The Power of Hidden Language

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ABSTRACT: *How a teacher responds and communicates to a student often sets the tone, climate, and culture of a person's educational journey for years to come. This does not just entirely deal with the interactions that take place between a teacher and student for a school term. People's memories of experiencing a terrific or terrible educator are often etched into their minds. Quite simply, no one forgets a good or bad teacher.*

The power of hidden language has a lot to do with the type of rapport that will be established between teachers and students. Without it, poor communication, ineffective behavioral responses, and negative attitudes toward learners constantly manifest through the cannons of implicit or explicit language. A teacher's mannerism, behavior, and expressions to learners convey whether or not the teacher cares for them. Most certainly, students pick up on such a "vibe" whenever an educator is in front of them and "doesn't like them."

To reaffirm the establishment of an excellent learning environment while supporting the academic needs and excellence of students, patience, support, and love are necessary to build social capital between students and teachers. Student fallibilities should be seen as genuine human responses apart of a person's learning curve whether than an innate genetic deficit or racial bias lens. Without improving the power of language in a classroom space, cafeteria, or building, negative behaviors between students and teachers will continue to interfere with the teaching and learning process.

I. INTRODUCTION

What does the power of language really mean? When classroom participants harbor responsive body language, tone, and verbal interaction, it creates a quality learning space. The occurrence of yielding such a positive culture and climate in a classroom also communicates to school members, teachers, and students are synced. Theoretically speaking, learning and teaching is enjoyable for people sharing space when they are connected and have a rapport. Billings (2009) examines this concept discussing explicit and implicit language. Explicit language is the open responsive mannerism and tone not hidden from learners. It surfaces when students first walk through the doors of a school building. The way a student is treated upon their entry usually determines what kind of day they will have. That is why it is extremely important for teachers, security personnel, and support staff to exhibit pleasant attitudes and positive behavioral responses when they encounter students because sometimes learners harbor a lot of internal dynamics that impact them prior to their arrival to school, e.g. personal challenges, family issues, social anxieties (Kunjufu, 2002). Implicit language, on the other hand, deals with the concealed way teachers mask or attempt to hide their direct feelings and attitudes toward learners. An example of implicit language occurs when a teacher returns graded papers to students or the way an instructor looks at them. Neither explicit nor implicit language is considered always negative. There are great examples of how explicit and implicit language empowers students' responses in a classroom (Kohl 1995).
The way teachers communicate and interact with students is never hidden.

Students know when a teacher feels a certain way about them. Delpit (2006) in her text, *Other People's Children* reinforces this notion saying, "How do I commit myself to achieve, to work hard over time in school, if I cannot predict when or under what circumstances this hard work will be acknowledged and recognized?" (45). Teachers possess a lot of power and influence in a classroom and should never think or somehow believe students in front of them do not know that. When students of color receive a fair amount of equitable voice and choice in a classroom, it empowers their connection to their teacher. It further allows for a great learning

environment.

Billing (2009) furthers this explanation referring to this as assimilation versus responsive teaching. For Billings, assimilation instruction is when teachers apply mainstream or traditional responses toward students. Similar to explicit language, assimilation teaching is a very direct and an assertive communicative tone of language dismissive toward children of color. Often the case, it says to black and brown children, "listen, I really do not want to be bothered so do this or else." Responsive language, on the other hand, "meets" the student where they are at supporting their needs in a respectable and equitable manner. Implicit language in this case can be used to uplift or devalue a student. Refer to the table below to review an example:

