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ENTHUSIASM AWARENESS IN THE EXPERIENTIAL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Enthusiasm comes from the Greek, where it meant "possessed by a god." An enthusiastic person is someone who literally is inspired by a powerful force. It is used frequently as a descriptor of effective teachers. Can we learn to be enthusiastic, or is it something we either have or don't have? This writing identifies both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of enthusiastic teaching, provides an Enthusiasm Awareness Index, and offers suggestions for developing a repertoire of enthusiastic teaching behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

It was once said, "nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (4). The folklore of education almost always includes enthusiasm as a characteristic of effective teaching. Yet, after extensive conversations with colleagues while revising a business faculty evaluation form, enthusiasm appears to be an old-fashioned and out-dated notion. Common criticisms were, "I'm here to teach the students and not to excite them," or "Enthusiasm is nice, but not necessary."

This lack of enthusiasm for enthusiasm comes as no surprise for two reasons. First, enthusiasm starts with feeling and not with thought, and many professors of business believe that feelings and thoughts are antithetical, head and heart separate, and quantitative and qualitative incompatible. Secondly, business unlike poetry, art or literature need not be passionate, or enthusiastic. However, when one puts together the teaching of business and the art of preparing future business professionals, the need for enthusiasm cannot be ignored.

Enthusiasm is a curious word. It is derived from a combination of Greek words meaning, "possessed by a god." An enthusiastic person is someone who literally is inspired by a powerful force. In the research on enthusiastic teaching, the word usually means "stimulating," "animated," "energetic," or "mobile." Limited research indicates that, all other things being equal, teacher enthusiasm correlates positively with student achievement on tests (3).

Teacher enthusiasm may be a powerful motivating force in the traditional classroom where teaching and learning relationships are formalized and well specified. This writing transfers the concept of enthusiasm to the experiential classroom where learning goes on in a less formalized and routinized manner, and, thus, requires greater motivating powers on the part of the teacher. It describes both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of enthusiastic teaching, it presents an Enthusiasm Awareness Index, and offers suggestions for developing enthusiastic delivery skills.

DIMENSIONS OF ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHING

In conversations with university professors who had received distinguished teaching awards when the question was put to them, "How do you motivate your students?", the unanimous answer was, "by your enthusiasm for your subject matter," or "by your enthusiasm for what you are doing." These responses are similar to Rosenshine's definition of enthusiastic teaching conveyance of a great sense of commitment, excitement, and involvement with learning where lectures are imaginative and stimulating (6).

Enthusiasm may be conveyed both verbally and nonverbally: verbally by word selection and vocal delivery; non-verbally by eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and energy level. Some non-verbal behaviors constitute personal mannerisms, such as adjusting one's clothing or one's appearance. These are not related to teaching effectiveness and in some instance even may be distracting. Conversely, non-verbal behaviors, effectively developed, may reinforce and support verbal behaviors. When effectively integrated, both non-verbal and verbal components support and facilitate teaching delivery skills. These relationships are described in Figure 1. The selected delivery functions are not all inclusive, however, they represent the core of most teaching situations regardless of content covered or methodology used.

Following is a brief description of the seven selected dimensions of enthusiastic teaching and a discussion of how each dimension supports the delivery functions listed in Figure 1. These dimensions are based on observations, conversations, and on the literature related to enthusiastic teaching. The seven dimensions also are not all inclusive. It is possible that other variables contribute to an enthusiastic delivery. The seven dimensions also formulate the Enthusiasm Awareness Index

1. Eye Contact. Eye contact is essential to all communication that goes on in the learning environment, as well as elsewhere. Establishing eye contact is an attending behavior. It gets the learner's attention. It is not staring. It means looking directly at your learners and not over their heads, or at the ceiling, floor or other objects. Wide-opened eyes not only focus the learner's attention but they also convey meaning, attitudes and feeling tones. By establishing eye contact with the learners, the teacher not only focuses attention on himself or herself but on the content of the delivery.

2. Facial Expressions. Facial expressions include smiles, frowns, wincing, grimaces, squinting, or wrinkling one's forehead or nose. Facial expressions may be used consciously to emphasize or reinforce verbal points, or may be used quite unconsciously or subconsciously. The important objective for the teacher is to integrate facial expressions into vocal delivery so that facial expressions are congruent with verbal messages.

