Emotional Contagion in the Classroom: The Impact of Teacher Satisfaction and Confirmation on Perceptions of Student Nonverbal Classroom Behavior

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Emotional Contagion in the Classroom: The Impact of Teacher Satisfaction and Confirmation on Perceptions of Student Nonverbal Classroom Behavior

Marian L. Houser and Caroline Waldbuesser

ABSTRACT
Teachers appreciate nonverbally responsive students, but what is missing is an understanding of the direct influence of teachers’ self-perceptions on their perceptions of how engaged their students are in class. Using the emotional contagion theory as a lens, this study examines the premise that satisfied instructors expect students to mirror their own behaviors in the classroom through being nonverbally responsive. Results of the regression model confirm that teachers’ perceptions of their own confirmation behaviors most strongly predict their perceptions of how nonverbally responsive students are in class. Thus, instructors who are more expressive will likely induce students to be more expressive, leading them to determine their students are being more nonverbally responsive. Further, expressive instructors will be more attuned to student interaction because they may subconsciously expect students to mirror their actions through nonverbal behaviors—they will look for it. Additionally, satisfied instructors view their students as satisfied and look for these feelings to be exposed via nonverbal response behaviors. Implications for teacher training and mentoring programs are discussed.

KEYWORDS
Emotional contagion; instructor satisfaction; satisfaction with students; student nonverbal responsiveness; teacher confirmation

Instructors frequently favor one class over another with little explanation for the imbalance. Dornyei and Murphy (2003) sought to understand why “some classes feel ‘good’ and some ‘bad’ at different times or all the time” (p. 4.) and argued that classroom dynamics, student-teacher interactions, and a “cohesive-performance effect” (Dornyei 1997) motivated students to perform, and teachers and students alike to gain stronger overall satisfaction. Ultimately, the level of classroom involvement can shape not only student perceptions of their instructors, but also instructors’ perceptions of students and their own teaching (Goodboy and Myers 2008; Malachowski and Martin 2011).

Specifically, previous research has explored how teacher classroom confirmation behaviors are related to increased student classroom involvement (Campbell, Eichhorn, Basch, and Wolf 2009; Goldman and Goodboy 2014; Goodboy and Myers 2008). In addition, teacher perceptions of their personal confirmation behaviors correlated with students’ nonverbal responsiveness (NVR) behaviors (Malachowski and Martin 2011). Even more important, perhaps, is the finding that instructors’ perceptions of their students’ NVR related to their personal satisfaction with the class and their levels of self-efficacy (Mottet 2000; Mottet and Beebe 2006; Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Medlock 2004a).

Teachers appreciate nonverbally responsive students, but what is missing is an understanding of the direct influence of teachers’ self-perceptions on their perceptions of how engaged their students are in class. In other words, teachers are working very hard in their classes to connect with students (e.g., confirm them) and are satisfied with their teaching, but does this, in turn, predict their perceptions of student nonverbal behavior? Does how I perceive my own teaching impact how I perceive my students? Using the emotional contagion theory as an interpretive lens, this study examines the premise that satisfied instructors expect students to mirror their own behaviors in the classroom through being nonverbally responsive. Understanding this relationship is important, as teaching does not occur in a vacuum, and instructors’ classroom experiences influence how they see their students.

This study will first examine previous scholarship on emotional contagion, teacher confirmation, and student nonverbal responsiveness. The relationships between the variables will then be examined, followed by an analysis of the predictive influence of teachers’ personal perceptions
in the classroom. Finally, implications for future research and the study’s limitations will be discussed.

**Literature review**

**Emotional contagion**

Social science scholars have studied how emotions can affect other people (Darwin 1872; Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994; Howard and Gengler 2001). Darwin (1872) first examined what caused humans to display certain emotions in various contexts. Hatfield and colleagues (1994) then sought to understand how people influenced each other’s emotions and, as a result, advanced the emotional contagion theory. They argued emotions were either negative or positive responses to stimuli; sometimes these responses were contagious. At the individual level, scholars have discovered people often “catch” or mimic the emotions of others (Hsee, Hatfield, and Carlson 1990). Specifically, they tend to copy the emotions of trusted or familiar individuals more readily (Howard and Gengler 2001).

