

Nonviolent Communication Strategies in Education from the Perspective of Illocutionary Acts

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore how Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in teaching affects students' academic performance in the American movie *Stand and Deliver* and then raises three questions: (1) How teachers can actively participate in the teaching and learning process through NVC? (2) What NVC strategies are used by teachers in the film *Stand and Deliver*? (3) Whether NVC strategies are conducive to improving teaching efficiency and promoting students' knowledge absorption? Based on Illocutionary Act Theory and the NVC model, this paper applies three research methods, including literature review, qualitative description and illustration, to analyze the impact of NVC on teaching. The conclusion is that Nonviolent communication provides conditions for teachers and students to actively participate in the process of teaching and learning, and the teacher in the film adopts the NVC strategy of observation, feeling, need, and request expression, improving teaching efficiency and promoting students' knowledge absorption.

1. Introduction

Communication skills play a crucial role in education. Starting with the teacher-student relationship, it can help teachers understand the needs and problems of students, better supporting and guiding students. Academic performance is another force behind the use of this skill. In the process of education, effective communication facilitates students' understanding of knowledge imparted by teachers. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a communication mode with four elements of observations, feelings, needs, and requests, which was put forward by Marshall B. Rosenberg, who believes NVC is frequently applied to intimate or teacher-student relationships.

Directed by Ramon Menendez, *Stand and Delivery* is a movie, describing a high school mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante helps students from Hispanic neighborhoods to pass a difficult test. Initially, teenagers lack aspirations for academic performance but seek to express themselves via provocative behaviors. However, the teacher-student relationship has been gradually eased and students achieve amazing and proud performances in calculus examinations since Escalante puts his heart and soul into students' future. This movie mainly discusses the issues of emotion, listening, and

communication skills between students and teachers. *Stand and Deliver* is regarded as the best film in the 4th Independent Spirit Award, in which the teacher successfully stimulates the student's interest and imagination and creates active and harmonious classes. How can the teacher make it? That is why this thesis will explore NVC.

Based on NVC theory, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of teaching strategies and learning techniques in *Stand and Deliver*. Practically, these skills are conducive to promoting teacher-student communication, boosting trust between both sides, creating a harmonious classroom atmosphere, and helping students perform better. In this paper, there are three questions:

(1) From the perspective of NVC, how does the teacher in the film make him and his students actively participate in the teaching and learning process?

(2) In this film, what does the teacher use with the NVC strategies?

(3) Whether the NVC strategy adopted is conducive to improving teaching efficiency and promoting students' knowledge absorption?

Here are some research methods that would be included in this paper: documentation, qualitative description, and illustration. Using literature studies, documents related to NVC and illocutionary Act theory are collected first, to summarize the research development and find out the research gap. After preparation, qualitative description is employed to explore how NVC is used in the American movie *Stand and Deliver*, analyzing the teaching effect and students' performance through observation and interpretation. Finally, illustration is used to highlight that NVC is beneficial to a classroom environment and enhances the persuasion by typical facts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Development of NVC

According to Wikipedia, Rosenberg was inspired by some psychologists, including Erich Fromm, George Albee, and George Miller to adopt a community mode in his work. The main ideas that influenced Rosenberg were: 1) Fromm's opinion that the social structure of a community can have a great impact on individual mental health. 2) Albee's opinion is that the psychological needs of a community cannot be met by therapists only. 3) Miller's opinion that knowledge related to human behavior will increase with psychology given to the community freely. Initially, the NVC model restructured the student-teacher relationship to give students greater responsibility for and decision-making in their learning. With development over the years, it is now applied to power relationships, like employer-employee, and informal ones, such as men-women, parent-children, and so on. No matter what kind of relationship use the NVC model, the ultimate goal is to resolve conflicts, improve communication quality, and develop a harmonious relationship. In 2002, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion* by Rosenberg was published. While in the next year, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considered NVC as one of the world's best practices for nonviolent conflict resolution in formal and non-formal education.

2.2 Previous Study on NVC

Over the two decades, academics have placed significant importance on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and have conducted extensive research on its practical applications. This research has focused on various areas such as developing harmony between teachers and students, aiding parolees in developing and sustaining positive social support systems, instilling empathy in medical and nursing students to prevent hardship in their careers, resolving communication barriers, fostering emotional and interpersonal competencies, enhancing mother-child interactions for children with intellectual disabilities.