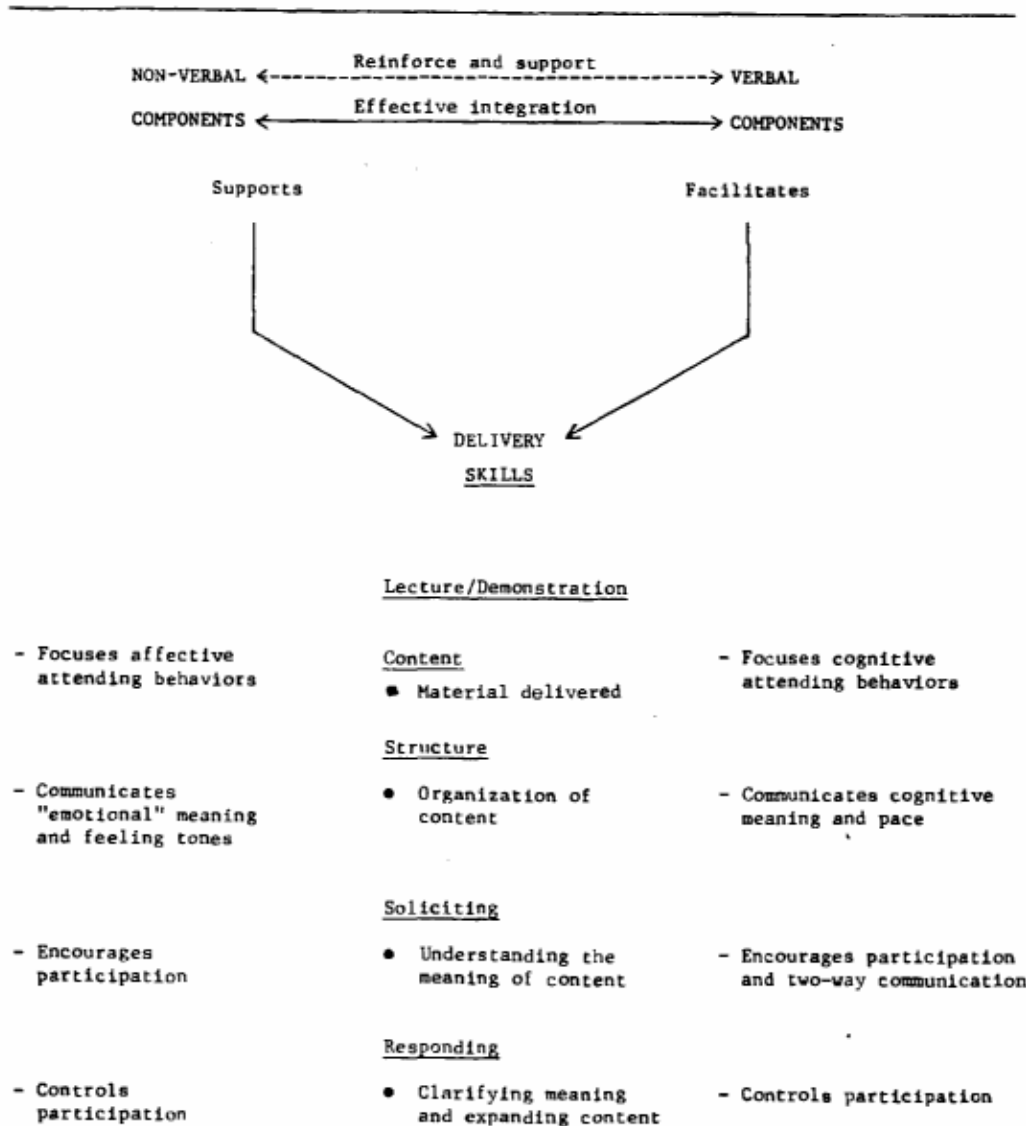
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Facial expressions are used not only to focus learner attention, but also to convey messages as well as emotion, to emphasize and illustrate verbal messages, and to communicate meaning.

3. Gestures. Individuals have unique gestural styles and in part they reflect cultural values and upbringing. Gestures include movements of the hands, arms, or head that accompany verbal messages. They are used to express an idea or emotion, or to reinforce and emphasize verbal communication. In addition, gestures assist in controlling participation by signaling, pointing, shaping, describing, or controlling things in the environment. The teacher's task is to translate ideas or content into gestures that convey meaning and, at the same time, inspire the learners.