Emotional contagion theory also explains people are either transmitters or catchers (Hatfield et al. 1994; Verbeke 1997). Transmitters in the service industry, for example, positively influence customer emotions, leading to increased sales (Verbeke 1997). In contrast, catchers appear to have both positive and negative implications (Miller, Stiff, and Ellis 1988; Verbeke 1997). In the classroom, this could translate to positive teachers “catching” from responsive students. Research suggests contagion also occurs when the receiver reacts negatively to the initiator’s emotional displays (Hatfield et al. 1994). Thus, if one person displays angry emotions, it influences the other person to back away or leave. Hatfield et al. (1994) referred to this contagion reaction as “complementary” or “countercontagion” (p. 5). Overall, emotional contagion is affected by a variety of stimuli and contexts, forcing it to be a complex phenomenon. This theory provides a useful lens to examine the relationship between instructor perceptions of student nonverbal responsiveness and self-perceptions of their confirmation behaviors, since student nonverbal responsiveness is closely linked with emotional displays in the classroom (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Klein 1971; Malachowski and Martin 2011).

Over the years, emotional contagion has been examined in the instructional context (Bakker 2005; Wang and Schrodt 2010). Bakker (2005), for example, concluded that if a teacher had positive experiences at work, their students would also have more positive experiences in class. In contrast, emotional contagion was reported to have no influence on how students perceived instructor immediacy or their affect for instructors (Wang and Schrodt 2010). Specifically, this study examined whether emotional contagion would influence students’ sense of liking for the instructor when students perceived them as more nonverbally immediate. Emotional contagion, however, was found to have no influence on the relationship between students’ perceptions of instructor immediacy and student affect toward the instructor (Wang and Schrodt, 2010).

This curious disparity leads us to question the impact of the emotional contagion of instructors’ perceptions of their students based upon their own confirmation behaviors of them.

**Teacher confirmation**

Teachers frequently display their positive emotions through their confirmation behaviors toward students (Ellis 2000; Goodboy and Myers 2008; Malachowski and Martin 2011). Ellis (2000) defined teacher confirmation as “the transactional process by which teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals” (p. 266). These behaviors have been linked with classroom outcomes from student learning and motivation to instructor perceptions of student behaviors. (Ellis 2000; Goodboy and Myers 2008; Schrodt and Finn 2011; Malachowski and Martin 2011). When students perceived that their instructors displayed more confirming behaviors, it has been positively related to their affective learning, cognitive learning, satisfaction with the class, and state motivation (Ellis 2000; Goodboy and Myers 2008). Further, research has shown that students felt more supported and understood in classes where the teacher was more invested in them (Goldman and Goodboy 2014; Schrodt and Finn 2011). Overall, this instructor behavior has helped students to have more positive experiences in the classroom (Goldman and Goodboy 2014; Goodboy and Myers 2008).

In addition, teacher confirmation has been found to directly impact student classroom behaviors (Campbell et al. 2009; Goldman and Goodboy 2014; Goodboy and Myers 2008). For example, researchers concluded that if students perceived that instructors displayed moderate levels of confirmation, they communicated more relational, participatory, and functional messages (Goodboy and Myers 2008). In addition to this, teacher confirmation also reduced negative student behaviors, such as excuse-making and challenging instructors.

Though most research has focused on student perceptions of teacher confirmation and their own classroom communication, Malachowski and Martin (2011) investigated how instructor perceptions of their personal
confirmation behaviors with students related to their perceptions of students’ communication during class; they reported a positive relationship between their confirmation behaviors and perceptions of student NVR. Plax, Kearney, and Down (1986) argued that teacher perceptions of their own behaviors “are more likely to affect their own perceptions of how they feel towards students and teaching” (p. 381). Therefore, it is important to understand the instructors’ perceptions of themselves in the classroom, including their own confirmation of students.

**Student nonverbal responsiveness**

The emotional contagion theory can be used to explain student responses to teacher confirmation behaviors. If students find instructors are more positive and complimentary, it could lead them to mimic the behaviors through their nonverbal response reactions. Mottet (2000) defined student nonverbal responsiveness (NVR) as student use of nonverbal cues in the classroom that indicates involvement and listening. Student nonverbal responsiveness is part of the overall nonverbal immediacy construct, but it differs as it focuses only on behavioral responses rather than including the initial behaviors in interaction (Mottet, 2000). Overall, NVR is important to examine within the classroom due to the influence on the communication of the instructor as well as the engagement of students in the classroom (Malachowski and Martin 2011; Mottet 2000; Mottet and Beebe 2006; Mottet et al. 2004a; Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Paulsel 2004b; Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Paulsel 2005).

