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The Kinesics of Praise: A Conceptual Framework for Private, Public, Individual, and Group Teacher Praise Gestures

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دراسة السلوك الحركي للثناء:
إطار مفاهيمي لإيماءات الثناء لدى المعلم (الخاص، والعلني، والفردي، والجماعي)

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Abstract:
Classroom praise is multimodal, yet its nonverbal realization has received far less systematic attention than its verbal form, and the two literatures have developed largely in isolation. This paper proposes a conceptual framework describing how teachers' hand gestures function as expressions of praise and specifying the kinesic features that distinguish its forms. Drawing on gesture science (McNeill, Kendon, Müller, Ekman and Friesen) and proxemics (Hall, Mehrabian), together with the educational-psychology literature on praise, the framework organizes praise gestures along two conceptually independent axes. The recipient axis distinguishes individual from group praise and is realized chiefly through directionality and deixis; the visibility axis distinguishes private from public praise and is realized chiefly through amplitude, spatial extent, elevation, and visual reach. The framework isolates a set of kinesic parameters, shows how their settings co-vary to produce four recognizable gestural profiles, and presents a conceptual matrix mapping each praise type onto its characteristic settings together with the contextual conditions that modulate them.

Keywords: Teacher praise, Hand gestures, Kinesics, Nonverbal communication, Classroom interaction, Multimodality, Gesture space, Proxemics, Private and public praise, Individual and group praise, Conceptual framework.

الملخص
يُعدّ الثناء الصفّي فِعلاً متعدّد الوسائط، غير أنّ تحقّقَه غير اللفظي حظي باهتمام منهجي أقلّ بكثير من صورته اللفظية، وقد تطوّر الأدبان إلى حدّ كبير بمعزل عن بعضهما. تقترح هذه الورقة إطاراً مفاهيمياً يصف كيف تؤدّي إيماءات يدي المعلّم وظيفة التعبير عن الثناء، ويحدّد السمات الحركية (الكينيسية) التي تميّز أشكاله المختلفة. واستناداً إلى علم الإيماءة (ماكنيل، وكيندون، ومولر، وإيكمان وفريزن) وعلم المسافات الاجتماعية (هول، ومهرابيان)، إضافةً إلى أدبيات علم النفس التربوي حول الثناء، يُنظّم الإطار إيماءات الثناء على محورين مستقلّين مفاهيمياً. يميّز محور المتلقّي بين الثناء الفردي والثناء الجماعي، ويتحقّق أساساً من خلال الاتجاهية والإشارة الإيمائية (الديكسية)؛ بينما يميّز محور الظهور بين الثناء الخاص والثناء العلني، ويتحقّق أساساً من خلال السّعة والامتداد المكاني والارتفاع ومدى الوصول البصري. ويعزل الإطار مجموعة من المُعامِلات الحركية، ويبيّن كيف تتضافر إعداداتها لتُنتج أربعة أنماط إيمائية قابلة للتمييز، ويقدّم مصفوفة مفاهيمية تربط كلّ نوع من أنواع الثناء بإعداداته الحركية المميّزة، إلى جانب الشروط السياقية التي تُعدّلها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ثناء المعلم، إيماءات اليد، علم الحركة (الكينيسية)، التواصل غير اللفظي، التفاعل الصفّي، تعدد الوسائط، فضاء الإيماءة، علم المسافات، الثناء الخاص والعلني، الثناء الفردي والجماعي، إطار مفاهيمي.

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1. Introduction and Study Background

