

Nonverbal Communication and the Education of Children

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In this essay the authors will describe some of the insights that have emerged from the study of human communication in general and nonverbal communication in particular.¹ We will suggest some of the implications of this new understanding for education in general and for the classroom teacher in particular.

One of the authors (P.B.) is an anthropologist concerned with the comparative study of human communication. The other (H.B.) has spent many years in early childhood classrooms, in teacher-training and parent-education programs, and was the director of a community cooperative school in New York's East (Spanish) Harlem. Our own discussions persuade us that the communication model or framework can be useful in redefining or restating some

¹The authors are particularly indebted to Gregory Bateson, Ray L. Birdwhistell, Edward T. Hall, and Eliot Chapple, whose research and insights have contributed most to our thinking about human communication. Each of these men would doubtless prefer a more precise representation of his work than the nature and length of this essay permits. We accept the responsibility for omitting and restating much in our effort to relate anthropological thinking about human communication to the education of children. We suggest the following original sources for further reading: Ruesch and Bateson (1968), Birdwhistell (1968), Hall (1963, 1968), Chapple (1940), and Chapple and Arensberg (1940).

of the concepts of education and can provide new, or perhaps only more direct, approaches to some of the problems in education.

We will (1) contrast an older and a newer view of human communication, (2) show how we arrive at our present view by making observations of imaginary communication situations, (3) describe and analyze actual communication situations involving children and classrooms and discuss the broader implications of these examples, and (4) relate our present understanding of human communication to the present and future of education in general by way of suggestions about "what to do about it."

I

In the recent past the so-called behavioral sciences were focused more on behaviors or parts of people than on whole people. Doctors were concerned with diseased organs or organ systems; psychologists studied reactions to stimuli; psychiatrists looked for and exorcised neuroses; teachers were trained to get the information into children that would enable them to score high on assorted tests and to perform well in assorted subject areas. Human communication was taken to be the study of messages, and almost always these were language messages. While animals might howl, growl, bristle, or dance, people were thought to use language as their principal, if not their only, important communication system.

The stuff of communication was information, organized as facts, concepts, or beliefs and taught as packaged knowledge. Each person was seen to have a kind of filing cabinet where this information or knowledge was stored. Ideally, each person's filing cabinet should contain the greatest possible amount of this knowledge in a well-ordered and usefully cross-indexed filing system. Much of a person's social worth and perhaps all of his education was assessed in terms of his capacity to produce this information, competently encoded, on demand. If some children were difficult to teach, it was because their filing cabinets (at the onset of education) were both impoverished and chaotic or because they suffered from a motivation deficiency.

However one looked at communication or education, the key seemed to be language. Parents competed to have their children

speak and read early. Schools still use reading scores as their most significant index of success or failure in the early years. We have come to put such great emphasis on language as our chief communication modality, and we offer such great rewards to children who can construct and perform elaborate and sophisticated messages, that it is possible for some people to believe that even human relations is a verbal-message enterprise.

Talk (and reading and writing) can serve the communication requirements of science, technology, and elaborate civilization-building, but talk alone cannot engender interpersonal warmth, openness, or intimacy. The growing feeling of alienation in our society will not be dispelled by teaching people better language skills.

Today the human sciences are broadening their focus to include the "whole man," and the milieu of his life is not only the environment and the technological extensions of man but a human environment of other live people organized into a complex society. Where once doctors specialized in organs or organ systems, they now also specialize in family and community medicine. Psychiatrists and psychologists are increasingly concerned with a person's relationship to his family and society as the milieu for his mental health. Teachers are now reading about and attending conferences concerned with "open education," where children learn in an interactional milieu more nearly resembling a socially interacting world of people engaged in discovery. Human communication is coming to be seen as the processes by means of which people relate to each other.

