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Cultural Competence Module 5

Communication Styles: Paralanguage and Elements of Body Language

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Module 5: Communications Styles - Paralanguage and Elements of Body Language

Module Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this module is to introduce Oral Communication and its non-verbal components. Students will learn elements of paralanguage such as, intonation, volume, rhythm and stress, and how these affect meaning. In addition, they will learn the importance of elements of body language such as, Kinesics, Haptics, Eye Contact, Proxemics and Chronemics, and their impact on communication. Finally this module provides students the opportunity to interpret paralanguage and body language and identify possible misunderstandings that can be drawn in the process.

Objectives:

Upon the completion of this module, the learner will:

1. Be introduced to Oral Communication and will learn its non-verbal elements like paralanguage and body language.
2. Be able to identify how paralanguage affects meaning
3. Have practiced the elements of paralanguage
4. Learn areas of body language and some cultural variations
5. Be able to identify how body language can affect communication
6. Raise awareness on the link between non-verbal communication and culture and the possibility of misinterpretations
7. Have practiced identifying, interpreting and discerning meaning using elements of non-verbal communication

Terminology

Culture
Cross-cultural interactions
Character
Misinterpretations
Misunderstandings
Universal concepts
Cultural Responsiveness
Attitudes
To elicit
Perspectives
Stereotype
Generalization
Animation
Emotion
Tone
Volume
Vocal Patterns
Stress
Rhythm
Paralanguage
Intonation
Body language
Kinesics
Haptics
Proxemics
Eye contact
Chronemics
Monochromatic
Polychromatic
Personal Space

1. **Communication and Culture (Introductory Lecture)**
   Open this session by introducing Communication as an integral part of culture\

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

Communication is the exchange of message or meaningful information between two or more people. For this to happen we need a sender of the message, the recipient and the message.

Communication is an essential part of culture, or better, culture is communication because communication is one way to express our behaviors and our behaviors are shaped by culture.

In other words, culture and communication cannot be separated. Communication problems, lack of understanding or misunderstandings can be the source of much frustration, particularly in healthcare. Communication can happen in three ways: Orally, non-verbally and in written form. In this lesson we will focus on Oral communication, and its non-verbal elements, Paralanguage and Body Language.

2. **Paralanguage (Lecture)**
   Introduce non-verbal elements (Paralanguage)

Time: 5-7minutes

Materials: None

Lecture Content - Use the points below to frame your lecture

- Oral communication primarily relies on spoken words, visual aids and non-verbal elements to support the transfer of meaningful messages.

- The non-verbal elements of communication are also known as Paralanguage. Pitch, volume, tone, stress, rhythm are an example of these non-verbal elements.

- In other words, Paralanguage can be said to be everything you hear that are not words and it can be expressed consciously or unconsciously. The conscious expression of paralanguage is often the result of a learned behavior. Since our behavior is the expression of learned values, beliefs and traditions, the conscious expression of non-verbal language is intrinsically cultural and can leave ample room to communication misinterpretations between people of different cultures.

  - For example, a person speaking in low volume may appear insecure <u>or</u> polite depending on the cultural value assigned to speaking using low volume. Likewise, a person speaking in a loud voice may be seen as boisterous <u>or</u> energetic depending once again on the cultural context.

- In addition, a person using a high-pitched voice may be seen as child-like and emotionally upset. Sometimes the person speaks that way naturally, so don't hold this against them.

- As far as stress or rhythm, think of these two utterances:

  This is the house I was talking about

  *This is **the** house I was talking about*

  In the second utterance the emphasis on the definite article is a way to indicate previous reference to the house. The added emphasis implies the message, "You know well which house I am talking about."

- Tone of voice can reflect the person's mood: pessimistic or optimistic. Interpreting tone of voice is extremely useful to assess the speaker's current frame of mind and affect. Even though tone can be controlled to a degree by the speaker, it is usually not faked.

- The variations of volume, tone, rhythm and stress give clue to a person's sarcasm, condescension or smugness; they allow us to guess whether someone is saying the truth or lying, or they make us understand someone's feelings when they are upset, agitated, sad, happy or euphoric.