1.1 Introduction

Praise is one of the most familiar instructional acts, yet it is rarely delivered through words alone. When a teacher commends a correct answer, acknowledges sustained effort, or celebrates a group's success, the spoken message is typically accompanied by the hands, the face, and the orientation of the body. Praise is therefore better understood as a multimodal act in which verbal and nonverbal channels operate together. This premise follows directly from Brophy's (1981) functional analysis, which argued that the meaning of teacher praise is determined by the degree of congruence between its verbal and nonverbal components and by the context in which it occurs. The present study specifically investigates the manual channel of praise in teacher-student interaction. The aim of the study is to propose a conceptual framework visualizing effective performance of gestures for different types of praise: private, public, individual, and group.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research on verbal praise has mapped its rates, forms, and effects in detail (Brophy, 1981; Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Jenkins, Floress, & Reinke, 2015; Mueller & Dweck, 1998), while research on classroom gesture has concentrated on its cognitive and instructional functions, such as how teachers' gestures support the explanation of concepts (Roth, 2001; Alibali & Nathan, 2012). What remains underexplored is how praise, as an evaluative and affective act, is realized through the body—that is, how a compliment is encoded in the form, size, direction, and timing of a hand gesture. The nonverbal realization of praise lacks a descriptive vocabulary and an organizing framework.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to two areas. First, it extends the praise literature in educational psychology by adding a nonverbal dimension to a field that has been predominantly verbal, showing that the recipient and visibility of praise are encoded manually as well as lexically. Second, it offers practical value for teacher education. The framework provides teacher educators and researchers with a shared vocabulary for kinesic praise (for the term kinesics, cf. Birdwhistell, 1970). It also offers a clear account of how private, public, individual, and group praise are performed, helping teachers employ nonverbal feedback deliberately rather than incidentally.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study pursues two objectives: (1) to identify the kinesic features that distinguish different forms of praise; and (2) to build a conceptual framework describing the effective gestures for private, public, individual, and group praise. These objectives are achieved through two research questions:

1. What kinesic features distinguish the different forms of praise expressed through teachers' hand gestures?
2. What are the gestural characteristics of the different types of praise, specifically: private, public, individual, and group?

1.5 Scope of the Study

- The analysis does not include the impact of praise or the impact of hand gesturing in teaching.
- The study analyzes the features of kinesic praise in teacher-student interaction in general education. The study is not restricted to a certain age or educational level.
- The study analyzes the properties of gestures performed with different praise types (individual, group, private, and public); it does not analyze when or why a certain type is appropriate.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Defining Praise

Praise may be defined as a positive verbal or nonverbal evaluation that a teacher directs at a student in response to desirable behaviour, effort, or achievement. Brophy (1981) distinguished praise from simple feedback or affirmation, arguing that to praise is "to commend the worth of or to express approval or admiration," an act that carries evaluative and affective weight beyond mere acknowledgement.

Praise is a multimodal act whose manual channel can both accompany and replace speech, so that the hands are capable of performing praise in their own right (Brophy, 1981; Hostetter, 2011; Roth, 2001).

2.2 Classifications of Praise

The praise literature classifies praise along several dimensions. Floress et al. (2017) conducted a study reviewing the trends and the characteristics of teacher praise. They found that praise is classified based on specificity, channel, recipient, and manner of delivery. They distinguish praise by its specificity, differentiating between general praise and behaviour-specific praise; by its channel, distinguishing between verbal and nonverbal

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praise; by its recipient, separating praise addressed to an individual student from praise addressed to a group; and by the manner of delivery, contrasting loud and quiet praise.

Two of these typologies are particularly relevant to the present study: the recipient typology and the visibility typology. Both are inherently spatial and, therefore, readily expressed through hand gestures. In contrast, the specificity typology is excluded from this analysis because it reflects spoken lexical content rather than manual realization.

One should take into consideration that the two typologies (recipient and the delivery, or visibility) are logically independent. The recipient typology determines the intended recipient (who the praise is for): an individual or a collective. On the other hand, the visibility typology governs the audience reach (how widely the praise is made perceptible): private or public. Therefore, the proposed framework developed below treats recipient and visibility as two separate axes rather than as a single continuum.

Keeping the two axes separate avoids the conceptual error of treating individual as a synonym for private, or group as a synonym for public. It also allows the four praise types to be defined as combinations rather than as points on a single line.

2.3 Teachers' Gestures in Classroom Interaction

Research on classroom gesture establishes that teachers' hands are communicatively significant. Roth (2001), reviewing work across anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and education, concluded that gesture is tightly coupled to speech and cognition and plays a substantive role in teaching and learning rather than functioning as idle movement. Alibali and Nathan (2012) demonstrated, in the domain of mathematics instruction, that teachers' gestures externalize and ground meaning, so that the hands become part of the instructional message. More broadly, Hostetter's (2011) meta-analysis found that gestures provide a significant, if moderate, benefit to communication, with the benefit depending on gesture type and on the redundancy between gesture and speech.