With the older approach to communication we tended to think that a message belonged to its sender, who sent it to another person. Our communication research told us a great deal about the human capacity to generate, encode, transmit, receive, decode, and act upon messages as though messages *caused* behavior. But it told us little about human relations. Since the easiest messages to find and analyze were verbal messages, we tended to suppose that verbal messages alone caused behavior and that nonverbal communication was only the unlearned reflection of inner emotional states. It was difficult if not impossible to discover the "meaning" of nonverbal behavior, and without "meaning" it was difficult to think of messages

or communication. Even today one finds popular articles that discuss language use in great and even scientific detail, but the same publications do little more with the so-called nonverbal behavior than amuse (or embarrass) the reader with psychological interpretations based on flimsy correlations.

When we study communication as the process by means of which people relate to each other, we must look at the context in which it occurs—the human relationship. And when we examine a human relationship, such as a simple conversation between two people, we almost immediately discover that there are multiple modalities or channels operating in addition to language. We discover that the modalities, verbal and nonverbal, are learned as patterns of the culture (as language is learned) and that they are systematic (as language has grammar, for example). Furthermore we discover that they all fit together; they are systematically interrelated.

A mother holds and feeds her baby; two people enjoy “talking to each other”; a community of mathematicians contributes articles and books to the academic community; a whole society maintains a particular political system. Each of these is a communication enterprise requiring the participation of two or more people who have learned the required cultural codes with some degree of code competence. A person’s competence in using the cultural patterns or codes is his ability to participate in society’s life. When we use this point of view or model of human communication, we can say that all of education is a matter of teaching children to participate in the communication of their human world. And we can begin to see that *the fact of participation, the process itself, is more deeply and interpersonally important than the content of the messages involved.* When we teach children how to participate in communication with others, we are teaching them how to learn. And whatever is learned serves to provide the child or person with the process for learning still more through increasingly higher levels of participation. This is a chicken-and-egg relationship in which the content learned at one point becomes the process for learning on the next step upward. One must know numbers (quantity symbols) to learn to count; he must know how to count (sequence) to learn arithmetic; he must know arithmetic (operations) to learn algebra—and so on to become a mathematician who must master the forms of participation

in the scholarly community of mathematicians. But before any of this the basic processes of human communication through all verbal and nonverbal modalities must be learned with an appropriate competence before any subject matter can be placed in an appropriate human context.

If we look at the *content* as the end product of learning, we see people as filing cabinets of information with which to perform certain behavior. But when we focus, instead, on the process, we see people as increasingly competent participants in the human society. When we focus on content, we can stay within the frame of language. But when we are concerned with processes, we must consider the full range of verbal and nonverbal communication.

II

It is not possible to discuss nonverbal communication by translating nonverbal messages into words. This is, admittedly, often tried in popular writing, with the caution that “something is lost in the translation.” But for our purposes it cannot be done without destroying the very structure of human communication and forcing nonverbal communication into the special structure and syntax of language. Indeed, the anthropologist who studies human communication never divides communication into verbal and nonverbal, since this division has no scientific significance or utility. He sees human communication as a process involving all modalities or channels of which one (or perhaps more) is called language, speech, or verbal communication. We will use the term nonverbal communication because it conveniently draws attention to those aspects of human communication which are nonlanguage and which are often overlooked as part of the total process. In face-to-face interpersonal communication, these so-called verbal and nonverbal modalities are interrelated, interdependent, and are used simultaneously.

In order to compare and contrast these verbal and nonverbal components of communication, we will imagine that we have a sound film of two people (adult Americans of roughly similar cultural backgrounds) talking to each other for several minutes. Since we are concerned with the nature of the process and the distribution of modalities or channels and are not concerned with particular

people or their messages, it does not matter very much which people or what situation the reader imagines. And it does not matter much what they are talking about.

We can divide this sound-film record of human interaction or communication into four sub-records: (1) we can make a transcript of the speech; (2) we can listen to a tape of the speech without the visual part; (3) we can look at the film, the visual part, without the sound; and (4) we can look and listen to the full sound-film record. If the first two records are the language or verbal communication, then the third, the silent film, is the nonverbal part. This is artificial, but it will allow us to make some interesting observations.