- Paralanguage can impact the speaker's ability of credibility and intelligence. Pauses like "um" or "uh" can make the speaker seem uncertain, or make us doubt the level of education, preparation or information the speaker may have about a subject matter.

- Most importantly, Paralanguage (non-verbal elements) can override the meaning of spoken words. For example:

  Instructor addresses a student and says in a happy and loud tone, *"What a beautiful shirt you have!"*

  Then instructor approaches another student and says in a sarcastic tone, *"What a beautiful shirt you have!"*

- Did I mean the same thing with these two students? The answer is clearly "No." As you can see, although exactly the same words were used, the meaning was entirely different. In the first case, the words expressed a genuine compliment, while in the second case, the tone indicated the opposite.

- In a nutshell, Paralanguage is not about what words you choose when you speak, but **how** you say them. People are very good at picking up Paralanguage cues, and listeners are quite accurate at judging education, age, and gender just from the sound of a speaker's voice.

3. Echoing (Pair Sharing)

Students will be given written quotes that they will read aloud to reproduce utterances with varied tone, volume, stress & rhythm.

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: Handout for Module 5

Preparation: Give handout for Module 5 to students and instruct to choose a partner to work with. Next, direct students to take turns reading quotes aloud to their partners, emulating the tone, volume, stress & rhythm noted in parentheses.

Practice overriding meanings using elements of Paralanguage. The purpose of this exercise is to have fun and experiment with Paralanguage.

Suggested directions:

"Please work with a partner and use the Echoing Exercise handout. In the parentheses you will find cues for how you should read each written quote aloud. Please take turns with your partner in reading these and act them out as best as you can."

4. Echoing - Easy or Not? (Whole Class Discussion)

Elicit information from students on degree of difficulty in replicating tone.

Time: 3-5-minutes

Materials: Handout for Module 5

Ask students to return to their seats and initiate a classroom discussion by asking these questions:

- *What did you learn from this exercise?*
- *Was it easy for you to emulate every cue?*
- *Why or why not?*

Comments that students may make include:

- *I did not feel comfortable raising my voice because….*
- *I never thought of how much tone can change the meaning, I am certainly going to pay more attention in the future*
- *This was a good way to raise my awareness of how others may perceive my tone or the way I speak*

- *This was eye-opening for me as I never thought of the impact that Paralanguage can have on conversations*
- *The reminded me of a particular time when…..*

5. Body Language (Lecture)

Introduce elements of Body Language (Kinesics, Haptics, Eye Contact, Proxemics and Chronemics) and demonstrate some examples

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Laptop/Computer
LCD Projector/Screen
Remote Control
Module 5 PowerPoint

Slide 1.

- Only 30% of communication is actually verbal; 70% isn't. Most of this nonverbal communication is conveyed by silent signs that are transferred through the expression of our body. Even when we don't say a word, we are still communicating with our posture, gestures, how we move our eyes or use time and space. This body expression is also referred to as Body Language and much of it is based on learned behaviors which may vary drastically from one cultural group to another leaving room to interpretations that may cause discomfort or miscommunications.

- Experts separate the study of Body Language in six categories: Kinesics, Eye Contact, Paralanguage, Haptics, Proxemics, and Chronemics.

- Because Paralanguage deals with the oral utterance of language, we have separated it from the other areas here by covering it at the beginning of our lesson.

Slides 2-6.

- Kinesics is the study of how we use gesture, eye behavior, posture or facial expression in communication. This can be broken down into 5 categories, but for the purpose of our lesson we will simply say that Kinesics is the study of every head nod, squinting of the eye, frowning of eyebrows, gesturing hello with our hands or giving the thumbs up, using our hands to illustrate a point and much more that deals with how we move our body to communicate messages.

- Some of these gestures are unconscious, while other are consciously made as a result of learned behavior. For this reason, some cultures may assign

a different meaning to gestures, creating some misunderstandings when two people communicate and use gestures that convey different meanings. For example: Use and PPT notes to introduce hand gestures and what have a different meaning assigned that may cause misunderstandings tat may affect communication in a negative way.