2.4 Gap in the Literature

Existing literature describes how the hands support explanation and how teachers verbally praise their students. However, literature on the intersection—the manual performance of praise—is lacking. The present study addresses this gap. The study explores the kinesic gestural features of praise. The study explores four types of praise: individual, group, private, and public.

3. Constructing a Conceptual Framework of Kinesic Features of the Four Praise Types

3.1 Conceptual Grounding in Gesture Studies

Before praise gestures can be classified, the descriptive constructs used to analyse them must be established. This section synthesizes five strands of gesture and nonverbal-communication research. Each theoretical strand contributes to developing the taxonomy of praise gestures.

The first strand is McNeill's (1992) foundational account of hand gesturing. McNeill distinguished several kinds of gesture: iconic, metaphoric, deictic (pointing), and beats. McNeill introduced the notion of gesture space, the bounded region in front of the speaker within which gestures are performed, extending from a restricted centre near the torso to an expanded periphery. Two of his categories are directly relevant to praise: (1) deictic gestures, which point to a referent and thereby specify a target; and (2) beats, the small rhythmic flicks of the hand that mark emphasis in time with speech. The concepts of gesture space, deixis, and the beat recur throughout the framework below.

The second theoretical strand integrates Kendon's (2004) work on gesture as meaningful visible action alongside Müller's (2004) work on the palm-up open hand. Together, these frameworks show that hand configuration and palm orientation carry conventionalized pragmatic functions such as offering, showing, and presenting. Their works ground the treatment of configuration and palm orientation as meaningful parameters rather than incidental details.

The third strand is Ekman and Friesen's (1969) typology of nonverbal behaviour, which identified emblems. Emblems are gestures with a direct verbal translation and a stable, culturally shared meaning. Examples of emblems are the thumbs-up, the open-palm applause, the "OK" sign, and several of the most recognizable praise gestures. Because emblematic meaning is conventional, it is also culturally variable, a point that becomes important when the framework's boundary conditions are considered.

The fourth strand draws on spatial theories of interpersonal communication. Hall's (1966) proxemic model demonstrates that interpersonal distance shapes social interactions into four distinct zones (intimate, personal, social, and public), each defining expectations for spatial scale and visibility. Complementing this, Mehrabian's (1971) work on nonverbal immediacy shows that behaviors reducing physical separation—such as direct body orientation and high visual presence—enhance perceived closeness. Together, proxemics and immediacy bridge physical gesture size with social audience reach, forming the theoretical basis for the private–public axis.

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The previous four strands provide the kinesic and communicative tools (gesture mechanics, proxemics, deixis, nonverbal immediacy); however, the fifth strand provides the empirical educational foundation for the significance of the private–public dimension.

The fifth strand grounds the framework in empirical behavioral research on praise delivery. Blaze et al. (2014) directly compared public (loud) and private (quiet) praise in secondary classrooms, demonstrating that both forms effectively increase appropriate behavior with no significant functional difference in behavioral outcome. This empirical evidence supports the present framework in two ways. First, it validates public and private praise as operationally distinct categories defined specifically by audience reach. Second, it indicates that greater visibility does not inherently increase intervention potency; rather, the choice between public and private delivery depends on situational and student appropriateness. The proposed gestural framework adopts this functional distinction while remaining neutral regarding the superiority of either mode.

3.2 Two Dimensions of the Framework: Recipient and Visibility

This framework categorizes teacher praise gestures across two independent kinesic dimensions: recipient structure and delivery visibility.

