Communication Violence in Verbal Expression and Nonverbal Behavior of Preschool and Early Primary School Teachers During Teaching Process: An Observational Study

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Abstract: The teaching process is actually a communication one. It could be interesting or not, pleasant or woeful etc. depending mainly on the teacher's attitude, his/her verbal expression and nonverbal behavior performed in the classroom. Especially, in children of preschool and early primary school ages, the words a teacher uses in an everyday chat or discussion with students during teaching, the tone of his/her voice and nonverbal behavior may create a positive or negative classroom climate which affects relationships among him/her and the students.

This study, based on observations of teachers' communication behavior during teaching process, focuses on the way they choose to communicate with children and on their verbal expressions in regard to classroom climate conditions. Also, the study focuses on teachers' nonverbal behaviors, which like nonverbal communication aspects, affect the relationships among classroom participants in school environment. Emphasis is given on teachers' verbal expressions and nonverbal behaviors that may lead to communication violence and bullying because teachers are more than often behavioral patterns especially for preschoolers and very young elementary school children (pupils).

Keywords: Communication violence, kindergarten, primary school, teaching/instructional style.

INTRODUCTION

George is a preschooler who lives in a family where his parents encourage him to spontaneously express his thoughts and feelings in words, deeds and behaviors, which include loud laughter, voices and other noises that do not bother them at all. On the contrary, this behavior of George gives parents great joy as they see their child being courageous, self-confident and well self-expressed. When George is in the classroom of the kindergarten he attends, believing that his teacher is thinking like his parents, he speaks and laughs loudly. After that, the teacher initially explained to George -but in vain- that he should not be talking and laughing loudly in the classroom, and then she was constantly making verbal remarks and reprimands, giving him a strict gaze. Also, she used to discourage him with grimaces, demanding him to change disturbing and unacceptable behavior in the classroom, not to speak and laugh loudly. As George was in a communication behavior selection dilemma and unable to understand the different communication rules in kindergarten and at home, he was not fast in adapting to the orders and instructions of his teacher. The result of that delay was the teacher becoming upset and expressing negative feelings towards George, injuring in a psychological way the relationship

between them and reducing the initial confidence, the child had established with her. The above-mentioned case consists of a very simple example which shows a form of communicative violence that could be experienced by every child of preschool and primary school age in the classroom from the teacher him/herself, the person from whom such behavior should never be developed; and even more within the classroom. On the other hand, the communication relationships between teachers and students, as shown by a large number of related studies, must be governed at least by calmness, courtesy and mutual respect (Stamatis 2011; Kodakos and Stamatis 2002; Edwards and Edwards 2001; Richmond and McCroskey 1997).

The relevant bibliography states that both the process and the content of communication developed between a pre-school or an early-school child and a teacher in the classroom, as well as other factors such as interpersonal relationships, communicative style, tone of voice, posture and body language in general, combined with the vocal shades and sound fluctuations of the teacher or the pupil, create the special communication feature of every pedagogical interaction (Vrettos 2014; Kodakos and Polemikos 2000; McCroskey 1996). This feature may positively or negatively shape the classroom climate. It may even exude or be inspired by positive or negative emotions that improve or hinder the effectiveness of classroom communication process. In general, it is well known that effective communication in teaching generates considerable results in learning, relationships and academic perfor-

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mances of children (Hadzigeorgiou 2014; Stamatis 2013). On the opposite, the lack of effective communication usually causes tension, neural irritation and conflict among classroom interactants which may lead to school bullying or even to child abuse.

According to Tell *et al*. (2006) "*there are four forms of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect. Physical abuse is defined as the threat or act of physical violence against the child by another person. Emotional abuse is coercive verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as insults or slamming doors that are not directed at the child's physical body but at his or her emotions and feelings of self-worth. Sexual abuse is forced or coerced sexual behavior imposed on the child by an older person. Neglect is the denial of basic human care that is required by the child in order to live a healthy life. Neglect can be emotional or physical. Abuse is marked by a power differential with the abuser in a superior position of power over the abused*".

An older definition of violence sheds light to its nature. Cahn & Lloyd (1996) claim that "*violence or abuse may be defined as the ability to impose one's will (i.e., wants, needs, or desires) on another person through the use of verbal or nonverbal acts, or both, done in a way that violates socially acceptable standards and carried out with the intention or the perceived intention of inflicting physical or psychological pain, injury, or suffering, or both. The range of abuse behaviors includes mild forms of verbal intimidation, severe beatings, and extremely violent rapes and homicides. Violence ranges from carefully planned attacks to sudden emotional outbursts inflicting injury on other persons*".