When we have only the *written transcript* as our sole access to the interaction in our film, we can do little more than study language messages. We can make some inferences about the intelligence, the education, or the language skill of the people in the film, but not much of their personalities would come through. We could not get underneath the language and *feel* much about them as people.

When we listen to the *voices*, we can get much closer to the personalities of the people. We can listen to the words and their meaning, but we can also hear tones of voice, hesitations, and the rates and rhythms of the speech. As Eliot Chapple (1940) demonstrated many years ago, personality can be described in terms of certain ways in which a person manages his talk with others. Chapple used a recording machine and a controlled test interview to make measurements. But all of us subjectively relate to others in terms of the rate of speech, the amount of talk in relation to the other person (or ourselves), the degree to which one person adapts to the speech rhythms of another, the amount of pause a person allows before speaking after the other person (or the extent to which one person interrupts or overrides the other), the loudness relationship between people talking, etc. Except for the amount of talk, none of these things is in the transcript. These aspects of personality can be heard but not read, and thus the sound record of the speech gives us more information than the transcript. This also shows us that there is more to talk than language alone when we think in terms of the larger frame of communication.

When we look at the *silent film*, we have no access to the speech but we can see two people behaving their personalities. We may not be able to make inferences about their intelligence, education, or verbal skill, but we can see other kinds of information. We can see age, sex, and dress. These tell us something about the subjects in the film and tell them something about each other. We can see their facial expressions, gestures, personal styles of movement, the distance between them and how each person attempts (or does not attempt) to change this distance. We can see how their heads and bodies are oriented toward or away from each other, and when, how often, and for how long they maintain (or avoid) eye contact. We can not only observe these single items, but we can see how they are put together by each person into an individual pattern of behavior, and, most importantly, we can see how the two people weave these individual patterns of behavior together. A conversation is quite literally a dance, and we can watch how the two people do it together. We can see whether or not they fall into common or complementary rhythms, whether their gestures mirror each other, whether the postural configurations of one person follow or are in contrast to those of the other. From all this we can infer something of how they liked each other, whether they regarded the occasion as formal or intimate, what their status relationships were. And when we relate what we can see to ourselves, we will have some (emphatic) feelings about each of the people in the film.

In the silent film we would find some of the same information that we found in the voice recording, but most of the information on which we would base our inferences would be a different kind of information. This communication would come from the use of bodies, which are much more elaborately expressive instruments than vocal apparatuses.

When we look at the *full sound-film record* we can see the people and hear them simultaneously. If we examine this full sound-film record on a projector that allows us to look repeatedly at selected parts of the film and to see it very slowly if we choose, we discover that the verbal and nonverbal parts are closely interrelated. When a person is speaking, his head and often other body parts move to mark the stresses in his speech, and his gestures or body movements mark off phrases, sentences, and even longer speech

units. The listener must nod his head slightly or make other movements to signal that he is listening. Even eye-blinks are made at regular points of speech.³ These elements of communication are interwoven in such a way that two normal people talking together and visible to each other do not (and cannot) break them into separate parts. One cannot talk to another person without moving parts of his body in a regular relationship to his own speech and to that of the other person. And one cannot have a comfortable or pleasant conversation with another person without participating with the other person in an elaborate although microscopic communication "dance" that both people have learned from their culture.

There is, then, a grammar of nonverbal communication that enables members of the same culture to achieve (or avoid) a particular degree or kind of interpersonal relatedness. The degree to which two people can achieve an intellectual relatedness through language depends on learned competence in nonverbal communication.

A person's language skill is often judged by looking (or listening) almost solely at that person alone. A person's nonverbal communication competence can be seen only by examining the communication that is taking place *between* (or among) the people in communication. We are not saying that the great competence in nonverbal communication results in intimate or good human relationships. We are saying that such competence allows people to be predictable to each other and thereby to achieve whatever relationships they find appropriate.