First, the recipient axis addresses who receives the praise, separating individual targets from collective ones. The recipient axis relies on directionality and deixis (McNeill, 1992; Kita, 2003). Individual praise relies on directed deictic gestures pointing toward a single student. Group praise employs sweeping, encompassing trajectories across the classroom space—making directionality and deixis its core governing features. Second, the visibility axis determines how widely the gesture is perceived. Visibility relies on proxemic variations in gesture space (Hall, 1966; Mehrabian, 1971). Private praise is realized through low, body-proximal movements (i.e., subtle, low-elevation movements kept close to the torso). Public praise employs large, elevated, high-amplitude gestures (i.e., high-elevation, far-reaching movements). This axis translates proxemic shifts (Hall, 1966; Mehrabian, 1971) into kinesic terms by varying spatial amplitude, elevation, and visual exposure.

Therefore, directionality and deixis fix target focus, whereas amplitude, spatial extent, and visual reach fix publicness.

4. Kinesic Features for Describing Praise Gestures

This section identifies the core kinesic parameters required to analyze praise gestures, demonstrated in Table 1. Derived from the theoretical constructs established in Section 3.1, these parameters represent a set selected specifically for their relevance to teacher praise. The parameters have been refined to eliminate redundancy while preserving analytical precision. Two key considerations guided this reduction. First, overlapping parameters are combined rather than treated separately—for example, visual reach subsumes general visibility, while spatial extent and amplitude are closely linked. Second, no single parameter determines a praise type on its own; each praise type is realized by multiple parameters acting together. This section presents the selected parameters, each with a definition, its range of possibilities, and its relevance to the praise typology. The following section, Section 5, integrates them into gestural profiles.

Table 1. Kinesic features relevant to praise gestures.

Kinesic feature	Range of possibilities	Axis chiefly served
Configuration / gesture type	thumbs-up, open palm, applause, raised hand, fist, point, hand-to-heart	meaning / register
Amplitude & spatial extent	low / restricted → high / expanded	visibility
Elevation	below chest → above shoulder	visibility
Directionality & deixis	toward one student → sweeping across the room	recipient
Trajectory	short / localized → sweeping / across-group	recipient + visibility
Visual reach	restricted → extended	visibility
Speed & dynamics	slow / controlled → rapid / energetic	affective register
Duration & holds	brief → sustained / prolonged hold	salience
Repetition & rhythm	single → repeated / rhythmic beats	emphasis
Timing (to speech)	before / with / after / instead of speech	verbal relation
Palm orientation	up / down / outward / toward recipient	meaning / register

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4.1 Configuration

Configuration is the particular shape of the hand, fingers, and arm that form the gesture. It is the parameter most responsible for what a praise gesture conventionally means. Configuration determines the gesture type. Many praise configurations are emblems in Ekman and Friesen's (1969) sense; they carry a stable, culturally shared translation. For instance, the thumbs-up signifies approval, applause signifies celebration, the open palm signifies acknowledgement or offering (Müller, 2004), and a raised or extended hand signifies recognition.

Hand configuration and palm orientation are logically prior to other parameters. They define the gesture's primary communicative intent (e.g., approval, celebration, or recognition). The others are spatial parameters modulating how far and to whom the praise is delivered. That is, configuration and palm orientation define the fundamental meaning of a gesture whereas the other spatial properties simply adjust the scale and direction of the message.

4.2 Palm Orientation

Palm orientation is the direction the palm faces during the gesture—upward, downward, outward, or toward the recipient—and it contributes finely to interpretation. The palm-up open hand is associated with offering, presenting, and inviting (Müller, 2004; Kendon, 2004), which lends it to the appreciative display of a student's contribution; the palm turned outward functions in acknowledgement and greeting; the palm toward the recipient personalizes the address. Palm orientation thus works with configuration to refine the register of praise—approval, offering, acknowledgement, or encouragement—without altering its target or scale.

4.3 Amplitude and Spatial Extent

Amplitude is the magnitude of the hand or arm movement; spatial extent is the amount of gesture space the movement occupies. They are related and thus treated together. Possibilities range from low amplitude and restricted extent—subtle movements confined close to the torso—to high amplitude and expanded extent, large movements reaching into the periphery of McNeill's (1992) gesture space. This parameter is the primary determinant of visibility. Low-amplitude, restricted gestures suit discreet, private praise because they are hard to perceive from a distance, whereas high-amplitude, expanded gestures make praise salient across the room and therefore public. The loud–quiet contrast documented verbally by Blaze et al. (2014) has, in effect, a manual counterpart in the amplitude of the praising hand.