Student Behavior	Assimilation	Responsive
A student consistently has missing work and difficulty engaging in class.	The teacher consistently marks the student tardy and sends notes to parents and the dean's office to document behavior. The teacher never once consults or talks with the student.	The teacher creates a homework folder in the classroom where the student can submit completed work and receive new assignments. The student can turn in work to this folder during or after class for feedback.
The student talks out of turn, at times, during class conversations and takes longer to start a lesson.	The teacher verbally redirects the student with a seemingly look of frustration on his or her face.	The teacher, whenever possible, provides the learner with written feedback (e.g. Write on his or her homework or a post-it note placing it onto the student's desk during class.) Use more praise one-on-one to establish rapport.
The student continues to have several missing assignments and encounters challenges submitting work on time.	The teacher consistently reminds the student of missing work and directs them to stay on tasks in front of his or her peers.	The teacher informs the student when a check-in will take place regarding his or her work. (e.g. We are starting this writing assignment at 10:20 am, and I will walk by your desk to check-in.)
The student seems sad, frustrated, and almost depressed, neither engaging in class or positively engages with his or her peers.	The teacher refers the student to school counselor, documents their behavior, and gossips with colleagues regarding the learner's non-responsiveness in class.	The teacher provides unconditional support. He or she remains consistent monitoring the learners' responses in a positive manner and engages the student in meaningful dialogue

Figure 1: Assimilation versus Responsive Teaching

What these examples illustrate is that when teachers care about the whole learning process, students are better prepared to engage more effectively in class. Classrooms, in this manner, emerge more significant and enjoyable for the student to experience. This also increases the opportunity for a learner to exhibit high performance to not only please their teacher, but also prove their intellectual worthiness. Shujja (1994) refers to this as efficacy, where learners value the teacher and the class because supportive systems have emerged. Such an occurrence is further produced by an educator's ability to have a great rapport with their pupil to produce and advance desired learning outcomes. The power of hidden language varies on so many levels. It especially matters with how teachers directly or indirectly positively communicate with their students.

"If You Don't Like Me…

There is a lot to be said about when a teacher and student both possess an attitude or personal discomfort between themselves. From a person's tone of voice, "rolling of eyes," behavioral posturing and mannerism, facial expressions, or all of the aforementioned things occurring at the same time, students get it when a teacher "don't like them." Research shows over and over again how children of color must believe a teacher "likes them" believing in their abilities while also wanting their presence felt in a classroom (Delpit, 2006) Too many times students of color are left with positions of uncertainty when they encounter teachers unfamiliar or different from their cultural standing. As a result, behavioral problems emerge causing a personal clash between the educators and students. Often the case, a person, anyone for that matter, can walk into a classroom or schoolhouse and intuitively "feel" such tensions. This is why it is important for educators to build cultural capital and personal relationships with students (Ali, 2016; Billings, 2009).

The application of a cultural value driven pedagogy (CVD) helps an educator navigate the personal, cultural, and behavioral challenges found in a classroom. (Ali and Murphy, 2013). For one, a cultural responsive pedagogy (CRP) and CVD allows an educator to look through the lens of a student embracing their identity,

perspectives, and behavior (Billing, 2009). When one values another person's identity what it simply says is that they are cared and recognized for who they are. Enter the power of hidden language where a teacher's passive voice, facial expressions, and demeanor dictate how a student will relate and connect with them. Sure, teachers are "people to" and deserve to make mistakes and display a little attitude every now and than to get kids to conform.

Teachers are not robots and should never be monitored or treated like one. Yet and still, it is the personal side of teaching that provides students with a chance to connect with an adult in a room that values them as a whole person. Teaching students brings along with it a humanitarianism that allows the members in a space to enjoy a symbiotic connection. Without integrating the value of the equity of voice for a student, it exercises auspicious judgment to those within the space while prohibiting learners from becoming a part of a classroom experience. Think about it for a minute: Whenever a person finds it easy to relate and identify with someone different from them, a more effective relationship and level of communication emerge between these people. It is no different in education, similar to a marriage, because without the establishment of an effective connection a relationship will either dissolve or no longer exist.