Imagine now that one of the people in the sound film asked the other a question to which the spoken answer was "Okay." In the transcript this "okay" might be ambiguous. In the spoken record we might discover that the "okay" was sarcastic and, therefore, the opposite of the meaning we read in the transcript. But when we see and hear this interchange in the full sound film we might infer (i.e., decode the full range of verbal and nonverbal messages) that

³There are many studies of behavior-stream punctuation or segmentation, language-body motion relationships, intra- and interpersonal synchrony in communication, and eye behavior. Two suggested references: Condon and Ogston (1967) and Kendon (1970).

the speaker didn't like being asked the question, that he was ill or depressed, or perhaps that he was really lying. And when we take into consideration a somewhat longer piece of the conversation, we might infer that the person was in a hurry, did or did not like meeting and talking to the other person, was self-conscious about being filmed, was trying to promote (or avoid) a more intimate relationship with the other, etc. And the other person could, if he chose, let the speaker know how he felt about all that was being said—all nonverbally.

One might suppose that this nonverbal behavior was "just natural," and that people do not have to learn how to communicate tiredness, illness, self-consciousness, or many of the other things we observed. But if we were watching two Chinese having a conversation we could make almost none of these observations correctly. The Chinese learn and use a different cultural system of communication, one that is unfamiliar to us, and we have, therefore, called the Chinese "inscrutable." We cannot decode their nonverbal communication. In the past it was not uncommon to believe that an unfamiliar and culturally distant people were primitive or even stupid when the observer was unable to decode the unfamiliar communication behavior. Sometimes people in an unfamiliar culture were thought sneaky or even magical when they could communicate with each other in ways that were incomprehensible to the observer. Africans once complained that Peace Corps volunteers were inscrutably hiding their real feelings because "all they do is smile."

We supposed in the example above that the spoken "okay" was sarcastic. To be sarcastic, it is necessary for the speaker to signal this reversal of meaning by a meta-message, i.e., a message about the message. This signal is only partly in the voice; we can also find it in the nonverbal behavior. Now, on top of the sarcasm it is possible to put a meta-meta-message carrying the information that this spoken "okay" is actually being quoted from someone else and is not the speaker's own word. This requires a separate nonverbal piece of behavior. Then, on top of all that, the speaker who is quoting someone else's sarcastic remark may put a third meta-message—to the effect that he agrees (or disagrees) with the person he is quoting. This may sound complicated when it is broken

into components and levels this way, but this simultaneous multi-level, multiple message-sending is a part of everyday human communication. One does not need to *think* about it.

All this multilevel, multiple message-sending that is going on in both verbal and nonverbal channels could not be successful communication unless the listener could keep it all sorted out. He must also be able to keep the speaker informed, nonverbally, that he has comprehended each signal or message on each level, and he must be able to signal the precise point at which he missed something so that the speaker can make the necessary corrections until the listener does understand (or thinks he does). This corrective feedback process is characteristic of all human *vis-à-vis* communication. Without it human communication would be as slow and laborious as two people trying to achieve an intimate relationship by communicating only through teletypewriters.

Imagine, for example, that a person has somehow been reared apart from any other people, in isolation, but has been taught his culture's language by tapes and teaching machines. Then he is brought out of his isolation and presented with another person to talk to. He can speak sentences with meaning and he can understand the word-meaning of other people's sentences. But he cannot carry on a normal conversation and he is certainly not able to get human value-sense into or out of a conversation. He does not know his nonverbal codes of communication, and we would say that "he isn't human."