4.4 Elevation

Elevation is the vertical position of the hand relative to the teacher's body, ranging from below chest level, through chest and shoulder level, to above the shoulder. Elevation works alongside amplitude to govern visibility: raising the hand lifts the gesture above the visual clutter of desks and bodies, extending the number of students who can perceive it. A thumb held near the waist is seen by a neighbour alone, whereas the same thumb held above the shoulder is seen by the back rows. Greater elevation therefore increases the public reach of praise, which is why celebratory, class-wide approval tends to be performed high, whereas discreet individual approval tends to be performed low.

4.5 Directionality and Deixis

Directionality is the orientation of the movement toward its intended recipient. It is the parameter that most clearly distinguishes individual from group praise. A gesture may be aimed at one student, a group of students, or toward the whole class. When aimed at one student, it functions deictically, pointing out a single referent, as McNeill (1992) and Kita (2003) describe deictic gesture. When aimed at a group, on the other hand, the configuration takes the form of a lateral sweep across the whole room or across a collective section in the room. Directionality thus fixes the target of praise. It does not, however, fix visibility. As Section 3.2 noted, a sharply directed gesture may still be large and high enough for the whole class to witness, so directionality must be read together with amplitude and elevation rather than in place of them.

4.6 Trajectory

Trajectory refers to the path the hand follows as a gesture unfolds, ranging from short and localized to direct and linear, or broad and sweeping across a group. It contributes to both dimensions of praise: visibility and recipient orientation. A short, direct trajectory from the teacher toward a single student reinforces individual address and may support private praise by limiting the gesture's spatial reach. In contrast, a broad, lateral, or sweeping trajectory can encompass several students, indicating group praise while increasing the gesture's visibility to others in the classroom.

Trajectory therefore connects the recipient and visibility dimensions. That is, trajectory helps indicate both the intended recipient and the extent to which the praise is visible to others. Its shape (direction) indicates who is addressed, while its spatial breadth influences how widely the praise is seen.

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4.7 Visual Reach

Visual reach is the extent of the classroom over which a gesture can actually be perceived. It is the parameter that most directly influences the private–public distinction. Visual reach is not a single property of the hand; it is a joint product of gesture size, elevation, arm extension, the distance between teacher and student, the teacher's position, and the layout of the room. Because it integrates several other parameters with the proxemic facts of the setting (Hall, 1966), visual reach is the summary variable for visibility: restricted reach yields private praise, extended reach yields public praise. For this reason, the framework treats visibility and visual reach as two names for the same underlying dimension rather than as independent features.

4.8 Speed and Dynamics

Speed is the rate at which the hand moves, ranging from slow and controlled to rapid and energetic, and it modulates the affective register of praise rather than its target or visibility. A controlled, measured movement communicates restrained, sincere approval, whereas a rapid, vigorous movement communicates excitement and celebration. Because the perceived sincerity of praise conditions its motivational value (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002), speed is not a trivial embellishment: an energetic flourish suits collective celebration, while a calm, deliberate movement suits the quiet acknowledgement of individual effort.

4.9 Duration and Holds

Duration is the length of time a gesture is maintained, including the hold at its peak, ranging from a brief flick to a sustained display with a prolonged hold. Duration governs salience. A brief gesture functions as a light, passing acknowledgement that does not interrupt the flow of the lesson, which suits discreet individual praise; a sustained gesture, held in place, draws and keeps attention, which amplifies emphasis and suits public recognition. For example, holding a thumbs-up for several seconds transforms a brief gesture into a sustained expression of praise that can be noticed by the entire class.

4.10 Repetition and Rhythm

Repetition is the number of times a movement recurs; rhythm is the temporal patterning of those recurrences. The two are treated together because rhythm presupposes repetition. Settings range from a single discrete movement, through two or three repetitions, to sustained rhythmic beats, which may be synchronized with stressed words in the manner McNeill (1992) described for the beat gesture. Repetition and rhythm intensify emphasis and enthusiasm: a single beat marks a specific, individual acknowledgement, whereas rhythmic clapping or a sequence of distributed beats across a row conveys a sense of shared, building celebration. Excessive repetition, however, risks appearing exaggerated and may reduce the gesture's communicative value, a point taken up among the boundary conditions in Section 6.2.