4. Body movements. Body movements refer to general body motion and include both instructional motions and personal motions (5). Using audio-visual materials, turning a page in a book, writing on the chalkboard or on a flipchart, or adjusting classnotes are examples of instructional motions. They are as integral a part of teaching as are verbal components because they communicate meanings that are essential in learning. Although instructional motions are integral parts of teaching sequences, they may be performed consciously to structure, sequence, illustrate, and support verbal communication, or they may be performed quite unconsciously as a cumulative repertoire of non-verbal behaviors. Personal motions are movements that are not used directly to aid in the learning process.

FIGURE 1. INTEGRATION OF NONVERBAL AND VERBAL COMPONENTS INTO DELIVERY SKILLS



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They include both personal mannerisms, such as adjusting one's person or clothing or fidgeting with personal or instructional items, and personal pace, such as entering and moving about the instructional setting. Personal mannerisms generally occur at the unconscious level and may be distracting to the learning process. These should be diagnosed and eliminated if possible. Personal pace, however, can be an effective element in motivating learning. Personal pace may be used to illustrate verbal concepts, maintain attention, and encourage, and control participation. The key to effective use of body movements in delivery is vitality peppered with reserve. Too much movement can be exhausting to the learner, too little, soporific.

5. Word Selection. It goes without saying that an effective teacher should have command of an extensive vocabulary. Combinations of words not only communicate content but feeling tones and enthusiasm as well. In general, action words, descriptive phrases, adjectives, positively stated combinations, great variety, clarity of expression, and use of metaphor and simile contribute greatly to an enthusiastic delivery of content. Word selection communicates ideas and content as well as feeling tones and enthusiasm.

6. Vocal Delivery. Vocal delivery refers to the pitch, pace, cadence, volume, articulation, and tone of verbal presentation. Extensive use and variations in these variables contribute both to the understanding of content and to maintaining attention, stimulating interest, and encouraging participation. Vocal delivery can also communicate a sense of excitement for content.

7. Energy Level. Energy level refers to the overall level of mobility variations in voice, and degree of animation or amount of dynamism. One group of researchers tested retention in students after experiencing presentations from Ustatic~ speakers and "dynamic" speakers. Static speakers read from a manuscript, used no gestures, had no direct eye contact, and kept vocal inflection to a minimum. Dynamic speakers delivered presentations from memory, with extensive use of gesturing, eye contact, vocal inflection and animation. The mean score of the students who heard the dynamic speaker was significantly higher than those who heard the static speaker (1). The implications of the study are that energy level not only contributes to attention, but to retention. Energy level, of course, will vary from individual to individual and with environments; however, it should be experimented with to ensure optimum results.

The above variables affecting enthusiasm are not all inclusive. They are presented based upon experience both in university teaching and in training presentations. They do not infer that teachers must attain a specific level of enthusiasm to be effective. They provide a framework to examine awareness, to measure performance, and ultimately to experiment with levels of enthusiasm to achieve optimum results in content delivery.

ENTHUSIASM AWARENESS INDEX

More often than not, the above behaviors are learned over a lifetime and are internalized to form a broad repertoire of responses. The following index is based on the work of both Rosenshine (6) and Collins (2).

The intent of the index at this point is not verification of

levels of enthusiasm, but awareness based upon self-knowledge and feedback from one's environment.

DEVELOPING A REPERTOIRE OF ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHING BEHAVIORS

Enthusiasm is an enticing concept. But, can we learn enthusiasm, or is it something we either have or don't have? Based both on research and experience it is noted that enthusiasm does make a difference in the learning environment and with sufficient motivation can be effectively developed and integrated into one's teaching behaviors. Four basic steps are outlined for developing enthusiastic delivery skills.

Step 1. Self-awareness. Development and/or improvement begins with self-awareness. Instruments such as the Enthusiasm Awareness Index can provide valuable insights into teaching behaviors. There is a word of caution here, however, and that is to respond to the Index based on one's actual behaviors and not as to the behaviors one would like to possess. Accurate self-awareness is essential to improvement.

Step 2. Videotaping or observing teaching behaviors. The most effective method of verifying levels of enthusiasm is to videotape one or two presentations and again to rate oneself. If videotape recording equipment is unavailable, a trusted colleague or trained professional may be used to observe and rate one's teaching behaviors and then provide feedback. Steps 1 and 2 have been used extensively by the author and with excellent results. Frequently, enthusiasm is not consciously perceived as an "improvable" skill. However, when attention is called to enthusiasm as an important variable in the learning process, teachers will include it consciously as a part of their delivery skills repertoire.