Unfortunately, the learning gap seen in education may also have something to do with this problem. According to Emdin's (2016) review of teacher and student relationships, a great deal is tied with the way educators' perceive their students. Teacher expectations and attitudes toward learners directly communicate how much success a student will have within their space. Not surprising, the study further suggests that students can sense when an educator projects low expectations of them. If adults around young people expect them to fail, it becomes a "self-fulfilled prophecy." Other problems emerge for students already struggling with race and identity causing them to become even more inadequate or irrelevant. Sadly, this is when a school day for a student can become too much of a burden and taxing. Dropout rates and low achievement from minorities, especially black males only confirm and document this crisis (Hacker, 2003; Koziol, 2006). A study produced by Nicholas Papageorge from Hopkins University cites that, "The white teacher is less likely by 30% to assume that a Black student would graduate from a four-year college. The white teachers were also 40% less likely to believe a Black student would graduate from high school" (Segal, 2014). If you are minority entering a class with one of these educators you are "damn if you do and damn if you don't." When a student of color believes the teacher does not like them they shut down. As such, great strides are being made by teacher college programs and professional development seminars to stress the implementation of CRP and CVD model to augment this very real problem. Without it, too many white educators will continue to have low expectations and "bad attitudes" toward minority learners.

Brown v. Board of Education and Racism

With the passage of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, considerable pushback from segments of the nation emerged (Kunjufu, 2002). Certain communities welcomed the change as a chance or way to integrate people restricted to specific spaces; whereas, other individuals resented the idea of being forced to interact with a person of color (Cashin, 2004). How much has changed since this decision remains to be seen with the way black and brown educators and students are treated in this system (Ali, 2016). The Brown decision was suppose to "clear the air" and provide new opportunities to minorities. This is not to say or suggest great strides have not been made from this 52-years old ruling. Yet, it is sad to learn that the learning gap, low expectations, MIA Black and Brown teachers, and suspension rates are prevalent despite the progress achieved on race relations in education (Ali, 2016). Strategy, effective planning, and teacher training are needed to direct teachers to work with struggling students meeting them where they are at rather than not believing in them at all and teaching "down" to them.

The ugly word called racism also needs to emerge with this conversation. Too many times educators are granted an excuse for why they harbor negative positions toward children of color (Delpit, 2011). From Delpit's (2011) perspectives, educators that do not believe black children cannot do math or any subject for that matter should not have a job as a teacher to begin with. As she puts it, "Every human brain has the built-in capacity to become, over time, what we demand of it. No ability is fixed. Practice can even change the brain" (9). If there exists a notion that everybody or anyone can learn and achieve, why is it that children of color are constantly viewed as possessing inferior intelligence? Educators believing any student, for that matter, cannot learn from them pose a real danger to society's economic structure. Nations need kids dropping into theeconomy to become productive citizens rather than dropping out to rob them. A nation pays more for exiting kids out versus keeping them in school. Delpit continues this line of reasoning saying, "As a result of this "racism smog," many of our children have internalized all of the negative stereotypes inherent in our society's views of

black people" (65). What racism continues to do is teach some educators that black kids cannot learn and are a behavior problem. Especially if students tend to come from a challenged zip code or poor economic environment where crime is riddled, there are many skeptics that surface in education believing such a student will not get it no matter what they do. Something else is also going on here besides the evil word, racism.

"Hidden Space"

Another area of concern that exhibits the power of hidden language resonates inside a teacher's cafeteria or lounge area. It is here where teachers unleash their "hidden" sentiments about particular students, especially when the student causes them grief in a classroom. This is not to say teachers do not get to "vent" or discuss their challenges with particular learners. However, such an exercise should constructively exist with a mentor or supportive peer. The project for *Teaching Tolerance from the Southern Poverty Law Center* provides a perspective about the dangers of non-constructive "venting" or an exercise of unrestricted "free thoughts" with a troubling example of

> "A fellow teacher made a joke to other staff about the band students, referring to them as 'band fags.' Needless to say, I told him it wasn't funny and certainly not appropriate. A colleague I barely knew expressed sadness that his Jewish and Hindu students were all going to hell [based on his Christian beliefs]. I was left breathless. It took me a few seconds to recover enough to tell him—firmly but gently—that I did not share that belief, for a lot of reasons" (http://www.tolerance.org/publication/location)

Clearly reading this is very concerning and supports the notion that no spaceshould exist anywhere in a building for a teacher to direct racial and damming comments about students. However when this behavior goes unchecked, it incriminates the profession while filtering to new practitioners it is safe to share other disgusting viewpoints about students. From negatively discussing students' parents or siblings to poking fun at their intellectual incapability and academic shortcomings, "everything goes" when teachers feel comfortable airing their "dirty" views about kids.

