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### **Think Communication**

## **A Key Tool That Often Comes Without Instructions**

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Have you ever heard your voice on an answer phone and been surprised at the sounds you make? As you always hear your voice from within the sound box that is your head it is difficult to hear what it is that others hear when you speak. Certainly the circumstances of your birth can determine a great deal about your voice and how other people respond to it. The context in which you grow as infant, child and adolescent further shapes the way you make sounds and the way in which you communicate nonverbally. The influence of your parents and significant people in your life can further shape your voice and the way you use it. You may be calm and controlled or loud and excitable. You may be intense, slow and definite in your speech, or you may be demonstrative, tuneful and flippant.

We do not have to stick with the same voice for ever. It is amazing how many people have a 'telephone voice', 'a posh voice' or an 'interview voice'. Some people work to remove accent and dialect seeing the effect their voice has upon other people as detrimental to their own hopes and aspirations. Others work hard to maintain their accent and dialect as it is a key part of how they view themselves.

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The voice and vocabulary reflects your origins and history. It reflects your emotional and psychological state. It reflects your ability to think, analyze, assess, comment, describe, commit, motivate, and the many other influential ways you have of impacting on and influencing other people.

People who work with children and young people in the teaching and learning environment soon come to recognise the power of the voice as a tool for facilitating learning, but there is not a great deal of opportunity for young teachers to learn how to develop both their speech and their voice appropriately.

Speech refers to the way in which words are used while the voice is the vehicle by which you convey your words through the creation of sound. The way that you speak is for the listener, an important part of who and what you are, providing messages about what they can expect and how they should respond to you. To your listeners, your voice is a part of who you are and what you believe. Do you have a big voice, a dominating voice, a weasley voice, a whining voice, or a droning voice? Do you talk quietly, whisper, roar, boom, tinkle, or mutter? Do you dramatise, assert, bully, blackmail, or mesmerise your students?

From the sound of your voice and the shape of your nonverbal language, your students will make judgments about your attitudes towards them and the ideas you're presenting. Your voice will help them judge your sincerity and credibility and that will determine the way in which they will respond to you and your communications.

Good teachers and paraeducators are aware of the impact their voice is having at any point in time. I have often suggested to student teachers that they sit in front of a mirror and practice their nonverbal communication and the range of voices they need. At first it appears silly, but like many things practice makes perfect.

There are a number of principles that can be observed to maximise the effectiveness of your communication. You do need to learn to control the pitch, volume, rhythm, and timbre of your voices. If these never change then you will be speaking in a dull monotonous voice.

1. Don't shout it merely raises the noise level you wish to reduce and prevents you from giving any voice variation to support what you want to communicate
2. Speak loud enough to be heard clearly and refuse to compete with intrusive noise. Have it checked from the back of the class.
3. Actively vary your voice and speech patterns so you communicate your interest, level of intensity, mood and expectation. Avoid monotonous speech. If you are not sure ask a colleague to listen to you teaching. Avoid a monotone. Use dynamics. Your pitch should raise and lower. Your volume should be soft and loud. Listen to the way professional speakers on the TV use speech to communicate.
4. Speak clearly. If the students keep asking you to repeat what you are saying there is a problem that needs sorting.
5. Use volume that is suitable for the environment, group size and activity. Speak more softly when you are alone and close. Speak more gently when you are speaking to larger groups or across larger spaces.
6. Vary the delivery pace of your speech displaying levels of energy and intensity. Create animation in your voice.
7. Speak more slowly when covering important points. Use repetition to emphasise important points. People will see you as nervous and unsure of yourself if you talk fast or erratically, but be careful not to slow down to the point where people begin to finish your sentences just to help you finish.
8. Don't be afraid to use the dramatic silence or the meaningful pause. All time does not have to be filled by someone talking. Silence can be good.
9. Remain hydrated – drink water
10. Pronounce your words correctly and demonstrate your competency through your use of vocabulary. If you aren't sure how to say a word, don't use it but even if you do, if there is a simpler, more suitable word use that..
11. Use the right words – If you're not sure of the meaning of a word, don't use it. Your students learn to use the words by listening to the way you use them
12. Make positive eye contact. Lack of eye contact can indicate uncertainty, fear, incompetence, lack of self esteem – I know a person who is very competent in her job. Don't make the other uncomfortable but establish appropriate eye contact throughout the communication
13. Use gesture and stance to communicate your attitude, intention, awareness etc. Observe the etiquette of proxemics Make Use smaller gestures for individuals and

small groups. The gestures should get larger as the group that one is addressing increases in size.

14. Don't send mixed messages – Make your words, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and message match. Disciplining a student while smiling sends a mixed and probably unpleasant message. It can be ineffective. It can also be intimidating or antagonising. If you have to deliver a negative message, make your words, facial expressions, and tone match the message.

Your ability to use the power of your voice and speech will go along way to determining your success as a teacher, paraeducators or student. It is effective to constantly reflect on how you used language and voice, the impact it had and how it can be changed or fine-tuned in the future.