Developing Teaching Immediacy in Language Teacher Education

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Teacher immediacy refers to the verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors that reduce the psychological distance between a teacher and students. Despite the importance of these behaviors in supporting student learning, teacher immediacy has received little attention in the field of English language teacher training. In fact, in many teacher training and faculty development programs, the explicit teaching of these immediacy behaviors is often absent. In this article, I first present a brief review of the literature on teacher immediacy. Then, I describe the steps for two specific training practices for developing teacher immediacy. Both practices have been used successfully for several years in an MA TESOL teacher training program in Hawaii.

　教師は、生徒との心理的距離を縮めるためにコミュニケーションを図る。この教師の近接性（teacher immediacy）の方法は、言葉を用いるだけではなく、言語外コミュニケーションを取ることもある。これらの具体的な行動（behaviors）は、教育において非常に重要であるにも関わらず、英語教員養成の中では軽視されている。実際、教員のための訓練や大学のファカルティ・ディベロップメント（FD）に、コミュニケーションの取り方（immediacy behaviors）は含まれていないことが多い。本論では、まず教師の近接性について、先行研究を元に説明する。次に、生徒とのコミュニケーション力を向上させるための2つの方法を紹介する。いずれの方法もハワイの教員養成プログラム（MA　TESOL）で実践されており、長きにわたり成功を収めている。

Teacher immediacy refers to the verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors that reduce the psychological distance between a teacher and students. A substantial body of research in the area of instructional communication has shown how immediacy behaviors support learning and are a key factor in student attitudes toward a course and teacher (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Therefore, it's critical to introduce these behaviors to pre-service teachers in language teacher training programs. Furthermore, because of the increasing emphasis being placed on faculty development (FD) initiatives at the university level in Japan (Shrosbree & Cheetham, 2017; Suzuki, 2013), training practices that focus on such behaviors can be valuable components of any such FD programs. In this article, after a brief review of the literature, I describe two specific training practices for developing teacher immediacy, practices that can be used with pre-service teachers in teacher training programs or with in-service teachers as a part of a FD program.

Teacher Immediacy

The concept of immediacy as a set of behaviors emerged in the late 1960s in the field of communication studies, where it was noted that people are "drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian, 1971, p. 1). Immediacy in educational contexts, or teacher immediacy, is located within the broader area of instructional communication—an interdisciplinary field of study that combines insights from educational psychology, pedagogy, and communication in order to examine the communication skills and competencies that are used by instructors and educators in the process of engaging in teaching and learning. Insights from educational psychology help explain the psychological and intellectual processes that predict student learning. The insights from pedagogy focus on the instructional methods teachers use in the classroom. And the field of communication contributes an understanding of how individuals use verbal and non-verbal messages to trigger meanings in the minds of others. The field of instructional communication, then, addresses the question of how teachers can communicate in ways that help their students learn. One part of the answer to this question is teacher immediacy behaviors.

Immediacy behaviors can be classified into nonverbal and verbal behaviors. Verbal immediacy behaviors include praise, addressing students by name, teacher self-disclosure, talking with students before and after class, humor, and using inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our," to name a few. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include gestures, eye contact, smiling, proximity, and a relaxed body position, for example.

Research has highlighted the positive relationship between teacher immediacy behaviors and classroom variables such as student motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 1995) and student engagement—a strong predictor of student learning

(Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009). Increased teacher immediacy results in increases in students' cognitive learning. With teachers skilled in the use of immediacy behaviors, students "attend more to the subject matter, concentrate more on the subject, retain more of the content, and when challenged can correctly recall more of the subject matter than students with nonimmediate teachers" (Richmond et al., 2006, p. 184). Research has also demonstrated how teacher immediacy reduces student anxiety (Richmond et al., 2006, p. 185). This is especially important in language teaching, as a large body of research has shown that anxiety is not only common among students, but also that it has a detrimental effect on aspects of language learning such as confidence and willingness to communicate both in and outside the classroom, (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Williams & Andrade, 2008). Indeed, in a review of the research from over 80 studies on immediacy, Witt, Wheeless, and Allen (2004) note that the results of the studies demonstrate "a meaningful relationship between overall teacher immediacy and overall learning" (p. 197).

Despite its importance, the concept of immediacy has received little attention in the field of TESOL. Hsu's (2006) doctoral work, as one exception, studied the relationship between immediacy behaviors and willingness to communicate (WTC) in English for Taiwanese learners. She notes how the literature has shown WTC to have an impact on second language acquisition. Results from Hsu (2006) showed the relationship to be significant, and, by extension, extremely important to L2 acquisition.