Slide 7.

- Eye contact is another way that we communicate that is likely to create some misinterpretation. Who we look at, how, where, when and for how long is governed by cultural rules. Depending on these rules, a "dirty look" or an "icy stare" can be seen as a sign of a humorous joke or as a message of offense or anger. In the Anglo culture, it is expected that two people that speak to each other also look at each other and maintain eye contact. If someone avoids eye contact, s/he may be interpreted as cold and defensive or as someone cagey, lying or being dishonest.

- On the other hand, in many Asian cultures, maintaining eye contact with someone who is considered a higher authority is impolite, or is seen as a sign of defiance. Looking down and avoid eye contact may be the accepted norm in this case.

Slide 8.

- Haptics is the study of tactile communication. The most common tactile communication is how we greet people using touch. Some people use a handshake, others a hug, others give a kiss on the cheek. What and with whom this way of tactile communication is appropriate is once again governed by cultural rules.

- In a non-work-related social context, it is common for Latinos to kiss on the cheeks after being introduced to a new person. This is not commonly true in an Anglo culture, where a handshake is chosen as the most common way of greeting someone who has just been introduced. Then again, in other cultures, no body contact may be made, and bowing someone's head may be the most appropriate salutation, such as for Japanese people, for example.

Slide 9.

- Proxemics is the study of distance that a person may choose when communicating to other people. The idea of **your** space and **my** space is foreign in some cultures, as space may be seen as a shared area, more like **our** space. Some cultures tend to keep a very short distance between a speaker and the other person; others create a rule of an acceptable space, such as the "1 to 4 Foot Rule" for the "Social Zone," for example. How

comfortable you are with space may once again be a culturally governed rule, or it could be merely a personal preference. In all events, if the concept of acceptable space is not shared the same way, it creates feelings of discomfort because our expectations are not met.

Slide 10.

- Finally, Chronemics is the study of how we use time to communicate. Different cultures have different ideas of time. Some cultures use Monochromatic Time—that is, they emphasize doing one thing at a time, sticking to schedules, and meeting deadlines promptly. In this culture, time is money. Other cultures tend to use Polychromatic Time, in which several things go on at once and time is conceived in a more informal way.

6. Interpreting Body Language (Activity)

Students listen to only the sound from a scene from a foreign film (in a language that none of your students know). What emotions or ideas can they discern from the sound of the actors' voices? Now have them watch the scene (without subtitles) and observe body language. Does the context of the picture change their interpretation? Lastly, watch the scene with subtitles. How accurate were students at interpreting the actors' paralanguage and body language?

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Laptop/Computer
LCD Projector/Screen
Speakers
Internet access
URLs for YouTube videos
Paper and a pen for students to write
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDbMq4sbplc For video without English subtitles
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFCcPtEuXTg For video with English subtitles

Preparation: Play YouTube videos. Make sure that speakers work well and are set at an adequate volume level.

Step 1: Students listen to only the sound from a scene from a foreign film.

Step 2: Now have them watch the scene (without subtitles) and compare and contrast their interpretations with what they initially discerned.

Step 3: Lastly, watch the scene with subtitles.

- Since students have already practiced giving different meanings to the spoken word using inflections, and have learned about Body Language, they will now

practice interpreting messages and creating perception of the speaker at first only by relying on the sound of the voice in a language they do not speak; then, they will hear the sound and will see the image and they will be able to observe body language and cross-reference what they interpreted the first time when they had no image. Finally, they will watch the video with the original sound and subtitles so they can see the actual conversation and cross-reference it with how they interpreted the conversation the first and second time.

- Step 1: Play the video file only to hear the audio, make sure that video is not projected onto the screen. Students should be listening to ONLY the sound of the scene of the movie without seeing the image. Tell students:

  "For our next activity I will be playing an audio file that is part of a movie scene in a foreign language. You will only listen to the audio the first time. When you are done, I would like you to write down some information of what you heard based on a few questions I will provide."

