***Introduction***

Have you ever had a conversation with someone, and they wouldn’t look you in the eyes? Was it awkward or frustrating? Well, I recently spent some time avoiding eye contact with people, and I found their responses to be very interesting. I am going to describe how I performed an experiment to study oculesics, and I am going to explain the results that I found. After completing this experiment, I have come to realize that I rely on the use of eye contact much more than I originally thought. I learned that maintaining eye contact is an essential component of effective communication. After completing this experiment and studying oculesics for this course, I feel that I am a credible source of information.

***Experiment***

I teach a Sunday school class at my church for children from age eight to twelve. I decided that I am going to do my experiment on oculesics in this class. I will perform my experiment on Sunday, March, 10, 2013. My experiment will begin at approximately 10:15 a.m. There will be four girls and four boys present while I do the experiment. I will monitor these children’s reactions to the experiment. I will also have someone else help me monitor the children’s responses that I am unable to see.

For my experiment, I will teach the first half of the lesson without making eye contact with the children. This will talk place from approximately 10:15 to 10:35. Then, I will transition to making frequent eye contact with the children during the second half of the lesson. This will take place from about 10:35 to 11:00. I will compare the children’s reactions to these two situations.

The children usually get to the classroom before I do, so I plan to avoid eye contact with them from the moment I walk in the door. I start the class off by taking prayer requests, and I will not make eye contact with them during this time. I will then start my lesson by reading to the children from a book, and then I will have the children volunteer to take turns reading out loud to the class. The students are also welcome and encouraged to ask questions and share their thoughts during the lesson. I will begin to make eye contact with the children about half way through this lesson.

I predict that all of the children will find it very odd that I am avoiding eye contact. I am expecting to get some strange looks and possibly even comments from them. I predict that the boys in the class will have more profound responses to my lack of eye contact. I would not be surprised if one of the boys asks me why I won’t look at them in the eyes. I think that the boys will focus more on my lack of eye contact rather than the lesson itself.

I predict that the girls will definitely notice my lack of eye contact, but will keep their reactions more to themselves. I expect for them to give me strange looks, as if I am crazy. I also expect that the girls might discuss my lack of eye contact amongst themselves and maybe try to decipher the reason for it. I think that the girls will have less obvious reactions than the boys. They may just think to themselves that this is an odd situation.

I think that the children will pay attention to the lesson more easily once I am making eye contact with them. I think that I will definitely be able to detect a greater level of focus on the lesson from the children while making eye contact than when I do not make eye contact with them. Now that I have explained how the experiment will take place and my predicted results, I will describe the children’s actual responses.

***Results***

During the part of the experiment in which I didn’t make eye contact, the class was very chaotic. The boys frequently got out of their seats, and they had several conversations among themselves. Overall, the children did not pay attention to the lesson very well. They had a difficult time keeping up with where we were at while reading.

When I called on the students to tell me something, they hesitated to answer me much longer than they usually do. The boys also kept repeating things that they had said several times. They came up right in front of me to ask me if they could use the restroom, instead of asking from their seats like they usually do. Two of the girls tried to pass things back and forth under the table, and they were arguing with each other. Other than that, the girls did not have any noticeable reactions.

Once I began making eye contact with the children, things began to calm down. The children stayed in their seats much better and didn’t talk as much amongst themselves. They also answered questions much quicker and volunteered to give their thoughts more often. They were much more involved in the lesson and better able to pay attention. Now that I have described some of the children’s reactions to the experiment, I will explain my thoughts about these reactions.

***Discussion***

My prediction that the children would not be able to pay attention as well while I was not making eye contact with them was correct. I felt like the beginning of this lesson was very impersonal due to not making eye contact. I feel that the children detected this too, and didn’t really focus on the lesson. They seemed to feel like I didn’t care or just wasn’t paying attention so they acted up more frequently than usual. They definitely were much more focused during the second half of the lesson in which I made frequent eye contact.

My prediction that the boys would have more obvious reactions to my lack of eye contact was correct. They did not; however, directly ask me why I wouldn’t look them in the eyes. My prediction that the girls would keep their responses to themselves was also correct. I mainly just got strange looks from them. They also seemed to try to take advantage of this opportunity in order to misbehave. They were arguing and passing things under the table because they seemed to think I wouldn’t notice them.

I found it very interesting that the children hesitated to respond when I called on them. I had to tell them to go ahead and give me their answer at least twice. They just sat there like they were waiting on me to look at them first. I think they felt that I was not listening to them since I was not looking in their eyes. I also thought it was interesting that they kept repeating themselves. This also showed me that they felt that I was not listening to them. This seemed to be a frustrating process for the children. This violated their normal expectations, and they seemed confused about how they should react.

It was very difficult for me to not make eye contact with the children. I had to constantly remind and force myself not to look them in the eyes. I never really realized how important eye contact is until this experiment. I felt that it was hard for me to convey meaning when I couldn’t look into the children’s eyes. I almost felt as if I was just speaking to myself. It was hard for me to not look them in the eyes when they were trying to tell me something as well. I couldn’t connect with them and let them know that I was listening and that I cared. It was really amazing to realize how important eye contact is during the communication process.

***Conclusion***

In conclusion, I found this experiment to be very interesting. As a future teacher, I came to realize how crucial eye contact is to efficiently teaching a lesson. I had never been put in a situation where I was forced to avoid eye contact before, and this experiment allowed me to realize how difficult it is to effectively communicate without it. I learned through this experiment that frequent eye contact truly does help to convey meaning and understanding between people in a conversation. Ironically, this was a very “eye-opening” experiment for me!