4.11 Timing Relative to Speech

Timing is the temporal relationship between the gesture and the verbal or interactional event it accompanies. A praise gesture may precede verbal praise, anticipating it; coincide with it, reinforcing it; follow it, confirming it; or occur instead of it, substituting for speech altogether. This parameter determines the gesture's relation to the verbal channel and connects directly to the two modes identified in the Introduction. When the gesture coincides with or follows speech it supports and intensifies verbal praise; when it occurs alone it carries the praise independently, which is often precisely how discreet, non-disruptive individual praise is delivered during an activity.

5. Gestural Characteristics of the Four Praise Types

The parameters specified above do not act in isolation; each praise type is a characteristic configuration of several of them. This section analyzes two essential dimensions of praise gestures: visibility and target recipient. This analysis is grounded in the gesture constructs established earlier. The analysis provides a theoretically grounded framework for understanding how praise is realized manually.

While spoken praise uses acoustic volume and projection to indicate audience breadth, manual praise achieves this through kinesic mechanics, specifically hand size, elevation, and trajectory. These parameters signal whether feedback is targeted at one student or the entire room.

5.1 Visibility: Private and Public Praise

Public praise expands into the upper and outer gesture space (Hall, 1966; McNeill, 1992). Characterized by shoulder- or head-level hand placement, full arm extension, and high-amplitude movement, this mode maximizes visual reach across the classroom. Common examples include elevated clapping, an overhead thumbs-up, or a high open-palm display. Kinesically, this expansive scale mimics high acoustic volume, ensuring whole-class visibility in the same way that loud praise achieves auditory reach (Blaze et al., 2014).

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Private praise reverses these kinesic settings. Characterized by low amplitude and restricted spatial extent, private praise is kept low in the gesture space—near the waist or shielded by a desk—and relies on subtle wrist or finger movements rather than full-arm articulation. Typical realizations include a small thumbs-up held near the hip, a brief low wave, or a discreet affirmative beat (McNeill, 1992) accompanied by direct eye contact. The reduced visual footprint restricts perception to the intended student, providing the manual counterpart to the quiet verbal praise examined by Blaze et al. (2014) when public visibility is undesirable.

5.2 Target Recipient: Individual and Group Praise

Individual praise relies on deictic precision. The gesture forms a direct vector from teacher to student, accompanied by mutual gaze to establish a closed interactional loop between the two (Kita, 2003; McNeill, 1992). Typical realizations include an open-palm point directed at a single desk—often preferred over an index-finger point, which can carry accusatory connotations (Kita, 2003)—or a targeted beat gesture synchronized with eye contact as work is returned. The clear directionality ensures that the feedback is addressed to one recipient, regardless of its spatial visibility.

Group praise transforms the gesture's trajectory from a single point into a broad spatial plane. Rather than isolating an individual student, the teacher uses sweeping lateral movements that encompass a wider section of the room, often employing metaphoric gestures that treat the collective as a unified entity (McNeill, 1992). Typical realizations include a wide, two-handed sweep with open palms turned upward (Müller, 2004), a series of distributed beats moving across a row, or a gathering motion signifying shared achievement. This broad trajectory explicitly labels the group as the recipient. These expansive movements naturally increase visual reach; therefore, group praise is often shifted towards the public end of the visibility dimension.

5.3 Synthesis and the Independence of the Axes

The two axes, recipient and publicness, can now be stated compactly. Private praise tends to involve low amplitude, restricted spatial extent, limited visual reach, low elevation, and brief duration, yielding low overall visibility. Public praise tends to involve greater amplitude, expanded extent, broader visual reach, higher elevation, and often sustained holds or rhythmic repetition, yielding high visibility. Individual praise tends to involve a narrow, deictic directionality and a short, linear trajectory anchored by gaze. Group praise tends to involve a broad, sweeping directionality and a lateral trajectory that encompasses several recipients. Briefly, the distinction between private and public is carried mainly by visual reach, amplitude, spatial extent, elevation, and trajectory breadth, whereas the distinction between individual and group is carried mainly by directionality, deixis, and trajectory shape. Some of the parameters, as noted earlier, overlap—such as visual reach with general visibility, and spatial extent with amplitude.

