

# Eye Contact in virtual education: An alarming change or a new way of learning

Ways of learning have been changing throughout recent times. Technology and new devices clearly accompany a face to face class, there are new elements that challenge teachers and students and their logic of eye contact. In 2020, virtual learning has challenged eye contact among teachers and students. This paper will discuss the roll of eye contact presenting real experiences from students and teachers. First, it will be defined what is non-verbal communication and eye contact as a form of nonverbal communication. Second, it will be analyzed what eye contact is beyond a culture of respecting inside the classroom. Finally, there will be presented some findings about eye contact as a powerful communicator of learning, thoughts and voice.

In a face to face class should be implied its involvement of a "face to face" learning process. Face to face interaction implicates verbal communication through the use of the speaking language and nonverbal communication which "has been defined as communication without words" (Barati, 2015, p. 223). It comprehends all kinds of body and facial expressions like touching, tone of voice and eyes. Based on this, it can be said that eyes contact communicates something and are part of communication. Teaching and learning process requires communication to share, re-think and apply new competences.

Eye contact, as part of nonverbal communication, has been found even in the business world as an important "component of achieving success in giving presentations and improving rapport between representative and client. Both teachers and learners can use eyes as a powerful tool for language learning» (Barati, 2015, p. 222). This is an important finding despite the fact that Barati (2015) proposes eye contact as a key in language learning; it also works for any kind of learning wherein it is necessary to communicate among humans. Ledbury, White and Darn (2004)

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clearly point out that education challenge concerning eye contact is an inevitable aspect in any learning environment: «teachers often forget about or underestimate the importance of non-verbal communication in their own and their students' performance" (p.1).

Eye contact in virtual learning has turned out into something more subtle, it is disturbing students comfort of their house privacy, but it is also opening a door to a bigger percentage of distraction and farer relationships in the learning process. For authors, Ledbury, White and Darn "one aspect of non-verbal communication is the use of the eyes to convey messages» (2004, p. 1). The lack of eye contact in the learning process can cause more confusion and can also affect the motivation and constancy in any learning process.

What Ledbury and *et al*, (2004) point out about the use of eyes to convey messages confirms that when there is not eye contact in a communicative action the capacity of convention can be affected. The avoidance or the lack of eye contact can get the message get ambiguous. «Eye contact is, fundamentally, time and effort saving» (Ledbury, White and Darn, 2004, p. 1). That is why, eye contact needs from both students' and teachers' effort. There will be always things to be done, and eye contact requires time and effort saving. The functionality of accomplishing responsibilities increases while eye contact decreases.

The use of ICTs (information and communications technology, or technologies) should facilitate eye contact process, understanding that «eye contact produces a powerful, subconscious sense of connection that extends even to drawn or photographed eyes (Barati, 2015, p. 224) since eye contact is linked with humans' first survival patterns. Humans' eyes are not structured to receive information in a passive way (Yin, 2013).

To finish, something teachers can do to improve eye contact into virtual learning environments, is to «increase eye contact when he wants to admire or confirm students in the classroom» (Barati, 2015, p. 225). In a virtual learning environment it is fundamental to remember that when the teacher's voice is reaching everyone, his look is able to touch at most, one student at a time. Thus, being touched by the glanze of the teacher that gives a sense of existence to the one who receives his glanze, in teaching and learning, everyone gives sense to the other through recognizing his existence, and it can be done if there is eye contact in the virtual classroom.

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