Cox [1] suggested that the NVC can alleviate various communication issues in e-mentoring relationships, such as virtual-classroom silence and other effects of a restricted sensory environment, impeding the growth of online mentor-student relationships. Also in 2010, Dong [2] agreed that the environment created by nonviolent communication is conducive to dialogue between instructors and students. Teachers are no longer the controllers of instruction but students' listeners to understand their psychological requirements. Students become active learners and subject developers. In 2012, when Marlow [3] explored the impact of NVC training on developing empathy of male parolees, they found that NVC could not only serve as a valuable supplement in substance abuse treatment programs for parolees but also manage maladaptive coping and communication patterns stemming from imprisonment and criminal conduct, as well as helping parolee build and sustain positive social support networks. In the aspect of NVC training for health care providers, Nosek, M. [4] conducted two-year interpretive research and probed that incorporating NVC into nursing education appeared to assist nursing students develop the ability to empathize with self and others and prevent future hardship in career. Museux, A. C. [5] found that after the NVC training program, participants from health and social services demonstrated an enhanced capacity to recognize the impacts of unscripted communication, a heightened comprehension of the underlying processes of empathy, and an improved ability to cultivate collaborative leadership. While Epinat-Duclos [6] and Sung [7] also confirmed that the NVC training program can improve subjective empathy and communication skills for medical and nursing students. In addition to the medical field, NVC also plays an important role in daily communication. Wacker and Dziobek [8] demonstrated that NVC training is an effective method for fostering emotional and interpersonal skills and preventing empathic distress and social stressors at work in individuals working in socio-emotionally demanding settings. In the field of mother-child relationships, Rezaei Z [9] pointed out that NVC training has a positive effect on the interaction between mothers and their children with intellectual disabilities.

To conclude, in the existing investigation and research, the research related to NVC is generally on doctorate-patient relationships, nurse-patient relationships, parent-child communication, and promoting teacher-student relationships. There are gaps in NVC research on how NVC is used by teachers and can play a significant role in students' academic performance. Therefore, this paper is going to look further into this new territory.

3. Introduction of the Illocutionary Acts and the NVC

According to JH Miller [10], Austin's Speech Acts are the actions performed via utterances, including locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Illocutionary will be emphasized since there are three illocutionary acts corresponding to four elements of NVC.

3.1 Searle's Five Classifications of the Illocutionary Acts

An illocutionary act refers to the use of a sentence to express an attitude with a certain function or "force," called an illocutionary force. This differs from locutionary acts in that illocutionary acts possess a certain urgency and appeal to the speaker's intended meaning and direction. Performative verbs such as "promise" or "request" are frequently utilized to explicitly convey illocutionary acts.

From Searle's view [11], there are five illocutionary points that speakers can achieve on propositions in an utterance, namely: the assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory, and expressive illocutionary points. Speakers achieve the assertive point when they represent how things are in the world, the commissive point when they commit themselves to do something, the directive point when they attempt to get hearers to do something, the declaratory point when they do things in the world at the moment of the utterance solely by saying that they do and the expressive point when they express their attitudes about objects and facts of the world.

3.2 Framework of Marshall Rosenberg's NVC

According to Mr. Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) involves articulating one's perspective without assigning blame or making a judgment about others, while also demonstrating empathy towards the perspective of others without being swayed by their criticisms. NVC contains four elements: observations, feelings, needs, and requests. And observations, feelings, and requests correspond to the illocutionary acts of assertive, expressive, and directive in speech act theory.

3.2.1 Observations

Rosenberg highlighted the importance of objectively describing the observed phenomenon without any biased opinions or evaluations of the individual's conduct. Searle's classification of illocutionary acts categorizes the act of describing an individual's observation as assertive within the context of interpersonal communication. To clarify, the term "assertive" refers to conveying a particular situation in illocutionary acts. The act of expressing a belief or proposition, whether through stating, claiming, hypothesizing, describing, telling, insisting, suggesting, asserting, or swearing, denotes a conviction in the truthfulness of a particular assertion. When performing assertive illocutionary acts, it is expected that the recipient's psychological disposition is one of acceptance and belief.

For example:

Sentence 1: I observed that you arrived late for the morning reading of class three times last week.

Sentence 2: Why are you such a lazy person?

The first sentence serves as a foundation of factual observation, allowing for continued communication within the context of the observed reality. However, the second sentence displays the speaker's subjective comment with an unfriendly tone, possibly causing the listener's negative emotions and subsequently impeding communication.

