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## Micro-Expressions and Teacher–Student Communication: A Hidden Layer of Pedagogy

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### ABSTRACT

Education can be thought of as a knowledge transfer process that is largely based on verbal instruction, curriculum, and assessment. But classroom communication is much more than just talking. Short, uncontrolled facial gestures that reveal true feelings, micro-expressions have an insidious but significant influence on teacher-student relationships. This document examines the importance of micro-expressions in the educational setting based on the psychological theories of nonverbal communication, the groundbreaking work of Paul Ekman, and pedagogical literature on the interaction in the classroom. With the analysis of how such short emotional cues influence perception, trust, motivation and cognitive engagement, the article claims that micro-expressions represent a neglected aspect of educational practice. The paper also brings out the implications on the training of teachers, learning management in classrooms, and learning in fair ways

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### Introduction

The educational process is based on communication, but it does not just involve language. Tone, gesture, posture, and facial expression are common types of teacher communication, and teachers may be unaware of their use. In turn, students react not only to say but to how to say. Micro-expressions have a special place among the nuances of the nonverbal message: it is an involuntary reaction, a facial movement that can denote an emotion of anger, fear, delight, or disgust and takes less than one second.



Micro-expressions may be a decisive factor in transmission and reception of knowledge in the context of teacher-student interaction. Even an involuntary moment of disillusionment on the face of the teacher can be demoralizing to a student. On the other hand, a quick smile or show of support may boost motivation and interest. In comparison to explicit communication tactics, micro-expressions are involuntary and in many ways beyond control, hence they are quite effective and hard to control.

This paper aims to deconstruct the phenomenon of micro-expressions in education by highlighting the psychological underpinning of the concept, their effect on classroom relationships, and the possibility of using them as a means of enhancing teaching performance.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***1. Micro-Expressions in Psychology***

Micro-expressions were first studied in psychology, specifically by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen, who found that there were universal facial expressions associated with the fundamental emotions. The micro-expressions according to Ekman, are the spill-over of actual emotional situations, which are in many cases contrary to what one has said. To put it in another way, somebody who approves verbally might, in a fraction of a second, express contempt or frustration in micro-expressions, showing a more significant emotional truth that.

### ***2. Nonverbal Communication in Education***

Educational psychology appreciates the importance of nonverbal communication in instruction. The communication model proposed by Mehrabian notoriously suggests that a high percentage of communication is nonverbal, that is, it is characterized by tone and body language. Eye contact, gestures and posture are nonverbal signals in the classroom that help build authority, empathy and rapport. Micro-expressions take this line of view a step further, providing it with a finer level of detail: micro-expressions display the true emotions of the teachers even when they are trying to be neutral.

### ***3. Pedagogical Relevance***

Pedagogy is not just the delivery of content, but also relationship. Whether you like it or not, students are extremely sensitive when it comes to the emotional conditions of their teachers. Unconscious cues of rejection, favoritism or excitement can have an impact on participation and performance. Micro-expressions are equally important as a measure of attitude and intent in culturally diverse classrooms, in which language barriers might be present..



## **Micro-Expressions in Teacher–Student Interactions**

### ***1. Emotional Leakage in Teaching***

The profession of teaching requires emotional work. It is the expectation of teachers to remain calm, uplifting, and balanced, despite their backgrounds or teaching experiences, and to continue to be so even in the toughest of situations. But these micro-expressions may be deceitful of hidden emotions such as annoyance with a problematic student, or disillusionment with poor results, and even a wish to favor someone. Such moments can be as brief as under a second, but students tend to notice them and believe they are significant.

### ***2. Trust and Authenticity***

Micro-expressions have the ability to build or destroy trust between teacher and student. Trust is increased when students believe that a teacher is saying what they are showing in their facial expressions. Quite to the contrary, even verbal encouragement followed by a short display of contempt can lead to confusion and mistrust. This is especially essential in the context of adolescent instruction when students are very sensitive to perceived authenticity..

### ***3. Classroom Climate***

The compound effect of micro-expressions is added to the general classroom culture. A teacher who has a habit of showing stress or frustration on his face can lead to a tense atmosphere, which makes participation difficult. On the other hand, even tiny gestures of joy, pride or amazement can promote learning and passion. Since micro-expressions are usually subconscious, teachers might not even know the extent to which emotional leakage influences the classroom..