Within this framework, violent communication or communication which includes violence, could be defined as a form of communication that limits liberty, denies recognition of needs, diminishes the worth of a person, and/or blocks compassion. This form of communication is often the result of using manipulative or coercive language that induces fear, guilt, shame, praise, blame, duty, obligation, punishment, and/or reward. Bearing in mind that communication is a social skill which aims to positively contribute to building good human relationships, violent communication or communication enclosed apparent or hidden violence in verbal or nonverbal processes is not a genuine form of communication after all. Actually, it could be characterized as "paracommunication" which, in this case, means communication with evil intentions and

purposes or at least hypocritical communication and miscommunication, as well. Referring to the relationship between violence and communication, Blumenthal (2007) aptly argues that "*violence is a communication at such a primitive level that it bypasses thought altogether, and consequently the dialogue between the victim, the perpetrator and society occurs largely at a level that is beyond awareness*".

Despite what scholars may believe about relationship between violence and communication, it is absolutely true that violent communication usually happens in speaking, listening and in thinking, through self-talk or imagined conversations. As it has been correctly mentioned in a paper recently uploaded by Heartland Community College which is available on https://www.heartland.edu/documents/idc/What%20is%20violent%20comm%20and%20nvc%20(Winters).pdf, common ways that violent communication occurs are through:

(a) Moralistic judgments and evaluations of others which include insulting, putting people down, labeling, criticizing, diagnosing, or seeing someone as "wrong."

(b) Denial of responsibility for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions. Typical examples of this case include blaming our feelings, thoughts, and actions on others, vague and impersonal forces, authority, policies, rules, regulations, social or gender roles, or uncontrollable impulses instead of our own choices and needs.

(c) Demands which include an implied or explicit threat of blame, punishment, or reward.

(d) Blocking compassion. Typical examples revolve around intellectual understanding that leads to trying to "fix" a situation by providing feedback that advises, one ups, shuts down, sympathizes with, educates, consoles, tells a story, corrects, explains, or interrogates a person.

As violent communication or communication which includes violence are defined as mentioned above, according to Rosenberg (2015) "*nonviolent communication is a "compassionate" communication process, is communication that maximizes liberty, enhances understanding of the relationship between feelings and needs, promotes equality, and creates compassion. It involves understanding that our feelings are a result of our basic human needs being met or unmet. When our needs are met, we feel "positive" emotions, such as*

joy, delight, confidence, inspiration, etc. When our needs are unmet, we feel "negative" emotions, such as annoyance, tension, fatigue, yearning, etc". Basic human needs are similar to those in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which are physical well-being, connection, honesty, play, peace, autonomy, meaning, etc (Maslow 2011). There are basic human needs that we all share as opposed to specific actions we would like others to take. So, nonviolent communication proposes that a basic human need is to contribute to our own and others' well-being. Developing this form of communication, especially in early childhood classroom environments, increases the likelihood of mutual giving and receiving because it helps children and teachers recognize and foster the joy one feels when he/she meets the basic human need of contributing to themselves' and others' well-being.

Moreover, the development of Emotional Intelligence in the classroom can be regarded as the corrective aspect of discipline, thus, preventing inappropriate behavior of learners (Van der Merwe 2016). If one speaks violently to others, they may do what he/she wants by their inducing fear, guilt, shame, praise, blame, duty, obligation, punishment, or reward. Although one can control others this way, it is always preferable to communicate nonviolently and furthermore, to communicate every time with calmness, compassion and politeness avoiding bullying patterns promotion which would be provided even unwillingly or/and subconsciously (Stamatis and Nikolaou 2016). Especially if he/she is a teacher in preschool and early childhood education ages.

It is well known that in-school violence and bullying occur in various forms in contemporary academic reality worldwide. One of these forms is related to the communication behavior of teachers, in a verbal or non-verbal communication level during teaching. Another one relates to the communication behavior pupils show to teachers, or classmates or their parents. By investigating or studying violent communicative behaviors and bullying situations that occur in schools, educators and psychologists reveal various causes related to those behaviors, which are mainly related to the psychological and emotional state of individuals who develop such behaviors. Also, these experts find out the levels of stress that may be experienced by students and teachers due to demands of the educational system or perhaps the parental expectations for academic and social excellence of their children, the desired achievements for teachers or the school unit where their own children are studying.

Since effective communication interactively affects interpersonal relationships of members of each school community and, by extension, affects the school climate, the academic performance, and many other parameters and matters of the educational process, the issue of violence manifested in in-school communicative behaviors and at all levels of education (preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education) is particularly interesting among all researchers working in the scientific fields of psychology, sociology, pedagogy and communication education.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

Taking for granted what has already been referred to and within the framework of the above mentioned theoretical issues, the present study aims to shed light to some communication behaviors which are developed by preschool and early primary school teachers focusing on whether communication violence and bullying take place, consciously or not, during teaching processes.

