



Listening and Nonverbal Communication

Competency

The cooperating teacher demonstrates intentional communication to create positive interactions with a student teacher.

Key Method

The cooperating teacher uses intentional strategies to establish clear, consistent guidelines for communication with their student teacher. These communication skills help cooperating teachers build trusting relationships with student teachers from all backgrounds, across race, class, language, and identity.

Method Components

The Importance of Communication

Communication is the foundation for building the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Heightening awareness of listening skills and nonverbal communication is critical to building and maintaining a strong, positive relationship. Many educators have encountered these ideas before, but they're often neglected when preparing to serve as a cooperating or mentor teacher.

These “soft skills” are relatively straightforward to practice when people are aware and intentional in their interactions. A cooperating or mentor teacher can use listening strategies, such as mirroring, to confirm the message the student teacher or intern is trying to convey. This helps eliminate misunderstandings and reinforces that the cooperating or mentor teacher is there to support the student teacher's professional growth. In contrast, failing to verify a message or dismissing an idea can undermine the relationship and foster distrust.

Similarly, nonverbal signals sent to the student teacher or to students in the classroom have a significant impact. For example, if the cooperating or mentor teacher appears inattentive or passive in the back of the classroom, the student teacher or intern may perceive a lack of interest in helping them improve. It's important for a student teacher to know that they're observed and supported as they move from observer to co-teacher to independent instructor ready for their professional setting.

Key points

Listening Skills

“The word ‘listen’ contains the same letters as the word ‘silent.’”—Alfred Brendel

- Listening without “jumping in” or thinking about a response instead of attending to what the other person is saying is a skill that requires practice. It's common to drift into planning what to say rather than actively listening. This must be modeled and explicitly described. This skill also applies in other situations, such as communicating with parents or families.
- The fifth habit from Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Genuinely seeking to understand another person clarifies messages, recognizes different perspectives, conveys empathy, and builds trust.
- It can be helpful to use cues to refocus on what another person is saying, such as intentionally returning eye contact when your mind wanders or when you start planning responses.

Verbal Communication Techniques and Strategies

- **Mirroring** is a technique used to reflect what has been said to verify that the listener's understanding matches the speaker's intent. The listener might say, "What I heard you say is..." followed by "Is that correct?" and then ask, "Is there more?" The conversation continues until the speaker is done sharing.
- **Empathizing** is a technique used to validate the speaker's feelings, even when the listener disagrees or has a different perspective. The listener may say, "After listening to what you said, it sounds like you're feeling ____ (for example, frustrated, angry, sad, disappointed, excited, encouraged, etc.)." The speaker can confirm or correct the feeling statement.
- **Connecting** can link the speaker's story to the listener's experience. While empathy is helpful, implying that the listener always fully understands how the speaker feels can be disrespectful. Rather than discounting the speaker's experience, respond positively and allow space for them to share their unique experience. Be especially careful when "connecting" around experiences of racism, classism, or other oppression. In those cases, listening and validating may be more appropriate than assuming shared experience.

Non-verbal communication

- Facial expressions convey a great deal, sometimes in ways that are unintended. Consider what a smile, an eye-roll, or a frown communicates. A student teacher may consciously or unconsciously look for visual cues from the cooperating teacher, so expressions should be chosen carefully, especially when a teaching experience doesn't go as intended.
- Body language and sounds such as sighing have a similar impact. Cooperating teachers need to be aware of these signals and make conscious choices in their nonverbal communication.
- Choices such as leaving the room, attending to other matters (for example, reading emails, texts, or papers), or disengaging from the classroom can send a strong message. Cooperating teachers should consider what those actions communicate.

Impact on the Classroom Environment and Students

Students also perceive these nonverbal cues, and those from marginalized groups often read adult nonverbal cues closely to gauge safety and respect; supporting student teachers to send positive, consistent signals helps create more equitable classroom climates. Cooperating or mentor teachers must consider the message being sent to students about the student

teacher or intern and the learning experience underway. For example, students who see the cooperating or mentor teacher checking email during a lesson may perceive the experience as unimportant. Students who see the cooperating or mentor teacher frown or sigh during a lesson may assume the student teacher or intern is doing a poor job, especially early in the student teaching or internship period.

Paying attention to the following nonverbal behaviors—toward both student teachers and students—will significantly increase your success as a cooperating teacher:

Eye contact: Making eye contact with your student teacher conveys attentiveness and respect. It signals that you're present, engaged, and valuing their input, which can boost their confidence, especially when they're seeking validation or clarification.

Facial expression: Facial expressions communicate approval, concern, encouragement, or understanding without words. A warm, open expression helps your student teacher feel comfortable asking questions or expressing uncertainty.

Proximity and space: Standing or sitting at a respectful, comfortable distance demonstrates approachability while respecting personal boundaries. Moving closer during collaboration can signal support and availability, while stepping back during instruction shows trust in the student teacher's autonomy.

Silence: Purposeful silence provides space for reflection and response. It allows your student teacher to process feedback or problem-solve independently, promoting critical thinking and confidence in their decisions.

Smiling: A simple, genuine smile communicates encouragement, reassurance, and approachability. It can ease tension, foster a positive learning environment, and reinforce that mistakes are part of learning.