6. Presentation of a Two-Axis Conceptual Framework

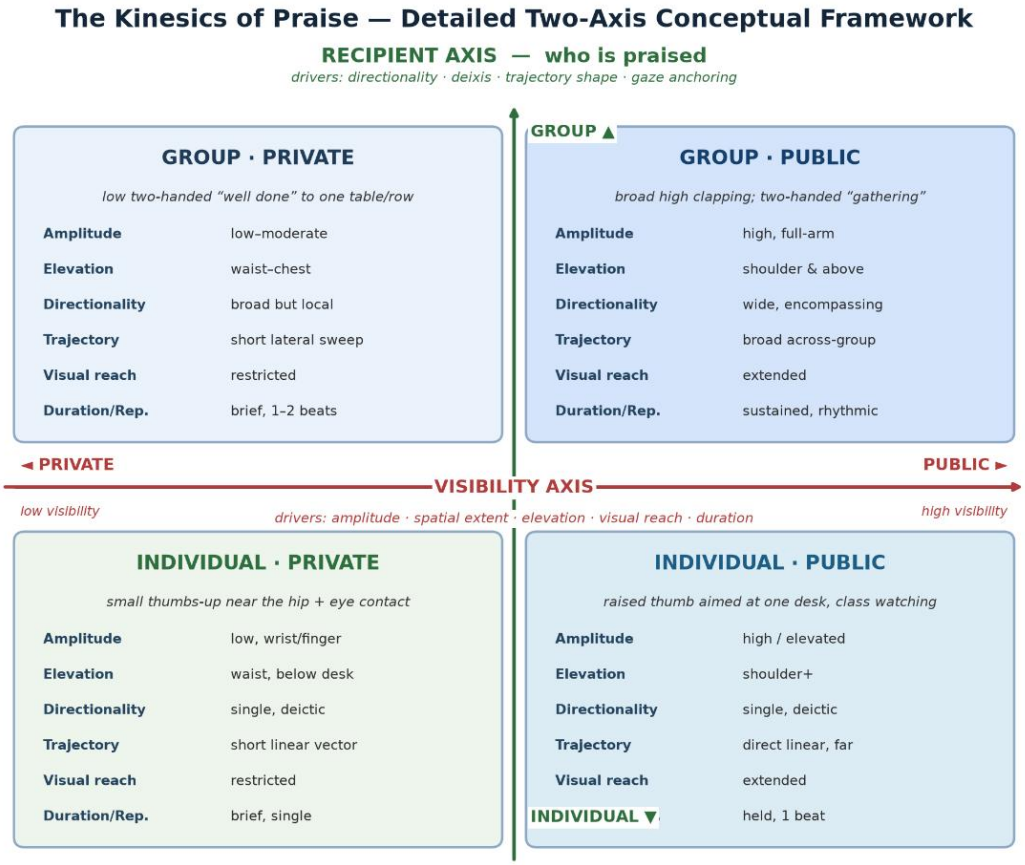
6.1 The Two-Axis Conceptual Framework: The Kinesics of the Four Praise Types

The proposed framework, as visualized in Figure 1, consists of four praise types, demonstrated on two crossing axes. These types are not separate entities on the framework; they are four combinations of settings along two conceptually independent axes: recipient and publicness/visibility. A recipient axis, carried by directionality and deixis, distinguishes individual from group praise, and governs whom the praise is for. A visibility axis, carried by amplitude, elevation, trajectory, and visual reach, distinguishes private from public praise, and governs how widely the praise is seen. Briefly, where individual praise narrows the former and group praise broadens it, private praise minimizes the latter and public praise maximizes it. Table 2 summarizes the characteristic settings for each type.