This study, based on observations of teachers' communication behavior during teaching processes, focuses on the way they choose to communicate with children and on their verbal expressions in regard to classroom climate conditions. Also, the study focuses on nonverbal behaviors of the teachers, which as basic nonverbal communication aspects affect the relationships among classroom participants in school environment. Emphasis is given on verbal expressions and nonverbal behaviors of teachers that may lead to communication violence and bullying because teachers (and parents), more than any other people, are behavioral patterns, especially for preschoolers and very young elementary school children.

METHOD

In order for the purposes and the specific objectives of this study in preschool and primary school units to be investigated, a research was conducted in May 2017. The whole project was based on the principles of research ethics and common procedures related to the nature of the present research subject and on the techniques of an observational study. The present study can be classified as such one. The basic identity characteristics and stages of the research as a part of method description used for conducting the whole research project are mentioned below in detail.

Sample of the Study

The sample of this observational study consisted of six (6) preschool teachers working in equal in number kindergarten classrooms, where one hundred fourteen (114) preschoolers (aged 4-6, 52 boys, 62 girls) attended and four (4) elementary school teachers teaching in equal in number primary school classrooms, where ninety (90) pupils (aged 7-8, 47 boys, 43 girls) attended. All teachers were women. All the kindergartens and the elementary schools which participated in this research were public and situated in the city of Rhodes island in Greece.

Data Collection Instrument

The data collection research instrument was based on observations made on preschool and elementary school teachers in regard with their communication behavior during teaching. Basic elements of teachers' communicational behavior were included in a special made data sheet where the researcher was to mark the appropriate communication behavior which could appear in any face-to-face interaction among a teacher and a child.

Data Collection Procedure

Actually, the researcher had to fill in on the data sheet a tick sign in the appropriate place, the communication behaviors of the teacher which were related to violence such as: (a) using words that offend children or sound sarcastic or ironic (verbal violence signs), (b) carrying out pinches, hits, pushes, pulls or showing ugly facial expressions and moods (nonverbal violence signs); and (c) speaking loudly or nervously, screaming etc. (paraverbal violence signs). The teachers' behavior observation was decided to be the main technique for the present research data collection. The whole concept was based on a cross-sectional study technique which took place in ten classrooms by the researcher himself who focused on communication behavior of every participating teacher during ten teaching processes which lasted thirty minutes each. Teachers were informed about the subject of the present study and the terms of its' conduction. The anonymity of the participating teachers was assured. The process of reaching conclusions was mainly based on the analysis and interpretation of the gathered quantitative and qualitative data earned by observations, as the following results show.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The process of recording the research data was conducted in ten teaching cases, one per single classroom, as mentioned above. Table **1** shows in detail the number of having taken place violent communication behaviors judged in regard with verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal signs which were disclosed during teaching by preschool and elementary school teachers who participated in every single teaching case lasting 30 minutes. As it apparently seems by quantitative data analysis, it is only a poor number of each violence signs category (verbal, nonverbal, paraverbal) that has been disclosed in every classroom. Most of these violent communication signs are related to nonverbal communication, then paraverbal and finally verbal communication. Taking in mind that in thirty (30) minutes at least sixty (60) interpersonal interactions may be developed, everybody could believe that the amount of violent communication signs in teachers' communication behaviors is not very high. Of course, once comparing this amount to pedagogical issues claiming for zero violent communicative behavior development in the classroom, the found amount of violent communication signs is becoming extremely and unexpectedly high. Anyway, related issues cannot be approached only by a quantitative point of view but furthermore by a qualitative one, which - even though it has taken place- is not presented at the results of this paper. Many of the results that are used later in this paper included statements' configuration based on the interpretation of all research data combined with communicative behaviors disclosed in the classrooms. The research on communication behavior issues has many difficulties, as it is known. One of them is to interpret the body signs and messages being sent out.

According to the related bibliography about the ways of nonviolent communication behavior development in every place and interpersonal interactions, every communicator should be conscious of choosing words and expressing body language and vocal signs to send out messages to his/her communication partner in order both of them to be able to effectively communicate with each other (Miller 2015; Evans 2010; Cahn 2013). Especially in school environments where teachers and children of all ages develop thousands of interpersonal interactions every day everyone –and most of all the teacher- should be extremely careful in what he/she says or expresses in many communicative ways. Knowing that even a word

Table 1:   **Data Representing Teachers' Communication Violence Signs Disclosed During 30 Minute Teaching Process: Quantitative Approach**