Together, these nonverbal behaviors build trust, model professional interactions, and support your student teacher's growth in a calm, respectful, and empowering manner. As the student teacher grows professionally, they'll be observed by students, university supervisors,

administrators, and you as the cooperating teacher. Be mindful that the verbal and nonverbal communication they perceive supports this professional growth.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Fletcher, S. (2004). Mentoring in schools: a handbook of good practice. London: UK, New York, NY. Retrieved partially from: https://books.google.com/books/about/Mentoring_in_Schools.html?id=rKm_VPp2Sy4C

Knapp, M. L., Hall, J. A., & Horgan, T. G. (2014). Nonverbal communication in human interaction. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262451645_Nonverbal_Communication_in_Humans

Stone, D., Heen, S., & Patton, B. (2010). Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most. Penguin. Retrieved from: <https://siliconflatirons.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Difficult-Conversations-Chapters-1-5.pdf>

Resources

[What is Active Listening?](#)

[12 steps to become a better listener](#)

[The Art of Nonverbal Communication in Practice](#)

[The Power of Mindful Nonverbal Communication](#)

[10 Steps to Effective Listening](#)

[Body Language–Understanding Non-verbal Communication](#)

[Communicating with your Mentee](#)

[The Top 15 Most Effective Communication Techniques and Strategies](#)

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[Enhancing Communication for Diverse Learners Through Multimodal Learning – TeachersFirst Blog](#)

[Diversity in the Classroom: Teaching, Types, & Examples | AU](#)

[Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #2](#)

[Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #3](#)

[Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #4](#)

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the microcredential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and be proficient in all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

350-500 words

Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the contextual questions below. This will help our assessor understand your current context for this microcredential.

Please don't include any information that will identify you to reviewers.

Please respond to:

1. How do you currently use, notice, or react to nonverbal cues from the people in your life? Give two examples.
2. Describe a situation in which you've effectively used either mirroring or empathizing and explain why it was effective.
3. Describe a situation you could've handled better by paying attention to nonverbal cues and how that attention would've made a difference.

Passing: The response answers all three questions and includes relevant examples from personal experience.

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Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following two artifacts as evidence of your learning.

Please don't include any information that will identify you or your students to reviewers.

Artifact 1: Scenario

Read the scenario below, then rewrite Mark's responses so he uses mirroring and empathy to help Jerome feel supported and more successful during parent-teacher conferences. For each of Mark's revised lines, identify at least one technique used (for example, mirroring, empathizing, tone of voice).

Scenario

The student teacher, Jerome, is concerned about upcoming parent-teacher conferences. He wants to talk to his cooperating teacher, Mark, about his concerns.

Jerome: I'm a little worried about the parent-teacher conferences. The parents I've met at school events so far keep commenting on how young I look, and it makes me feel like they doubt my competence as a beginning teacher.

Mark: Oh, don't worry about that. Have a little confidence in yourself!

Jerome: It will be challenging to talk with a few parents whose students are struggling, and I'm worried they'll think that I'm way off base about what I need to discuss with them.

Mark: There's no reason to worry. When I was a student teacher, my cooperating teacher disappeared into the teacher's lounge most of the time I was at school, including the parent conferences. You should feel lucky I'll be there, so stop worrying.

Jerome: Okay. Thanks.

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Artifact 2: Observation

Spend 15-30 minutes in one setting, such as a classroom, staff meeting, or coffee shop. List five nonverbal cues observed, an analysis of the potential message conveyed, and a strategy to strengthen the communication.

Example strategies:

- Eye contact
- Listening without jumping in
- Mirroring
- Empathizing
- Relating to the situation
- Proximity and space
- Word choice
- Tone of voice

When creating your artifact, use a format similar to below.

Observation setting:

Time spent:

	Non-verbal cue observed	Potential message conveyed	Suggested strategy
1			
2			

Artifact 3: Consideration for Communication

Describe the demographics of your classroom and students, including age, grade, language levels, academic needs, or other aspects that affect communication. Explain how the background or demographics of your classroom impact communication. Based on your experience, create a visual representation or one-pager to share with student teachers that communicates the unique communication needs of your group of students.

Include:

- At least three demographic groups in your classroom

- Characteristics to be aware of for each group (for example, gender identity, culture, trauma-informed needs, religion, disabilities, and language)
- At least one specific communication strategy for each group

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Scenario	Rewrites both of Mark's lines. Each new line demonstrates at least one communication technique effectively (for example, eye contact, listening without jumping in, mirroring, empathizing, relating to the situation, proximity and space, word choice, tone of voice). The technique is specifically identified and clearly demonstrated in the writing.	Rewrites both of Mark's lines. Each line names at least one listening or communication technique, but the technique isn't clearly used in the new line.	Rewrites both of Mark's lines, but the lines don't demonstrate any listening or communication technique effectively, and techniques aren't identified.
Artifact 2: Observation	Observation includes at least five nonverbal cues with potential messages and communication strategies for each. Strategies are relevant to the context.	One or more of the following: not all actions relate to nonverbal communication; not all parts (cue, message, strategy) are completed; strategies aren't specific or relevant to the context.	Observations don't relate to nonverbal communication.
Artifact 3: Consideration for Communication	Includes at least three demographic groups, each	Includes three demographic groups with a brief explanation of why each group may need	Includes fewer than three demographic groups. Explanations of why

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	clearly explained or defined. For each group, provides an explanation of why differentiated communication is needed and identifies at least one specific communication strategy.	differentiated communication. Specific communication strategies are defined for only one or two groups.	differentiated communication are brief, and specific communication strategies aren't identified for groups.
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Part 3 Reflection

350-500 words

Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this microcredential. For tips on writing a strong reflection, review the following resource:

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

Please don't include any information that will identify you to reviewers.

Reflect on what you learned about verbal and nonverbal communication by addressing:

1. What impact will understanding and effectively using verbal and nonverbal communication have on you as a cooperating teacher?
2. How will you use the skills you've acquired in this microcredential with your family, colleagues, or in other settings?

Passing: The response clearly illustrates how communication strategies were used to build a relationship with another person and how understanding nonverbal communication can be applied across various settings.