Several studies have concluded that teacher interactions, self-perceptions, and satisfaction in the classroom are correlated with student NVR (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Klein 1971; Malachowski and Martin 2011; Mottet 2000; Mottet and Beebe 2006; Mottet et al. 2004a; Mottet et al. 2004b; Mottet et al. 2004). Particularly, student nonverbal feedback has been shown to predict how a teacher perceives his or her own teaching within the classroom (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet 2000). When researchers examined student positive feedback in the classroom, they found that if students engaged in more positive nonverbal response behaviors, instructors felt that their teaching was effective in the classroom, and the students achieved increased levels of cognitive learning (Jenkins and Deno 1969).

Student NVR has also been linked with how a teacher viewed the students in the classroom (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Paulsel 2004b). Past scholars concluded that when students utilized positive feedback behaviors, the teachers felt that the students wanted to contribute more in the classroom (Jenkins and Deno 1969). Later, researchers extended this concept to find that if students used more nonverbal response behaviors it was related to increased levels of instructor affect toward students (Mottet and Beebe 2006; Mottet et al. 2004b).

Student-teacher nonverbal interactions have also been related to teacher classroom behavior Klein 1971; Malachowski and Martin 2011). Earlier research on student feedback in the classroom reported that if students used more positive/negative NVR, teachers interacted more positively/negatively with them (Klein 1971). Additionally, if students were more nonverbally responsive, it correlated with an increased instructor willingness to comply with their demands in the classroom (Mottet et al. 2004b). Student NVR has not only accounted for how teachers behaved within the classroom, but a relationship has also been established with student grades. Mottet and Beebe (2006) found that if a student was more nonverbally responsive in class and more involved in classroom interactions (Frymier 2005), it was related to higher grades on oral assignments.

Furthermore, student NVR has been shown to influence teacher outcomes (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet 2000; Mottet et al. 2004a). Specifically, previous researchers concluded that if students used increased levels of NVR, it increased instructor self-efficacy within the classroom (Mottet et al. 2004a). Additionally, student NVR can increase instructor job satisfaction (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet et al. 2004a) such that if students utilized more positive feedback with instructors in the classroom, they enjoyed teaching more (Jenkins and Deno 1969). Mottet (2000) concluded that when students in televised classes provided more nonverbal feedback, it not only made the class more enjoyable for the instructor but also increased the likelihood that instructors would teach the same class again in the future.

**Instructor satisfaction**

Understanding the relationships between teacher confirmation, student nonverbal responsiveness, and teacher satisfaction can help explain the interactions between students and teachers in the classroom. Satisfaction is also a factor that can help explain the mirroring depicted in the emotional contagion theory (Homburg and Stock 2004). Past studies tell us perceptions of student NVR is significantly related to teacher satisfaction in the classroom (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet 2000; Mottet et al. 2004a). Mottet et al. (2004a) found that if instructors’ perceptions of student NVR increased, so did their own levels of satisfaction within the class. Although past research has not examined how teacher perceptions of
their own confirmation behaviors influence their levels of satisfaction, research has revealed a relationship between student satisfaction and instructor confirmation behaviors (Goodboy and Myers 2008). Thus, the relationships between instructor behavioral self-perceptions, student behaviors, and satisfaction should be better understood.

Plax et al. (1986) defined two forms of teacher satisfaction in the classroom: satisfaction with teaching/instruction and satisfaction with students. Past research on student NVR has examined overall instructor satisfaction but failed to separate teaching from student satisfaction, which are very different (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet 2000; Mottet et al. 2004a). Therefore, an examination of this gap in the literature can lead to a clearer understanding of the impact of teacher perceptions in the classroom. As a simple relationship between instructor perception of student NVR and overall satisfaction has been reported (Mottet 2000), it can be assumed that teaching and student satisfaction, separately, will be correlated with instructor perceptions of student NVR as well. To examine these relationships, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Instructor teaching satisfaction and satisfaction with students will be positively related to perceptions of student NVR in the classroom.

The relationship between instructor perception of their own confirmation behaviors and satisfaction in the classroom has not been examined in past research. As Plax et al. (1986), reported, it is teacher self-perceptions that are more likely to impact how they feel about their students and their job. In order to examine these relationships, the following research question is posited:

RQ1: Does a relationship exist between instructors’ perceptions of their own classroom confirmation behaviors and their teaching satisfaction, and satisfaction with students in the classroom?