## **Impact of Micro-Expressions on Learning Outcomes**

### **1. Cognitive Engagement**

The way students feel their teachers are emotionally invested in them is closely associated with their participation in the learning process. Small signs of interest, enthusiasm or curiosity e.g. raised eyebrows or wider eyes give students a clue that the topic they are talking about is exciting. Such signals can help in better attention, which results in better understanding and memorization. On the other hand, the students will be demotivated and lose concentration or even develop the same attitude with the material as a result of micro-expressions of boredom or frustration.



When a teacher presents a new concept in math using micro-expressions of happiness and interest, students tend to reflect the feelings and feel like the lesson is not an imposition but a way to discover something. Conversely, when the teacher expresses the feeling of contempt or irritation unwillingly, even when giving verbal encouragement to students, the message they get may not be one of encouragement.

## **2. Emotional Regulation and Student Confidence**

The process of learning is not a purely cognitive process but more of an emotion. Students are characterized by anxiety, self-doubt and fear of failure. The micro-expressions of teachers may either support these feelings of insecurity or neutralize them with some reassurance. An example of this is the brief smile or display of pride when a shy student manages to answer a question, as this can help in building his/her confidence in a great way.

Meanwhile, adverse micro-expressions, e.g., a transient frown, can intensify the feelings of insecurity among students, especially those who are younger or belong to a minority group and may already feel insecure about their academic performance. Therefore, micro-expressions play a silent role as either reinforcements or discouraging behaviors in the development of student self-esteem.

## **3. Equity and Bias in Classrooms**

The educational equity area is one of the most important and under-researched implications of micro-expressions. Studies indicate that teachers (as well as everyone) might have unintentional prejudices against any race, gender, or socioeconomic status. As explicit discrimination becomes more identified and addressed, micro-expressions tend to display implicit attitudes that are inconsistent with overt promises of fairness.

One instance of this is where a teacher may purposefully strive to treat all students equally but may have micro-expressions of frustration, which are brief, more frequently directed at particular groups of students. Students may interpret these cues, whether intentional or not, as microaggressions of exclusion or disapproval and help perpetuate inequities in participation and performance. It highlights the significance of creating awareness of how micro-expressions are relevant to reinforcing or dismantling systemic biases.

### **Challenges and Misinterpretations**

#### **1. Ambiguity of Micro-Expressions**



Although micro-expressions are typically thought of as universal, their meaning can be different across different cultural settings, or in individual perceptions. Even a momentary look of confusion, say, could be taken out of context by a student as an expression of condemnation. The same way, a micro-expression of surprise on the behalf of a teacher can be understood as ridicule instead of encouragement. The lack of clarity of these cues renders them effective, as well as dangerous in the pedagogical context..

## **2. Cognitive Load on Teachers**

Teaching already creates great multitasking behavior: controlling classroom behavior, providing content, testing student comprehension, and emotionally supporting. Asking teachers to be aware of their micro-expressions creates an extra load of cognitive load that might not be attainable. In addition, by definition, micro-expressions are uncontrollable, and it is not possible to fully control them. The task is not necessarily to remove micro-expressions but to learn to understand the self and control emotions.

## **3. Risk of Over-Interpretation**

In particular, students, and adolescents in particular, can interpret the facial cues of their teachers. Even a momentary expression of disillusionment might be enlarged in the mind of the pupil into some extended epic of failure or rejection. Likewise, parents/administrators who strive to make conclusions about teachers based on micro-expressions without understanding the situation can make unjustified conclusions. It is therefore possible that over-interpretation may distort classroom dynamics rather than clarify them.

## **Applications in Classroom Practice**

### **1. Teacher Self-Awareness Training**

Training modules on nonverbal communication including micro-expressions can be included in professional development programs. The goal of such training is not to stop emotional leakage but to assist teachers to identify patterns in their own behavior. Self-reflection activities, which can include video, can also potentially help teachers track their unintended expressions of frustration or disengagement. Consciousness is the initial step to more conscious regulation of emotions.

### **2. Building Empathy through Micro-Expression Recognition**

The teachers also would learn to read the micro-expressions of the students. Students tend to hide their plight linguistically and will claim to know a concept when they do not. An expression of perplexity,



transient as it is, may be a false sign of real trouble. Teachers can be more effective in intervening by becoming sensitive to these signals in order to provide clarification or encouragement at the appropriate time..

### **3. Classroom Management and Conflict Resolution**

Micro-expressions may act as precursors of classroom management. A student who is on the brink of disruptive behavior might show short expressions of annoyance or scorn. These cues can help teachers to recognize the conflict before it can escalate to the point of open disruption. Similarly, small gestures of relaxation and sympathy on the teacher side will help to defuse the situation and make it more relaxed in the classroom.