3.2.2 Feelings and Needs

Rosenberg emphasized that a person's feelings were essentially derived from whether the person's needs were met. Instead of criticizing or blaming others during communication, individuals should focus on expressing their physical and emotional sentiments truthfully. These two elements correspond to the expressive of illocutionary acts, which expresses the speaker's mental state regarding an event assumed to be true, such as congratulating, thanking, deploring, condoling, welcoming, and apologizing. Specifically, such behavior implies that the speaker is in a particular mental state.

For example:

Sentence 1: I was disappointed that you didn't show up last night.

Sentence 2: I was disappointed that you didn't come last night because I wanted to talk to you about something worrisome.

The former contains an allegation directed toward the recipient. Whereas the latter acknowledges the veracity of the assertion that "you did not attend last night" and subsequently expresses the desire that "I" want to discuss something wrong with you remains unfulfilled. Then the recipient can accurately comprehend the requirements of the sender. Therefore, the utilization of expressive language facilitates the establishment of empathy between the speaker and the listener, thereby increasing the likelihood of the audience's willingness to collaborate with the speaker and ultimately fulfilling the speaker's objectives.

3.2.3 Requests

The last element of NVC is the request. NVC places emphasis on the speaker's use of affirmative

sentences to express their request and to clearly communicate what they expect the audience to do. This approach discourages the use of negative sentences that communicate what not to do. A directive is an illocutionary act that corresponds to the request, and it is intended to prompt the addressee to take actions, such as issuing an order, giving a command, daring, defying, or challenging. Stated differently, the speaker aims to persuade the audience to take a particular action, while simultaneously holding a certain level of anticipation. Furthermore, in comparison to commands, requests carry a lower degree of force, rendering them more readily accepted.

For example:

Sentence 1: I hope you understand me. (Statement)

Sentence 2: Can you tell me what you understand what I just said? (Request)

The initial statement lacks specificity in terms of a request, potentially leaving the recipient uncertain regarding the necessary actions to fulfill the speaker's requirements. The second sentence constitutes an implicit appeal, whereby the speaker presumes that the audience possesses a clear understanding of the desired action, thereby increasing the likelihood of compliance and fulfilling the speaker's objectives.

4. Analysis of NVC in Stand and Deliver based on illocutionary acts theory.

4.1 Observations in Stand and Deliver

Rosenberg said [12]: “Observations are an important element in NVC, where we wish to clearly and honestly express how we are to another person.”

(Example) When the teacher observed students entering the classroom after the bell, he said, “You got a slip?”

According to what he saw, the teacher inquired about the presence of leave slips or late tickets instead of reprimanding or ridiculing the students for their indolence or disregard for regulations.

(Example) When the student sat in his seat, the teacher saw that there was no book on the student's desk. After observation, the teacher chose to ask the reasons without sarcasm or accusations. He said, “Where's your equipment?” The student responded, “Don't get any.” The teacher replied, “You got to come to this class prepared.”

Instead of reprimanding the students for failing to bring their books, the teacher maintained an objective and peaceful demeanor while making requests for necessary materials in the classroom.

(Example) The teacher found that the student's list was not signed.

In this example, the teacher stated what he observed. He said, “You didn't sign it.” He communicates straightforwardly, devoid of any negative emotion such as judgment, or contempt. This approach can prevent communication conflicts and psychological defenses that may arise from language misrepresentations. On the contrary, if the teacher said, “Didn't I mention yesterday that your parents had to sign that you could come to class? What do you mean by bringing an unsigned piece of paper today? Do you listen to me carefully?” The emotional questioning sentences may leave an uneasy sense among students and create an intense conversation, thereby hindering the problem-solving process.

In short, “observations are to be made specific to time and context” [12]. The combination of observation and evaluation may potentially reduce the likelihood of effective communication to the intended audiences. Instead, audiences have a tendency to hear criticism and resist the message being truly conveyed [12]. Therefore, using observations without judgment and criticism can prevent people from being attacked.

4.2 Analysis of Feelings in Stand and Deliver

(Example) The teacher expressed his feelings by saying “But don’t sleep in my class. I take that as an insult.”