Previous research has demonstrated a link between instructor self-perceptions of confirmation behaviors and their perceptions of student NVR in the classroom (Malachowski and Martin 2011) and Mottet (2000) concluded that student NVR and satisfaction were significantly related. While a positive relationship has been demonstrated between the variables, the studies do not fully examine how the two components of instructor satisfaction (teaching and students) and perceptions of their own confirming behaviors impact their perceptions of student nonverbal behaviors in the classroom. The emotional contagion theory can be used as a framework to help explain the connections between these variables. If an instructor is more confirming with students and more satisfied, they may expect students to mimic their behaviors through their nonverbal responsiveness in class, and they will be more attuned to student nonverbal behaviors in the classroom. To gain a better understanding of how satisfaction and teacher confirmation behaviors influence instructor perceptions of NVR, the following hypothesis and research question are proposed:

H2: Instructor perceptions of classroom confirmation behaviors will be positively correlated with his/her perceptions of student NVR in the classroom.

RQ2: How much variance in instructor perceptions of student NVR is predicted by instructor perceptions of his/her own confirmation, teaching satisfaction, and student satisfaction?

Method

Participants and procedures

Convenience and snowball sampling were used to collect information from 267 college instructors from colleges across the United States during the middle portion of the semester. The sample included three groups: 51 adjuncts, 55 GTAs, and 161 full time instructors between the ages of 21–79. There were 177 females total and 90 males, with varied ethnicities. Due to the imbalance of men and women in the study, an initial independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether differences existed in perceptions of teacher confirmation, student nonverbal responsiveness, teacher satisfaction with teaching and satisfaction with students. No significant differences were discovered for teacher sex and any of these examined variables.

After university IRB approval, participants were sent a link to an online consent form and anonymous survey containing 50 items to assess their perceptions of student NVR in the classroom, perceptions of their own teacher confirmation behaviors with students, satisfaction with the class (students and teaching), and level of emotional contagion. The survey asked them to think of the first class they taught that week and answer the questions based on that specific class. Demographic questions included participant sex, ethnicity, age, teaching level, department, and years of experience.

Instruments

Teacher confirmation

To measure teacher confirmation, an adapted version of Ellis’s (2000) Teacher Confirmation scale was used. The original scale directed the questions toward students’ perceptions of classroom instructors. Questions were
adapted to reflect teachers’ perceptions of their confirmation behaviors with students in the specific class. Instructors responded to the 13-item, 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) and. The adapted items contained 13 items, including: “In this class, I communicated that I was interested in student learning” and “In this class, I made an effort to get to know students.” The original scale reported high reliability, with multiple studies reporting a .95 alpha (Ellis 2000; Goodboy and Myers 2008). Reliability of the adapted scale was $\alpha = .80$.

**Student nonverbal responsiveness**
The Student Nonverbal Responsiveness scale developed by Malachowski and Martin (2011) was used to measure instructor perceptions of student nonverbal response behaviors in the classroom. Questions were adapted to reflect behaviors of students in the specific class instructors were asked to think back to. The measure was taken from Mottet’s (2000) Student Nonverbal Visual and Audio Responsive measure. Questions solicited responses on an 8-item, 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Items included “In this class, my students nodded their head while I was teaching” and “In this class, my students tried to sit towards the front of the room while I was teaching.” Malachowski and Martin (2011) reported an alpha reliability of .83. Alpha reliability in the current study was $\alpha = .83$.

**Teacher satisfaction**
To measure the instructors’ satisfaction in the classroom, the Teacher Satisfaction Scale developed by Plax et al. (1986) was used. The questions were adapted to measure instructor satisfaction with the specific class for which they completed the survey. The scale included six total items consisting of subscales: teacher satisfaction with their own teaching and satisfaction with students in the classroom. Three sets of 5-point Likert items were included. The first set ranged from 1 (Never) to 2 (Always) and include the questions “Have you ever wanted to quit teaching this class?” and “In general, are students cooperative in this class?” The second set ranged from 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 5 (Very satisfied) for the questions: “Everything considered, how satisfied are you with teaching this specific class of students?”; “How satisfied are you with the general level of students’ abilities in this class?”; and “In general, how satisfied are you with the motivation of the students in this class?” The last 5-point Likert set included the question, “If you could choose again, would you still teach this specific group of students?” Answers ranged from 1 (Definitely not) to 5 (Definitely yes). Previous alpha reliabilities of .76 and .95 were reported (Plax, et al., 1986). The current alpha reliability was $\alpha = .84$ for overall teacher satisfaction. The teaching satisfaction subscale reported $\alpha = .76$, while the student satisfaction subscale had a reliability of $\alpha = .77$.