### **4. Integration with Technology**

Recent advancements in technologies (e.g. emotion-recognition software, AI-based video analysis) open the prospect of implementing micro-expression analysis in the classroom. Such tools might be an ethical gray area, but they would help teachers to understand the emotional communication of their own communication. An example of this would be a software program that examines video recordings of the lesson to point out instances of teachers unwittingly showing contempt or disapproval. Such tools, in responsible use, might complement the practices of reflective teaching.

### **Case Studies and Illustrative Examples**

#### **Case 1: The Encouraging Smile**

A teacher visits a middle school science class and this time targets a low-participation student who is quiet and shy. The learner does not start immediately and starts explaining something. The answer is not complete, but the teacher involuntarily shows you a micro-expression of pride raised cheeks and a short smile. The student perceives this unobtrusive supportive feature and proceeds further with increased confidence. The student becomes more involved in the process over time, which is how a micro-expression can prompt positive behavioral change.

#### **Case 2: The Frown of Disapproval**

In the other case, a teacher in a high school describes a math problem. One of the learners gives a wrong response. Even though the teacher is telling them, verbally, that they have made a good attempt, the facial expression involuntarily displays a micro-expression of frustration; a short frown and tight lips. As the



student picks the cue, they pull out of the play, understanding that the teacher is emotionally bleeding and thinks they are being disapproved of. This case demonstrates the possible adverse effects of automatic micro-expressions.

### **Case 3: Cultural Misinterpretation**

A micro-expression of surprise is shown by a teacher in a culturally diverse classroom when a student gives a response which is unusual and highly advanced. Although it is meant to be flattering, the student perceives it as non-belief or doubt making him/her feel insecure. This example highlights the sensitivity of culture in the reading of micro-expressions..

### **Implications for Teacher Training**

#### **1. Emotional Intelligence in Teacher Education**

The traditional way of teacher training focuses on subject knowledge and teaching methods. The little impact of micro-expressions, however, hints at the idea that emotional intelligence should become the focus of teacher education. Emotional intelligence would involve self awareness, self regulation, empathy, and social skills all of which apply directly to nonverbal communication. The skills will help teachers to become more efficient in using their own emotional expressiveness and react to the students more empathetically in the manner the students need.

#### **2. Reflective Practice**

Reflective teaching also motivates teachers to examine their personal classroom behavior, including how they nonverbally communicate. Teachers can be able to understand the different impacts of their own micro-expressions on their interactions with students through journaling, observation by their peers or video evaluation. In such a way, watching a recorded lesson can show recurring instances of irritation that might manifest itself in situations of classroom noise—a fact that would not have been noticed in practice. The awareness creates the conscious focus on emotion regulation and communication..

#### **3. Role-Playing and Simulation**

Role-playing games may serve to allow the teachers to train on responding to classroom situations whilst considering micro-expressions. As an example, when a student provides an incorrect response in a simulation teachers can train to remain encouraging in their facial expressions instead of unintentionally showing dislike. Likewise, educators can be taught to read between the lines of a student who appears to



be confused or lost in the lesson, and can then respond by making appropriate changes in their teaching methods.

#### 4. Addressing Teacher Well-Being

Micro-expressions are considered to be a side effect of stress and emotional tension. A teacher who is burnt out and overworked might end up expressing frustration or exhaustion unintentionally, which the students view as negativity. Thus, in addition to the health of the educators themselves, teacher well-being is of significance in maintaining a healthy teacher-student dialogue. The concept of professional development should thus include strategies of emotional resilience, mindfulness and stress management..

#### Conclusion

Micro-expressions are an invisible, but effective, aspect of teacher-student communication. They may be brief and unintentional, but they contain emotional facts that have a tremendous impact on how students view their teachers, themselves, and the process of learning. Even a little scowl can put an end to engagement, whereas a micro-smile can set fire to confidence. These small cases add up to build up with time, classroom climate, student motivation, and educational equity.

Micro-expression awareness is a challenge and an opportunity to teachers. Totally controlling involuntary facial cues is farfetched, but through increased awareness of emotions, the negative effects can be reduced and the positive increased. Attention to micro-expressions of teachers can offer some slight guidance to students, but on the other hand, it can also be interpreted wrong.

Finally, the need to consider the importance of micro-expressions should also enable us to better comprehend the meaning of education as a knowledge sharing process as well as a human experience. With education systems across the globe grappling with the issues of inclusivity, equity and engagement, a call to examine this undervalued aspect of communication presents worthwhile contributions to the creation of more compassionate, authentic and capable classrooms.

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