Another word of caution is necessary here~ don't rely too heavily on the results of only one observation. Repeated observations are necessary to accurately evaluate levels of enthusiasm.

Step 3. Experimentation. After awareness and verification, experimentation with varied levels of enthusiasm is desirable. While enthusiasm may be infectious, it is not gained through osmosis. Teachers should experiment with enthusiasm strategies previously unattempted. Strategies may be developed by consciously experimenting with the seven dimensions described in this writing or by consciously modeling other enthusiastic teachers or former teachers.

Step 4. Selection and Variation. Finally, teachers need to select purposefully from among the verbal and non-verbal enthusiasm options to meet the needs of a particular learning environment. Teachers then can decide when to modulate or escalate their enthusiasm levels to meet the demands of a particular situation in an effort to provide a more effective overall learning environment.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This writing began with the proposition that teacher enthusiasm is a powerful variable in the teacher's repertoire of delivery skills. In addition, teacher

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enthusiasm may provide valuable “fringe benefits” for the learner. Teacher enthusiasm may increase student attentiveness to the teacher as well as to content. Enthusiasm may also increase the learners understanding and appreciation of the subject matter at hand. The teacher’s enthusiasm conveys to the learners that the teacher is interested in what he or she is doing and is willing to expend sufficient energy to assist the students in the process. Enthusiasm also communicates that the teacher really

“loves” what he or she is doing, believes in it, and wants the learners to “feel” and share the teacher’s enthusiasm.

If teachers consciously exhibit enthusiasm for their subject matter and for what they are doing, it is possible that they may become an inspiring powerful force for the student. In the final analysis, perhaps it is enthusiasm that distinguishes merely good teachers from “great” teachers.

EXHIBIT I ENTHUSIASM AWARENESS INDEX

below are seven resources related to enthusiastic delivery skills. Phrase antis your level of enthusiasm based on self-knowledge and past performance in training situational. Remember there are no right or wrong answers. The aim of the index is to assess self-awareness of your level of enthusiasm in training situations and not to evaluate your training effectiveness. Circle the appropriate level of enthusiasm on each index.

LEVEL OF ENTHUSIASM

	LOW		MEDIUM			HIGH	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. Eye Contact	Avoids eye contact; unfocused gaze or blank stare; dull or bored look.		Moderately good eye contact; appearing interested and occasionally lighting up.			Maintains excellent and constant eye contact while avoiding staring; shinning, wide-opened eyes.	
2. Facial Expressions	Expressionless, deadpan, or frowned; little smiling; closed lips.		Smiles occasionally; agreeable looking; pleased; expression generally “fits” situation.			Vibrant; demonstrative; exhibits many variations and frequent changes in expression; broad smile.	
3. Gestures	Arms kept at sides or folded; rigid; infrequent use of arms.		Maintains steady pace of appropriate gestures; pointed occasionally sweeping movements.			Quick and demonstrative movements; Frequent and sweeping movements of hand, arms or head.	
4. Body Movements	Stationary; standing or sitting; seldomly moves from one spot.		Move freely, steadily but slowly; sometimes paces’ uses frequent instructional motions.			Large demonstrative body movements to emphasize vocal delivery; rapid, energetic and natural movements.	
5. Word Selection	Few Descriptors or adjectives; Simple expressions; no use of simile or metaphor.		Moderate use of descriptors, simile and metaphor bur rends to be repetitive.			Highly descriptive; great variety; excellent and frequent use of simile and metaphor.	
6. Vocal Delivery	Monotone; minimum inflection; Poor articulation; little variation; reads from notes or book.		Pleasant variations in pitch, tone, cadence, and volume; good articulation; good integration of notes and instructional materials.			Highly varied tone, pitch, volume and cadence; uplifting intonations; excellent articulation’ variations from rapid excited speech to a whisper. Rarely uses notes or book. r	
7. Overall Energy Level	Lethargic; inactive; sluggish; appears tired or sleepy.		Maintains an even and moderate level of energy; occasional bursts of energy.			Exuberant; high and constant degree of vitality, drive, and spirit throughout session; inspiring.	

Scoring: In general, a score of 42-49 indicates a very high level of enthusiasm. You are “inspired by the gods.”
a score of 21-41 indicates moderate levels of enthusiasm. You are in “apprenticeship to the gods.”
a score of- 7-20 indicates s very by level of enthusiast. You are “inspired by Morpheus.”

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