**Results**
Data were collected from instructors at varying levels (Assistant/Associate/Full Professor; Adjunct/Per Course Instructor; Graduate Teaching Assistant), thus participant responses for the three groups were compared on all outcome variables. Participants’ perceptions of student nonverbal responsiveness $[F(2, 266) = 2.44, p < .09]$, their own confirmation behaviors $[F(2, 266) = .39, p < .68]$, and teacher satisfaction $[F(2, 266) = 2.59, p < .08]$ were compared across the three groups via one-way ANOVA. No significant differences were discovered between the groups, and therefore all the groups were combined for analyses. Correlations and multiple linear regression (see Table 1) were utilized to examine the hypotheses and research questions.

The first hypothesis predicted instructor perceptions of student NVR and overall teacher satisfaction, teaching satisfaction, satisfaction with students, and perceptions of confirming behaviors would be positively correlated. Results from the Pearson Correlations supported this hypothesis for all four variables: overall satisfaction ($r = .49, p < .000$), teaching satisfaction ($r = .44, p < .000$), satisfaction with students in class ($r = .45, p < .000$), and teacher confirmation ($r = .45, p < .000$).

Research question one explored the relationship between instructor perceptions of his/her own confirmation behaviors and overall teacher satisfaction, satisfaction with students, and satisfaction with teaching. Pearson Correlations revealed significant positive relationships between teacher perceptions of his/her own confirmation behaviors, satisfaction with his/her students ($r = .18, p < .01$), and satisfaction with his/her own teaching ($r = .20, p < .001$).

Hypothesis two examined the relationship between instructor confirmation behaviors and perceptions of student nonverbal responsiveness in the classroom. Pearson Correlation revealed a significant positive relationship ($r = .45, p < .000$).

**Table 1. Correlations between all variables.**

<table>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student NVR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher confirmation</td>
<td>.446*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total Satisfaction</td>
<td>.488*</td>
<td>.213*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teaching Satisfaction</td>
<td>.442*</td>
<td>.203*</td>
<td>.912*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Student Satisfaction</td>
<td>.446*</td>
<td>.183*</td>
<td>.907*</td>
<td>.654*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01, "p < .001"
Multiple regression analysis for instructor confirmation, teaching satisfaction, and student satisfaction predicting student NVR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student NVR</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Confirmation</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( p < .01, \quad ^* p < .001 \)

Finally, research question two explored the variance in instructor perceptions of student NVR predicted by personal perceptions of classroom confirmation behaviors toward students, satisfaction with their teaching, and satisfaction with students in the class. This was tested using a multiple regression (see Table 2) and revealed 36.1\% of the variance \( [F(3, 266) = 49.61, p < .000] \) in instructor perceptions of student NVR was predicted by confirmation, and satisfaction with teaching and students in class. All three independent variables significantly predicted instructor perceptions of NVR responsiveness, with teacher confirmation having the highest predictive power \( (\beta = .36, t = 7.11, p < .000) \), followed by instructor satisfaction with students \( (\beta = .24, t = 3.73, p < .000) \), and lastly teaching satisfaction \( (\beta = .21, t = 3.21, p < .002) \).

Discussion

Via an emotional contagion lens, the goal of this study was to investigate the power of instructor self-perceptions on perceptions of student mirroring responses or nonverbal responsiveness in the classroom. Teachers spend years preparing to teach, in hopes of having a responsive class full of students who match their own interest and energy. While much has been studied about what teachers “think of students” and vice versa, the combined influence of teacher self-perceptions of classroom behaviors and feelings of perceived student behavior is new. Knowledge from this study suggests instructors as well as their instructional mentors in teacher training programs could profit from an emphasis on understanding the power of self-perceptions when teaching.