- After students are done listening to the sound of the movie scene, ask students to write the answer to these questions (you might want to write these on a flip chart and turn the page away until ready to show to students):

a. *How many speakers are there in this conversation?*
b. *Who do you think they are?*
c. *Are they related or friends or something else?*
d. *Can you guess the age of the two speakers?*
e. *What do you think the two speakers look like? Are they blond, dark, big, thin, etc?*
f. *What do you think is being said?*
g. *What sort of emotions can you discern from the two speakers' voices?*
h. *What kind of words do you think the message has? For example: positive, negative, kind, rude, strong, soft, gentle, etc…*

- Step 2: Now show the video without subtitles and allow students to look at body language.

  You can tell students:

  " I am going to show you the video now that is associated with the audio part that you just heard. Now I would like for you to still continue to listen, and also observe body language."

  When the movie clip is over, ask students to adjust their previous answers. Then ask them:

  Did the context of the picture change your previous interpretation?
  Did you have to modify any of your previous answers?

- Step 3: Finally show the video with subtitles and allow students to assess and share how accurate they were at interpreting the actors' paralanguage and body language?

  You can tell your students:
  "I am now going to show you the same video with English subtitles. Please make any further modifications to your answers as needed."

  Finally ask students:

  How accurate or inaccurate were you at interpreting the actors' paralanguage and body language the first or the second time?

  Allow one or two students to share their results with the rest of class.

7. Interpreting Body Language (Closing Lecture)

Instructor reviews the link between the non-verbal elements of oral communication and culture and recaps on the importance of being aware of the communication differences when interacting with other people, especially co-workers and clients who may come from a different cultural background.

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

Close this lesson with these points:

- Although communication is universal in that we all share the need to communicate and we do so even when we do not speak a word, many non-verbal elements of communication are governed by behaviors that are culturally learned and may have opposite meanings depending on how large the cultural gap is between those who engage in communication.

- These communication differences are not right or wrong, they are simply different and difficult to decipher when their cultural context is unknown to us. To reduce stress and feelings of discomfort, it is important to be aware of the diversity that surrounds us and that we keep an open mind to learning different meanings and intentions behind the way that people from different cultures communicate. This is particularly significant when working in a very diverse environment and we are in constant contact with co-workers or clients who may not be very knowledgeable of the cultural rules that govern the way to communicate in the dominant culture.

Module 5
Echoing Exercise

Work with another student. One student will read the first quote, and then the other student will read the second quote. Both students will continue alternating with even and uneven numbers, using the cue in parenthesis to create different types of utterances. When finished, start over using the opposite order.

1. **(In an angry voice)** Go back to work next week? But, I can hardly walk on this leg!

2. **(In a sad voice)** Go back to work next week? But, I can hardly walk on this leg!

3. **(In a sarcastic voice)** Sure, I'll just get some crutches, and everything will be just fine. I'm sure I'll have no problem getting around the construction site on crutches!

4. **(In a normal voice)** Sure, I'll just get some crutches, and everything will be fine. I'm sure I'll have no problem getting around the construction site on crutches!

5. **(In a very sad voice)** I – I understand. I guess I'll take the appointment in three weeks. My problem isn't that important.

6. **(In an anxious voice)** I – I understand. I guess I'll take the appointment in three weeks. My problem isn't that important.

7. **(In an annoyed tone of voice)** Mrs. Brown, you can't continue to adjust your medication on your own. Just take two pills four times a day for the next week, and then we'll see about adjusting the dosage. Four pills three times a day is too much. You're going to hurt yourself!

8. **(In a gentle voice)** Mrs. Brown, you can't continue to adjust your medication on your own. Just take two pills four times a day for the next week, and then we'll see about adjusting the dosage. Four pills three times a day is too much. You're going to hurt yourself!

9. **(In a sarcastic tone)** I've never had an X-ray before. Do I need to do anything to prepare – like wear special clothes or something?

10. **(In a normal voice)** I've never had an X-ray before. Do I need to do anything to prepare – like wear special clothes or something?