Table 2. Conceptual framework: characteristic kinesic settings of the four praise types.

Kinesic parameter	Private	Public	Individual	Group
Amplitude / extent	low / restricted	high / expanded	moderate	moderate–high
Elevation	low (waist–chest)	high (shoulder+)	variable	chest–shoulder
Directionality	narrow	variable	single, deictic	broad, sweeping
Trajectory	short / localized	broad / far	direct / linear	lateral / across-group
Visual reach	restricted	extended	variable	extended
Duration / holds	brief	sustained	brief	sustained
Repetition / rhythm	single	repeated / rhythmic	single beat	distributed beats
Typical configuration	small thumbs-up, low wave	high clap, raised thumb	open-palm point	two-handed sweep / gather
Axis chiefly defined	visibility (low)	visibility (high)	recipient (one)	recipient (many)

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Note. The four settings are modulated by context (Section 6.2): classroom size · teacher–student distance · student characteristics (age and culture; emblem meaning) · timing and frequency.

Figure 1. The kinesics of praise: a two-axis conceptual framework.

6.2 Contextual and Boundary Conditions

The framework describes default settings, but those settings are modulated by the context in which praise occurs. Four conditions are especially significant. Attending to them prevents the framework from being applied mechanically; focusing on them ensures the framework is used naturally rather than like a strict formula.

Classroom Size

The physical size of the room scales the parameters. In a large lecture hall, achieving even moderate visual reach requires greater amplitude and higher elevation than in a small seminar room, so a gesture that counts as public in one setting may register as merely personal in another. Visibility is thus relative to the space, a direct consequence of treating visual reach as a joint product of gesture and setting (Hall, 1966).

Physical Distance

The distance between teacher and student conditions how a gesture is perceived. At close range, within Hall's (1966) personal zone, small movements suffice and large ones may feel overwhelming; at a distance, the same small movement becomes invisible and must be enlarged to carry. Distance therefore interacts with amplitude and elevation to determine whether an intended private gesture remains private or an intended public gesture actually reaches its audience.

Student Characteristics

Age, cultural background, familiarity, and individual preference shape interpretation. Because many praise configurations are emblems whose meanings are culturally specific (Ekman & Friesen, 1969), a thumbs-up or an "OK" sign that is interpreted as warm approval by an individual or a group may be neutral or even offensive in another.

Timing and Frequency

Finally, timing and frequency condition effectiveness. Poorly timed or excessively frequent gestures lose their communicative force, just as indiscriminate verbal praise loses its motivational value when it is perceived as insincere or automatic (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Jenkins, Floress, & Reinke, 2015). While moderate repetition heightens emphasis, excessive repetition risks appearing exaggerated and distracting. Thus, the dynamic parameters outlined in Section 4 are constrained by a functional ceiling.

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7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary

The study aims to establish a conceptual framework of kinesic praise in teacher-student interaction. The framework proposes two axes: recipient and visibility. Each dimension is divided into two further categories: individual versus group, and private versus public, respectively. Each category is realized by specific hand movements and spatial behaviors. Private praise is realized by a small, low-elevation thumbs-up held near the hip or waist, a brief low wave shielded by a desk, or a discreet affirmative beat paired with eye contact. Public praise is realized by broad, high-elevation clapping, a raised thumbs-up sustained above head or shoulder height, or an overhead two-handed open-palm display. Individual praise is realized by an open-palm point directed toward a single desk or student, or a single targeted beat gesture synchronized with direct eye contact as an assignment is returned. Group praise is realized by a broad two-handed lateral sweep with open palms turned upward, a sequence of distributed beats moving sequentially across a seating row, or a two-handed gathering motion.

Kinesic features of praise are adjusted according to contextual conditions such as room size, distance, culture, and frequency.

7.2 Research Recommendations

The framework proposed here is grounded in established gesture science and the verbal-praise literature. Nevertheless, it remains to be tested through direct observational measurement in authentic classrooms, including cross-cultural comparison of their emblematic configurations. Establishing such a descriptive baseline would allow the conceptual framework advanced in this paper to be refined into an empirically validated model of the kinesics of praise.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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