The concept of “metacommunication” (communicating about communication) may also play a significant role here. Bateson (1972), coined this term to describe the nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, etc., that carry unstated meanings. Instructional communication scholars (Wilmot and Nimmo 1980) explain that instructors think about what they are saying and doing (self-thought). In the current study, this metacommunication may develop self-perceptions and, in turn, predict interpretations of students’ NVR. Thus, teachers who view their own classroom behavior a certain way expect students will mirror it; they communicate intrapersonally to understand the metacommunicative influences on their interpretation of student nonverbal behaviors. This reflects the emotional contagion of teaching and should be understood if instructors hope to understand and create meaningful relationships with students. Results of the regression model confirm this. Emotional contagion informs us that people catch the emotions of those around them (Hatfield et al. 1994).

In this model, teachers’ perceptions of their own confirmation behaviors most strongly predict their perceptions of how nonverbally responsive students are in class. Thus, instructors who are more expressive will likely induce students to be more expressive, leading them to determine their students are being more nonverbally responsive. Further, expressive instructors will be more attuned to student interaction because they may subconsciously expect students to mirror their actions through nonverbal behaviors; they will look for it. This dovetails nicely with instructor feelings of satisfaction with teaching and their students. If instructors are satisfied, they perceive their students are as well; teachers look for students’ feelings of satisfaction to be exposed via nonverbal response behaviors (Jenkins and Deno 1969; Mottet 2000; Mottet et al. 2004a). Although this study does not establish causal relationships, results do indicate that it is a plausible hypothesis that should be investigated in the future. It would seem a happier classroom exists with both student and teacher on the same emotional page.

Implications, limitations, and future research

Conclusions from this study create a further understanding of the importance of instructor confirmation behaviors and student NVR in the classroom. The current findings help explain the influence of satisfaction and instructor perceptions of his/her confirmation behaviors on how they “see” student NVR. Understanding these links can help us explain the experiences of teachers in the classroom overall. Past research has extensively examined students’ perceptions of teachers in the classroom, but less research has focused on the experiences of the instructors. Plax et al. (1986) point out the importance of instructor perceptions, as it not only shapes the instructors experience, but also the students’ experiences. Therefore, this study furthers our understanding of what influences the instructor perceptions of students, which can enlighten future researchers on what instructors expect from students; instructors who perceive they utilize more confirmation behaviors expect greater levels of reciprocation. If students do not mimic their behaviors, it can work to explain why...
instructors have negative experiences with students, which can result in a more negative classroom environment for everyone.

Further, the adapted measure of teacher confirmation (Ellis 2000) opens the door for future research on instructor perceptions. The scale was altered to reflect instructor perceptions of their own confirmation behaviors, which can allow for investigations for the relationships of a myriad of student outcomes.

There are, of course, limitations with this study. For instance, we only looked at the perceptions of instructors at the college level rather than actual student nonverbal responsiveness behaviors; future studies should examine student levels of nonverbal responsiveness in the classroom to determine the connection between instructor perceptions and student enactment of nonverbally responsive behaviors. In addition, other untested factors may be adding to student NVR behaviors; in the future, instructor variables, such as the credibility factors of caring and trustworthiness, should be examined. Further, there was a larger percentage of female instructors compared to male instructors in the sample; though this could have influenced the results, an independent samples t-test revealed no gender differences in any of the variables examined in the current study. In addition, previous research has reported the absence of sex differences in teacher confirmation behavior and perceptions of student NVR (Malachowski and Martin 2011). Future research should explore if sex differences exist in gender identity and teacher perceptions of students.

In addition, more should be understood about teacher confirmation impressions at the high school or elementary school levels; future research could examine the perceptions of high school instructors to see if differences exist. Further, participants, although from various departments, were heavily centered within the communication studies field. It may be these professors are more aware of their communication/confirmation in the classroom. Those from “other” fields may interpret confirmation perceptions very differently. It would also be useful to understand the congruence of instructor and student perceptions. Knowing this could reveal much more about the relationship between instructor confirmation behaviors and student nonverbal responsiveness.

This study extends current research on teacher confirmation, teacher satisfaction, and student nonverbal responsiveness; beyond correlational analysis in previous research, instructor perceptions of his/her own confirmation behaviors, satisfaction with teaching, and satisfaction with students significantly predict perceptions of student NVR in the classroom. This study also adds to current knowledge of how instructor self-perceptions in the classroom influence their impressions of students, as well as how emotional contagion can impact teachers and their classroom communication with students. Teachers, teacher-trainers, and mentors would do well to better understand the importance of focusing on the value of these self-perceptions.

References