Training in teacher immediacy may be especially beneficial to beginning non-native teachers of English, who may be concerned about their level of English language proficiency. For example, in my years of experience training teachers in an MA TESOL program in Hawaii, many of my non-native speaking students noted, as their number one concern, their perceived low level of English speaking ability. As a result, I have observed many examples of demonstration lessons and student teaching where beginning teachers fail to connect with students during the lesson. What happens is that beginning teachers not only prepare detailed lesson plans for their practice teaching, but they also prepare specific scripts of what exactly to say—much like an actor memorizing his/her lines. As a result, the beginning teachers remain quite still—even frozen—behind a desk/table/podium, afraid to break away from the safety of their lesson plan and script. In fact, teacher immediacy helps all beginning teachers get out into the classroom and engage with students. According to Richmond et

al., (2006): "Increased teaching immediacy results in the teacher being perceived as a more competent communicator, one who listens and cares" (p. 185).

So, can immediacy behaviors be taught? Yes, they can. The research has shown that when specifically addressed and practiced, pre-service and in-service teachers are able to develop and consciously control such behaviors (Ozmen, 2010). In the following section, I describe two training practices for developing teacher immediacy. These practices can be used for training pre-service teachers or as components of FD programs for in-service teachers.

The Development of Teacher Immediacy

The following two practices have been used by the author for years with pre-service teachers in an MA TESOL program in the U.S. and both have received positive feedback from teachers.

1. Developing teacher immediacy through professional noticing.
2. Developing teacher immediacy through focused microteaching.

Professional noticing: The first suggestion for developing teacher immediacy behaviors in language teacher training programs is what is called professional noticing. Professional noticing can be defined as "an ability to recognize and act on key indicators significant to one's profession" (Schack et al., 2013, p. 380). For language teachers, this idea seems closely related to the noticing hypothesis in second language acquisition. The noticing hypothesis states that as a starting point for acquisition, a learner must first consciously notice a particular grammatical feature before it is learned. Thus, teachers must provide guidance for learners in order to help them notice particular linguistic features in classroom activities. Without guidance, learners may not notice what it is teachers want them to notice.

Similarly, for pre-service and beginning language teachers, it is beneficial to direct their attention to particular instructional communication features in their observation assignments. Schack et al., (2013) note that novice teachers are often expected to observe their mentor teachers, but without specific guidance, these teachers "may not observe what we intend for them to see" (p. 381). Furthermore, even for in-service teachers, without proper training or specific guidance, classroom observations among colleagues may be disorganized and ineffective (Bollen et al., 2010; Sheal, 1989). Steps for developing a professional noticing component are as follows:

Step #1: If the observation of practicing teachers is not part of your teacher training or FD program,

then this must be organized. Identify some language classes for pre-service and in-service teachers to observe, and, of course, secure permission from the appropriate individuals.

Step #2: Choose one or two immediacy behaviors for any one observation. Inform the observers that they should concentrate on finding evidence of the particular immediacy behavior during their observation. The teachers being observed do not necessarily need to know the focus of the observation.

Step #3: Distribute a handout like the one in the appendix for use while taking notes during an observation. A structured observation form like this will help pre-service and in-service teachers organize their notes that they are taking very quickly.

Step #4: After the observation, set aside time in your teacher training class or with your participants in a FD program for small group or pair discussions, where the observers can share examples of immediacy behaviors that they observed during their observations.

Step #5: Finally, wrap up by sharing examples with the whole teacher training class or FD group. In addition, encourage the pre-service and in-service teachers to visualize, and comment on, how they might incorporate the immediacy behaviors into their own teaching in the future.