This bizarre and impossible example is instructive if one thinks of a child who has learned language skills, even perhaps in an educated and highly verbal family, but whose nonverbal competence is poor because adults rarely engaged the child in *full* human communication so that he could learn it. This child's capacity to learn from a teacher would be impaired, and his capacity to relate subject matter (factual information) to the lives of people, including his own, would be limited. When he first comes to school, this child may appear to be intellectually superior but socially immature. He may have difficulty playing the games of other children or he may prefer to sit on the sidelines and watch, and he is likely to engage the teacher primarily through his best communication skill—language. Later on in school the boy or girl may be seen as the shy or easily

embarrassed person who does not relate easily to others in face-to-face situations. When people avoid face-to-face communication, we see them as shy or embarrassed when it might be more useful to see that they are uncomfortable simply because they have too little nonverbal communication competence. It is perhaps for these children that the opportunities for communication involvement in the open classroom will be most useful, provided, of course, that teachers do not perpetuate a home situation in which children are talked *to* and not involved in the full range of adult communication.

We have already observed that the rates of speech of two communicating people tend to move toward a common rate (when they move toward feeling good about each other). We could look at the tiniest movements of the two people in our film and find numerous instances in which some parts of the two people moved together in almost perfect synchrony and in a continuing steady rhythm (see Condon and Ogston, 1968).

Present research⁹ suggests that cultural patterns of communication are organized on a base of culturally specific patterns of rhythmic organization. It would then follow that individual (personality) variations are varying from cultural patterns. And, of course, there are species-specific rhythms such as heart and breathing rate and the multitude of internal rhythms subsumed under the term *biological clocks*. Individual and cultural time-qualities in human communication are reflected in such things as the time relationship between eye-blinks and other behavior, the rate of blinking, the duration that one remains in eye contact with another person. When walking down a city street, for example, one may sweep his eyes across oncoming people and come briefly into eye contact with strangers, but if one is to maintain the appropriate "stranger" relation to others, this eye contact cannot last more than a small fraction of a second. If this eye contact is prolonged by perhaps half a second, the person being looked at is immediately alerted to a possible threatening change. At the other end of the scale, one can signal a desire for greater intimacy by prolonging eye contact in other interpersonal situations. (Eye contact has been taken out of a pattern involving other accompanying behaviors for the sake

⁹The author's (P.B.'s) current research.

of highlighting the time element of a single item. Any *meaning* of eye-contact behavior would have to include the other behavior in the pattern and the context in which it was performed.)

In our imaginary film, then, we would find that if the two people were moving toward closeness or intimacy, we would find this reflected in certain patterns of coinciding rhythms. And, conversely, if they were contradicting each other, we would find rhythmic contrasts—not in words but in communication intent or style. The words have little to do with communication at this level. People can agree in words and dislike each other or they can disagree lovingly.

We can, then, literally see the nature of a human relationship, although at a level that we usually report as *feeling*. We believe that this kind of rhythmic underlayer of communication behavior is the basis for the intuitive talk about “good waves” or “bad vibrations.” The waves or vibrations concept may turn out to be quite real, although it is only observable in any explicit detail when it is examined carefully from a film (or possibly TV) record.

We will now look at an example of a child learning to communicate.

III

The authors visited friends who had a twenty-month-old son. During the visit the child approached the male visitor and with appropriate behaviors got the visitor to accompany him to the kitchen, where, with other behaviors, he got the visitor to find a glass, put water in it, and hand it to him. The child took a small drink, handed back the glass, and returned to the living room with a look on his face that the visitors interpreted as one of great satisfaction and delight.

When the incident was finished, it was clear that the child did not undertake the “get me a drink” enterprise because he was thirsty. He had only a very small drink. We believe that his pleasure was derived from the self-evident proof that he could participate in this communication enterprise. We were told that this was the first time he had done this with people other than his parents.

This incident could be discussed in terms of psychological or

cognitive development, but it will be discussed here as a communication enterprise. It will be convenient for the participating author (P.B.) to describe the incident in the first person.

I could not know what was in the child's head, but I could observe that the incident he directed was a sequence of events requiring the participation of two people. To accomplish the “get me a drink of water,” the child had to:

1. Get my attention—i.e., get me into communication with him.
2. Establish the particular kind of communication—i.e., I was not simply to acknowledge him but to accept the “listen to me and do what I tell you” relationship.
3. Monitor my behavior so that he could correct my misinterpretations of his signals or messages and let me know when I was right and when I was wrong.

