

Brey, Elizabeth. (2016). **Children Use Nonverbal Teacher Cues to Evaluate Peers**

Abstract

Teachers provide feedback to students not only through explicit praise or criticism, but also through their nonverbal behaviors (e.g., smiles or frowns). Previous research has focused on how teachers' nonverbal cues affect children to whom the behaviors are directed; however, less is known about whether third parties use such information to evaluate others. The present research tested whether 5- and 6-year-old children use teachers' nonverbal behaviors to guide their inferences about, and desire to associate with, unfamiliar children. In Studies 1 and 2, participants saw interactions between a teacher and a pair of students. The two students behaved similarly, but the teacher did not: She directed a nonverbal behavior (smile, nod, shoulder touch, or headshake) toward one student and looked at the other student with a neutral expression. In Study 1, children used some of the teacher's differential behaviors to make inferences about the students' relative intelligence, kindness, and physical strength. In Study 2, children used some of the teacher's differential behaviors to select student partners for activities (reading, movie watching, and lifting). Study 3 pitted differences in the teacher's behaviors against differences in student performance. When asked who was smarter, children selected low-performing students who received more positive nonverbal cues from the teacher rather than high-performing students who received more negative cues. Taken together, the results provide evidence that teachers' nonverbal behaviors serve as an important guide for students' evaluations of one another. Moreover, these studies indicate that children who receive negative nonverbal cues from their teachers may also face negative peer evaluations and exclusion from group activities, which could hinder both their social and academic success.