Classroom of observation	Verbal violence signs[1]	Nonverbal violence signs[2]	Paraverbal violence signs[3]
Kindergarten 1	2	4	2
Kindergarten 2	1	2	1
Kindergarten 3	3	3	4
Kindergarten 4	2	1	2
Kindergarten 5	1	3	3
Kindergarten 6	0	2	1
Elementary school 1	2	1	2
Elementary school 2	2	2	2
Elementary school 3	0	2	1
Elementary school 4	1	2	1
Total	14	22	19

[1]Verbal violence signs: Use of words that express thoughts, desires and feelings.
[2]Nonverbal violence signs: Use of visual cues such as body language (kinesics), distance (proxemics), physical environments/appearance, touch (haptics), chronemics (the use of time) and oculesics (eye contact and the actions of looking while talking and listening, frequency of glances, patterns of fixation, pupil dilation, and blink rate).
[3]Paraverbal violence signs (paralanguage): Use of voice quality, rate, pitch, volume, and speaking style, as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation, and stress.

or a glance or an inappropriate voice tone in a sensitive time for the child might cause an immense trauma to the soul or to the emotional sphere of that child, every single teacher should be putting barriers to his/her violent communicative behaviors and thus prevent him/herself of developing communication violence in every way (Stamatis 2013).

What was very interesting during every classroom observation procedure was the reaction styles developed by all participating teachers while they realized the inappropriateness in their verbal, nonverbal and/or paraverbal behavior. They were trying very hard to erase that bad moment from the children's minds - and especially from that one who was involved in a bad interaction with- by making positive comments, jokes, funny grimaces, and vocal changes be heard to children friendlier and even hilarious. They had apparently regretted for the violent communication moment that permitted to be develop from themselves and shared with their beloved pupils. Both quantitative and qualitative results of this research may lead to the following synoptic conclusions in the framework of the limitations and strengths mentioned below.

CONCLUSIONS

As it has already been mentioned, the present study aims to shed light to some communication behaviors which are developed by preschool and early primary school teachers disclosing, either consciously or not,

communication violence and bullying during teaching processes. As it is obviously shown by the analysis and interpretation of this research's results, all teachers disclose violent communication behavior signs in their interpersonal interactions with children and in the everyday classroom activities even in low levels. Such behaviors are usually shown to children, who are not very collaborative with the teacher or other children, or to those who do not get the teacher's instructions at once.

According to the research's findings and results, all teachers show consciously or spontaneously some form of communication violence which is disclosed by violent communication signs created verbally, nonverbally or/and paraverbally. Most of them are nonverbal signs related to eye contact, facial expressions and grimaces. Verbal violent signs are less than the other two categories, maybe because teachers are better at knowing/ understanding the use of speech than the body language usage. What is more, significant enough is the disclosing of paraverbal violent communication signs related to vocal characteristics. Those characteristics are quite often in Arabian, Latin and Mediterranean cultures including the Greek one.

The most experienced teachers seemed to be regretful about their violent communication signs disclosure. As it was observed, once they understood their mistaken behavior they were trying to change it by showing a more friendly and pedagogically acceptable

one. In short discussions conducted after every observational procedure among the researcher and the participating teacher, it was made quite clear that teachers absolutely dislike using inappropriate words or making ugly grimaces and screaming to rebuke children, especially the youngest ones. Sometimes, they develop such behaviors because of some children. They do not feel ready enough to manage difficult situations in classroom when some children are not collaborative. Thus, they lose the control of their communication behavior for a while.

Despite what teachers believe about communication violence they provide in everyday classroom activities anyway, research in such fields is always extremely interesting and useful. As teachers are communication models for the children, if they do not consider well upon all powers emerging from their position and underestimate the communication behavior they disclose every day, they may harm the children for the rest of their life by teaching them the wrong way to communicate. It is clear that the wrong way of communication is that one which gradually produces violence and bullying, i.e. what all educators, parents and society try to prevent nowadays.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

As it is well known, an observational study draws inferences from a sample to a population where the independent variable is not under the control of the researcher because of ethical concerns or logistical constraints. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study, which is related to an observational study, involves data collection from a population, or a representative subset, at one specific point in time. Bearing in mind both of these issues, everyone could effectively imagine the limitations and strengths of the present study. As it has been noticed, although observational studies cannot be used as reliable sources to make statements of fact about the "safety, efficacy, or effectiveness" of a practice, they can still be of use for some other things such as to provide information on "real world" use and practice, to help in formulating hypotheses in order to be tested in subsequent experiments etc. Thus, the enrichment of this study with an observation on variables such as training of teachers in instructional communication processes and nonviolent expressive practices (verbal and nonverbal) could make a significant contribution to enhancing the findings of exploring teacher communication behaviors during teaching.

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