We can also observe that the incident had a beginning and an end. It began when he undertook to get me into communication with him, and it ended as he handed me back the glass. At that moment he broke the almost continuous eye contact with me abruptly, stopped vocalizing, turned away, and walked out of the kitchen.

To get me into communication with him the child stood in front of me, looked at my face, and vocalized loudly. All three elements were required. If he had not stood in front of me I wouldn't have noticed that he was confronting me, searching my face, and “talking” to me. If he had not looked continuously at my face I would not have known that his “talking” was directed at me. If he had not vocalized loudly, I might have assumed that he was merely staring at a visitor. He had learned, then, to combine three non-language elements: (1) a body orientation in relation to me that was close enough for him to touch me and facing me with his body; (2) a search of my face so that he could “catch my eye”; and (3) vocalization, which was loud before we made eye contact and which dropped the moment we made eye contact. That is, the voice change had the effect of telling me when I was doing the expected thing with my eyes. Since he kept repeating the same sounds, I took them to be words. But I did not understand them. His parents

understood the words, I discovered later, but they did not translate them for me. The child and I did not share a useful amount of language at the level of word-meaning.

When I first acknowledged the confronting, eye-searching, vocalizing child I quickly looked away, back to his parents, with whom I had been talking. But the child grasped my hand and vocalized loudly again. This served the purpose of bringing me quickly back into eye contact with him, this time to try to figure out what he wanted. That is, he was able to change my brief glance of acknowledgment into a different kind of communication. What I first perceived as "acknowledge me," I now perceived as "pay attention to what I want to tell you." The child had to know his nonverbal communication well enough to know how to correct my misinterpretation and to know when my prolonged eye contact with him meant that he could then proceed to direct me.

Having established the particular kind of communication relationship required for him to proceed, the child tugged at my hand and looked intermittently at me and away from me. This, plus his insistent tone of voice, got me to stand up. Then his voice and movements guided me to the kitchen. He led me to the sink and began saying a new but equally incomprehensible word. I thought he wanted a cookie, but his facial expressions and his tone of voice told me that I was wrong. When I looked at him and watched his gestures, I eventually realized that I was being directed to a water glass and, subsequently, to the idea that he wanted not milk or juice but water in the glass. As I put water in the glass he held out his hand. He took a sip of water, handed back the glass, and abruptly walked away with the broad smile.

It took two of us to carry out this enterprise, which I see as a testing out of the child's capacity to participate in a communication enterprise of this complexity. He had to succeed at several crucial points. He had to initiate communication. He had to correct the encounter into a particular kind of communication. He had to know how to send signals or emit messages and to observe me to know whether they were the appropriate signals and to change his own behavior, his signals, to correct my behavior.

No doubt the child's sense of himself in relation to his human world emerges from his successful participation in such enterprises.

But in addition to his own possession of and competence in these communication skills, there is one further requirement for this learning process. He must find people who will participate with him, people willing to engage in the full range of these communication processes with him. He can learn no more from his adult world than members of that world will share with him. In our enterprise we can say that he had already learned how to organize the various modalities of vocalization, face and eye use, space and body orientation, and body (hand) contact. But only by participating with me could he learn that he had learned. Participation with his parents would not suffice in the same way, since parents and young children share private codes—i.e., his parents understood his very imperfectly spoken words and a single word to them could have evoked the entire performance. This would give him no opportunity to test his communication competence against the larger world of people. Performances that are coded and organized by someone else and rote-learned by the child offer him a quite different and less useful opportunity to discover his own place in the world of other people.

