (new teaching content). The obtained data is extremely

interesting for the reason that it was expected humour would be mostly used in the motivational (introductory) part of the lesson in order to get pupils motivated to work.

We can conclude that the fifth hypothesis was also not confirmed; relationship of teachers with pupils was not different from the relationship of student teachers and pupils. Differences that emerged were random (t = 0.597 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05). These findings suggested the need for student teachers to become aware that using at least one non-verbal element of communication is of exceptional importance for pupils. First of all it is the facial expression which should be more smiling and less serious. This change would have a positive impact on other aspects of non-verbal communication, which would impact the behaviour of pupils, their motivation, and activity during the lesson (Napan, 1994).

Although in previous studies differences were found between experienced teachers and student teachers (Howe, 2002, Klinzig et al., according to Neill 1991, Wragg & Dooley 1984, Napan, 1994, Neill, 1991), our study did not confirm them. There may be more reasons for that; good selection of students for admission to the Faculty of Teacher Education, student teachers' motivation to imitate teachers - their mentors, the quality of the programme of study that allows student teachers to attain the skills level of teaching practice over five years. We also observed that the situation was not the same for the teachers considering that the existing situation is not quite satisfactory. The results indicate that non-verbal communication channels are inadequate and underutilized and that the atmosphere in the classroom is insufficiently motivating, encouraging, relaxed and interactive.

Conclusion

Non-verbal communication is a constant subtext of everything we do. No matter what we do, we cannot stop showing facial expressions or posture, or conceal the tone that says something. It is of great importance to adopt the unspoken rules of social harmony, which is a function that enables all participants in a social interaction to feel comfortable. Research conducted among experienced primary school teachers and the student teachers showed the following results:

– Non-verbal behaviour of these two groups in the channels of non-verbal communication differed very little, that is, the difference was not statistically significant (t = 0.303 <2.04 threshold at a significance level of 0.05).
– Visual communication was dominated by visual communication with individual pupils - on average teachers and student teachers spent 23 minutes during one lesson visually interacting with individual pupils, while visual communication with the whole class took up only 6.81 minutes on average per lesson.
– With respect to teacher and student teacher movement during the lesson walking in front of the class dominated with an average of 25 minutes during one lesson, while walking among the pupils took up 10.19 minutes an average during one lesson.

– Paralanguage was used very little, which is good on the one hand because catchphrases might interfere with the intelligibility of the teachers' speech, and on the other hand it is not as good because intonation and speech volume variation that create certain dynamics during a teacher's speech were less used. Over 43 minutes of the lesson, teachers and student teachers used standard speech.

– On average, student teachers and teachers remained serious for about 35 minutes of the lesson, and smiled for only a little less than five minutes. This ratio is not desirable and expected especially when it comes to children between 7-11 years of age, who should perceive school as a little more play and joy, rather than stern and serious work.

– A surprising result is that both teachers and student teachers used little humour in the classroom, on average only one and a half minutes during the entire lesson. Also there was very little tactile communication, although it is known that at this age, it means a lot to pupils (1.70 minutes on average during one lesson).

The analysis of the survey results showed that teachers and student teachers need to develop and raise the awareness of the importance of non-verbal behaviour in the classroom. This is particularly true for facial expressions that teachers and student teachers use in class, movement through classroom, visual communication, correct and clear expression and how they establish relationships with pupils, in particular, the use of humour that would have created a relaxed and warm atmosphere in the classroom.

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Neverbalni komunikacijski kanali u nastavi

Sažetak

Sposobnost prepoznavanja, razumijevanja i tumačenja neverbalnih znakova čini komunikaciju među ljudima kvalitetnom i uspješnom. U ovom radu posebna se pozornost posvećuje neverbalnoj komunikaciji u razredu, a naglasak je na neverbalnom ponašanju nastavnika. U ovome je radu predstavljena studija neverbalnoga ponašanja učitelja i studenata završne godine studija na Učiteljskome fakultetu. Cilj je bio otkriti oblike neverbalnoga ponašanja kojima se koriste nastavnici i studenti – budući nastavnici u nastavnim situacijama. Studija je provedena u osnovnim školama prema Flandersovu modelu analize interakcije. Deset elemenata koji su uključeni u Flandersov model komunikacije u nastavi prilagođeni su specifičnim potrebama ovog istraživanja. Istraživanje je obuhvatilo petnaest učitelja s više radnog iskustva i petnaest studenata na posljednjoj godini na Učiteljskome fakultetu. Istraživani su ovi kanali neverbalne komunikacije u nastavi: vizualna komunikacija, pokreti na predavanju, korištenje parajezika, izrazi lica učitelja i odnos učitelja prema studentima. Rezultati su pokazali da nema statistički značajne razlike između nastavnika i studenata – budućih nastavnika (t = 0,303 <2,04 ograničenja na razini značajnosti 0,05) u korištenju različitih kanala neverbalne komunikacije, te da se dobiveni rezultati razlikuju od rezultata prethodnih istraživanja u svijetu i u Hrvatskoj (Globočnik Žunac & Bakić-Tomić, 2011, Howe, 2002, Napan 1994, Neill 1991, Klinzig i Tisher 1986, Wragg & Dooley 1984, Jacker sur., 1965) koja su općenito potvrdila postojanje razlike između uzoraka.

Ključne riječi: *Flandrersova analiza interakcije (FIA); neverbalna komunikacija; razredna nastava; učitelj*