Students' futures are also discussed in these settings where educators forecast certain learners' post school outcomes. Statements such as, "You know he will never amount to anything, look at where he lives" to "why waste anymore energy on these kids? They are not going to do nothing anyway!" are destructive and despite appearing invisible find themselves apart of other teacher's sub-conscious, which eventually affects and damages a school culture and climate. Literally speaking, an educator hearing this madness has to detox prior to ever first meeting a student being discussed in this way; otherwise, the teacher and student will also have a challenging experience.

"This Is Why I Don't Like You…"

Herbert Kohl (2009) explores this issue in his text, "*I Won't Learn From You*" describing the way teachers sometimes treat students of color. Kohl argues that how an educator operates in a classroom often dictates the amount of growth a student will have. When students believe their teacher "don't like" them they internalize this as being a bad person (Delpit, 2011). Hence, some students when they feel this way do not have a problem with making their teacher's life a "living hell" in that classroom. Teaching is a tough business as Kohl mentions, which is why educators from his perspective must look through the lens of their student to "Really see through our eyes or hear through our ears… To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment" (35). Teachers have to see their students as they see themselves. They have to know they possess flaws, make errors, and need support. More important, everyone's lot in life is different and should never be purposefully judged from where they come from. To deny this fact is to deny what makes us human. As a result, it is imperative for schools and college programs to identify and recognize this as apart of teacher preparedness to exorcise such negative perceptions.

How does this occur? Schools and college programs must frame and establish professional development seminars and training sessions that offer teachers support and encouragement. In addition, educators have to become accustomed with and supported to identify effective measurable outcomes that sustain their existence and encourage their growth. When this does not occur, teachers burn out and remain as anxiety riddled folks trying to keep their jobs. Receiving a "bad crop" of students, from their perspective, does not make

matters easier. Of course this is not saying any student should ever be considered "bad," but what is being argued here is teachers working in low performing schools or possessing a greater number of struggling students in their classroom become a bit more judgmental toward their learners (Kohl, 2009). This is where the problem emerges of "hidden messaging" because students pick up on this right away. What could alleviate or reduce such anxiety are better pay, mentoring from teachers, and smaller class sizes of struggling students. Yet, "the system" wants teachers to do more with less, which wounds up dwindling right down to the educator present in front of students of color. With the pressure of being "fired" everyday from having to achieve benchmarks, test scores, and improve grade performance, particularly in non-unionized contract and charter schools, someone has to catch this attitude. In this case, it is the children of color that receive this negative messaging (Ali, 2016). Similar to a parent having a bad day at work and bringing their attitude home to their spouse and children, far too many educators are also doing the same thing.

Rather than applying unrealistic measurable benchmarks toward teachers that have students with low academic skills, the establishment of quality and fair benchmarks enhance the opportunity of an educator to successfully work with students. No one can ever determine what "card hand" they are being dealt when it comes to acquiring a classroom. Although very few experienced teachers have been afforded the opportunity or privilege to teach advanced placement, honor, or select enrolled population, most educators receive their students as they are. This is where realistic benchmarks strengthen teachers' quantification of their progress in an effective measurable way because when a school community agrees with how they plan to assess their performance based outcomes to the district and public, it creates a distressed and equitable environment for everyone involved.

Instead of always relying on a test to set the trend about how effective teachers are with their students, measurable outcomes need to become more diverse and supportive of teachers to build their confidence and control of the profession they once possessed (Ali, 2016). Some schools are taking this by the "bulls horn" seeing the value of teachers working collaboratively to develop reasonable benchmarks through school improvement plans. Unfortunately, other districts remain staunch about "sticking it" to educators demanding improved test results or else leading to many in the field to flee or stay with reluctance. When a teacher stays where they believe they are failing or seen as ineffective, this leads them to feeling like a student in a classroom with a teacher that "don't like them." The result of this is that negative attitudes of scorn, hurt, and bitterness recycle in a classroom like a deadly tidal wave off the coast of South Africa.

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