In this example, the teacher felt disrespected and insulted about students sleeping in class. Then, he conveyed his feeling bluntly and truthfully and made a specific and lucid requirement: “Don’t sleep in my class.” If the teacher is incapable of expressing his feelings and just prohibits students from sleeping in classrooms by saying that “You sleep all day, are you a pig? Go out and stand if you don’t listen to the class”. This expression will not only make the student feel humiliated but also undermine the teacher-student relationship.

Interpersonal conflicts can be resolved by expressing feelings directly to show our vulnerability. In the NVC model, the expression of actual feelings is distinguished from words describing thoughts, assessments, and interpretations [12].

4.3 Analysis of Needs in Stand and Deliver

“The third component of NVC entails the acknowledgment of the root of our feelings. We see that our feelings result from how we choose to receive what others say and do, as well as from our needs and expectations at that moment” [12].

(Example) The teacher said “WANT TO TALK TO YOU. WAIT A MINUTE.”

In this example, after the bell rang, the teacher wanted to talk to his student, who was late and didn’t bring a textbook to class. The teacher put forward his need and request bluntly, whose need was talking to the student, and the request was for the students to stay for a while. He straightforwardly expressed these and communicated with the student without a commanding or punitive tone, which is important because the imperative tone may lead to rebellion. If the teacher had said, “I see you’re often late, what is your attitude? If you don’t want to learn, don’t come. I think you owe a lesson, don’t leave after class.” That may stimulate the emergence of teacher-student conflicts, which is not conducive to a harmonious teacher-student relationship. In dealing with the late arrival of the student without textbooks, the teacher was able to express the needs and requests clearly, which facilitates the smooth handling of student tardiness while avoiding the student feeling disrespected or offended when told to talk.

NVC suggested that when expressing feelings, we should connect our feelings with the needs, like “I feel - because I need –”, rather than “I feel - because you –”. And the thing of needs should be clear “Judgments of others are alienated expressions of our own unmet needs” [12].

4.4 Analysis of Requests in Stand and Deliver

In this movie, the words of the request appear many times, such as the following:

(Example) When the protagonist, as a new teacher, entered the classroom after the bell rings, he saw that there were students who were not seated. He said to the students, “Please find a seat.”

This is a request. When the teacher saw a chaotic classroom, instead of expressing his request by roaring, he put it forward explicitly, in accordance with the Speech Act’s Directives. If the new teacher frightened the students and controlled the disorder by getting angry and yelling, such as saying, “Quiet down, it’s time for class, you bastards. Didn’t you hear the bell ringing? After the class bell rang, you are still playing in the classroom, is it decent? Now sit in your seat and don’t make noise.” It may trigger deliberate resistance and disturbance by students, because those admonitions are disrespectful to students, neglect the potential of student development, and have unequal conversations in which teachers communicate with students from a top-down perspective.

(Example) The teacher said, “Everyone, please read the first paragraph for a second.”

In this example, the teacher made such a request because he wanted to ensure that the late student was seated without distracting the other students. Without the request, other students may whisper or lose concentration in class when the teacher assigned a seat to the student who was late. Therefore, the expression of the requirement can effectively maintain order in the classroom when dealing with unexpected events. This request is also consistent with the directives of the Speech Acts, which is the utterance. Its function can be as a command or requirement and make someone do something.

Therefore, the more positive action and language are used to state our request, the more likely we could get it [12].

5. Conclusion

The film contains four elements of NVC, which employ more requests and fewer observations, emotions, and needs. The use of NVC and teacher education promote student achievement.

There is a lot of research on NVC, but not much research on NVC in the field of the relationship between students' academic and communication skills. Therefore, this paper studies the effects of NVC on the motivation of teachers and students to engage in classroom activities, as well as the efficacy of knowledge acquisition among students.

Consistent with previous studies, NVC can make the campus full of love [13] and enable teacher-student communication smoother [14], and the progress of this paper is to prove that NVC can help create a harmonious atmosphere, improve teaching effectiveness, and promote students' knowledge acquisition.

Although there are some discoveries revealed in this paper, there are also limitations. Firstly, this paper does not analyze how to use NVC to resolve conflicts in the face of classroom conflicts between teachers and students. Secondly, though the film uses the four elements of NVC, the two elements of observations and feelings are used less. In addition, due to plot reasons, elements of NVC appear more frequently at the beginning of the movie. It will be better to appear in the entire movie. Thirdly, this paper uses the text analysis method. And if there is an opportunity to use the method of experimental control as the research method, the data will be more reflective.

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