

Voice and the teacher²



Philip Bliss continues his series on communicating effectively by highlighting ways the voice can be used to foster confidence and minimize stress.

The first words you utter in class are a very important indicator to both you and the children as to your state that day. By warming up the voice a little prior to class, you eliminate much that might be read as negative. You can choose any location you like, but I suggest the shower is the best place as it is warm and private.

- 1 Gently move the muscles of the face around, feeling that you are separating the muscles from the skull. This frees and relaxes the face and helps you communicate more effectively.
- 2 Blow through your lips to warm up these vital articulators. Blow firstly without sound (like a horse), then with sound (like to indicate that you are cold). The lips help you shape and form both the vowels and consonants, but well articulated consonants in particular, enable you to communicate more clearly.
- 3 Gently humming, using as wide a range as possible, will warm up the voice and remind your ear and brain of the notes available. This helps control monotone.

A clean slate

We sometimes take into class feelings and thoughts that can wear us down and erode our focus. Letting these negative thoughts go can be as simple as breathing it out. Try this exercise;

- Sit down, leaning forward in a chair. Place your feet below your knees. Support your chin with your thumbs and have your elbows resting on your lower thighs. Make sure that your tongue is away from roof of the mouth. Let go of all your breath/stress/bad feelings on a large out breath. Then, breathe in through your nose right down to the base of your torso. You

should feel your tummy making contact with your upper thighs – fill right up. Let that breath gently go, and breathe in another deep breath right into the base of the belly. Sit up, still breathing into the belly. Finally, stand up still breathing from the lower abdomen.

You should now feel refreshed,

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empowered and in the moment of what you are about to tackle. This strategy works when you want to “move on” from a class that maybe didn’t go so well, also when you are tired and need to quickly re-charge, and even when you’ve had a bad journey into work. Simply let it go on an out breath.

Breathing for confidence and control

We connect with each other with our breathing, and sometimes we put vibrations on that breath to make conversation. But with or without words, breath is the link between us. Therefore to enable verbal and non-verbal connection with the whole of the class, ensure that you do not interrupt the flow of breath.

This strategy can be used when trying to re-gain control and when you want to bring something out of a pupil, or to calm an upset child.

You might be thinking “I breathe all the time” but you might be surprised how often you cut the breath link.

Notice how you breathe in someone you like, and how you cut your breath connection when you are approached by someone you dislike. Subtle though it may be, that’s how we know whether someone likes us or is listening.

One further thought on breathing; as teacher, you are the lead communicator, and as such the children will follow your breathing pattern. For example, if you follow their breathing pattern after play it will take longer to calm them down. Try to establish a deep, long and relaxed breathing pattern – it can help you keep both you and the children focused, relaxed and stress free.

Looking relaxed

We all know how our body can communicate things we don’t want it to. Here’s a top tip to help you feel, sound and look confident; drop the shoulder blades.

The gap between the lower lobes of the ears and the shoulders very clearly communicates the stress levels of the individual. Furthermore, if the shoulder blades are lifted, this increases the weight perception in the hands, which makes us want to fiddle with them. Also, lifted shoulder-blades reduce the ability to resonate and enrich your voice. And, as if that isn’t enough, lifted shoulders close the chest producing a defensive body image. Better to remember, as often as possible, to drop the shoulder blades.

Philip Bliss B.A. (Hons) lectures voice at Brunel University where he works with undergraduates, lecturers and academics. Through etchtraining.co.uk he delivers training to groups in London and also makes school visits.

The next Voice for teachers course is on June 26th in Central London.