Focused microteaching: In addition to professional noticing, a second practice for developing teacher immediacy is what I call focused microteaching. The concept of microteaching, or demonstration lessons, is well known in language teacher training programs. A microteaching demonstration involves a pre-service teacher delivering a short lesson to fellow classmates, other pre-service teachers, who act as the learners. The lesson is videotaped, and afterwards, all the pre-service teachers and a teacher trainer view the recording and offer constructive feedback to the pre-service teacher. The process has been shown to be effective in teacher training (Moore, 2015). The idea of a *focused* microteaching demonstration is that the pre-service teacher focus on one or two particular pedagogical behaviors or strategies when teaching. In order to sharpen the focus on those one or two behaviors, students are not required to prepare a short lesson—a task that occupies much of a pre-service teacher's attention up to, and during, the microteaching task. Instead, they are provided with a lesson plan for a 10-15 minute activity which they will lead. Some of the best resources for this include the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series and the Oxford Resource Books for Teachers series. Both series include dozens of titles covering a wide range of skills, with each title offering a large selection of short activities in an easy-to-follow, consistent, lesson plan template. Activities from these books are perfect to use for a focused microteaching task. Pre-service teachers do not need to prepare a lesson; instead, they are more able to focus on the *how* of teaching. This brings to mind a distinction that appears in the literature sometimes—a false dichotomy that pits the content of what is taught against the pedagogical method of how its taught. In other words, as Mottet and Beebe (2006), note: "What's more important, instructional content (*what* is taught) or instructional pedagogy (*how* the content is taught)?" (p. 10). In teacher training programs, there has long been a preference for content knowledge over pedagogical method. Yet, as many have recognized, deemphasizing pedagogical method may not be producing the results that had been hoped for (Mottet & Beebe, 2006, p. 11). It is important to move past such false dichotomies and recognize that both content knowledge and pedagogical method are equally important. The focused microteaching task, then, is one way in which to develop the less emphasized aspect of pedagogical method in teacher training. Steps for developing a focused microteaching component in teacher training are as follows:

Step #1: Distribute to each student a prepared lesson plan for a short activity from one of the books in the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series or the Oxford Resource Books for Teachers series. You may assign each student a different lesson plan, or you may assign the same lesson plan to several or all students.

Step #2: Assign 2-3 immediacy behaviors as the focus for the microteaching task. A combination of both verbal and nonverbal behaviors is recommended.

Step #3: Encourage the pre-service teachers to practice the behaviors while following the lesson plan for the short activity.

Step #4: Video record each pre-service teacher's microteaching demonstration.

Step #5: After each microteaching demonstration, allow time for immediate feedback in a whole class discussion. Try to keep the discussion focused on the immediacy behaviors that the pre-service teacher practiced in the microteaching.

Step #6: Collect a follow-up, self-evaluation of the microteaching demonstration after the pre-service teacher has viewed and reflected on the recording. Like the discussion, the self-evaluation should stay focused only on the immediacy behaviors.

This focused microteaching practice can be adapted for FD programs as well. For example, participants in FD programs could select any particular

immediacy behavior to target. Then, in pairs, they could each observe a portion of the other's class during which the teacher consciously targets—exaggerates even—the selected behavior. A discussion among the two would follow, focusing only on the immediacy behavior(s) targeted in the microteaching. Such a task would also help boost the currently low number of peer observation tasks that are part of FD programs in Japan (Suzuki, 2013, p. 3).

Conclusion

In conclusion, because of the importance of immediacy behaviors in teaching and learning, teacher training and FD programs should consider addressing these behaviors. Which behaviors, however, should a program target? Where might we get, with limited time, more "bang for the buck," so to speak? Although the answer to this is beyond the scope of this paper, I will conclude with some final thoughts on particular behaviors that have consistently been underscored by pre-service teachers in my years of working with them. First, praise is one behavior that has been frequently noticed and practiced by pre-service teachers. This has led to frequent discussions about the nature of praise, with pre-service teachers noting, and echoing the literature, that to be effective, praise must describe a specific behavior, rather than offer general comments such as "good job."

Furthermore, eye contact and physical proximity are two behaviors that have been frequently discussed and practiced by my students. Eye contact is important when, for example, pre-service teachers address a class from the front of a room. However, when a pre-service teacher keeps that focus on eye contact while at the same time targeting physical proximity—moving around a class—these two behaviors complement each other well. In fact, what emerges is a "close eye contact," a behavior that seems to further reduce that psychological distance between teacher and students.

Finally, humor and self-disclosure are two verbal immediacy behaviors that my pre-service teachers have thought to be the most useful for building positive affect, which is more conducive to learning.

These are just a few of the immediacy behaviors that have been especially highlighted in my experience over the years. In fact, any combination of immediacy behaviors can be addressed in language teacher training and FD programs, which, it is hoped, place an equal emphasis on both the content of what a teacher is expected to teach as well as the pedagogical method through which that content is to be delivered.

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Appendix

Observation Task: Immediacy Behaviors

- Instructor's name: _____
- Course/level: _____
- Number of students: _____

Immediacy behavior _____

Tick the box every time you see an example of this immediacy behavior	What was happening in the classroom when you observed this immediacy behavior?

After completing the above table, write down what you have learned from this observation

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