One of the authors (H.B.) recalls a morning at school when a child came into the classroom "with a chip on his shoulder." She apparently picked this up without realizing it in a way that started the day off badly between herself and the child. It is possible that the child had no "chip on his shoulder" but that, in fact, it got there in the first moment of the encounter. We have no way of knowing this, and for practical purposes it is irrelevant, since both teacher and student, in fact, found themselves in communication of this kind. After several minutes of unpleasant and even hostile interaction between herself and the child, the teacher called the child over and said, "Billy, we started all wrong today, didn't we? Please go outside and come in again and we'll start over again." Billy went out the door, closed it behind him, and after a few seconds opened the door again. This time the teacher greeted him with a smile and a cheery "Hi, I'm glad to see you this morning." Billy grinned broadly and the day started again, quite differently.

We believe that the success of this procedure may be possible only when it is clear that the teacher does not blame the child. If

she had said, "Go out and when you come in again have a smile on your face," it is probable that the child would have gone outside and cried. But when the nature of the communication about the situation was acknowledged as something *between* the teacher and child, when it was acknowledged as a matter of participation, then the child could expect to participate in the new beginning. In popular language this is called "trusting the teacher." In communication terms it means that the teacher is not dealing with particular messages from the child but proceeds as though the situation is something that exists between them and to which they have both contributed.

In large-scale social behavior we easily recognize that certain kinds of communication behavior are appropriate for certain contexts and inappropriate for others. Every parent is aware of the problem of teaching children that certain things may be said or done at home that are inappropriate elsewhere. Part, then, of the competence a child learns in communication concerns the relation of message to context. It is often easy to recognize the message-context confusion when it is a matter of obvious inappropriateness, but less easy to recognize when the confusion is of a different order. The following example will illustrate this.

A group of children were playing near some adults. There was much whispering and giggling; they were telling each other "dirty" words and knew that such words had to be whispered if adults were near. But among them was a younger child, who learned one of the new "dirty" words and went to his parents and whispered the word to them. The older children had learned that dirty words had to be whispered *in the presence of adults*, i.e., in a certain context. But the younger child had not yet learned that the whispering was related to the context, and assumed that certain words were simply "whisper words." The mastery of the hierarchy of contexts is probably learned in a developmental progression.

As the child proceeds through life he will be required to learn increasingly specialized behavior-context relationships, to learn how to perceive the mistakes he will make, and to learn how to produce the appropriate corrections. At whatever point this is poorly learned, the child or adult is seen by others as gauche, deviant, or uneducated, and his opportunity for further learning is impaired

insofar as his world now communicates with him in terms of this deviance.

In a parent cooperative school in East Harlem (New York City) where parents work in the classrooms, a boy in nursery school, Juan, walked up to another boy sitting at a table, Leroy, and hit him. The teacher, who saw the incident and what preceded it, went to Juan and Leroy and asked Juan if he wanted to play with Leroy. Juan nodded yes. The teacher then told Juan that there was a better way. He should *ask* Leroy to play with him, and she told him the words to say. She had seen Juan silently looking at Leroy and recognized that he was uncertain of his language but had a certain repertoire of encounter behaviors that he had learned and which worked satisfactorily in the streets. It is more useful to recognize that the behavior, the attempt to establish a relationship with another child, was learned as appropriate at an earlier age or in another context and that it is not bad; it is simply inappropriate in the context of the classroom and the social situations the classroom represents.

At another time, in the same school, there were two boys who, at the beginning of the year, often behaved wildly and "tore up the classroom." By midyear their relation to the other people in the classroom was proceeding more peacefully. Then, one morning the two boys suddenly swept all the large building blocks off the shelf onto the floor. The teacher recalls asking herself, "Why did they do that? What is different in the room today?" When she looked around the room she saw an adult who was new and a stranger to the class. So she went up to the boys and said, "Do you want to know who that person is?" They nodded yes. The teacher said, "I think you know the words to ask that question. Now please put the blocks back, come over and sit down, and I'll tell you who she is." The boys put the blocks back and went to the teacher, and she introduced them to the newcomer.

Since the behavior of the children in the last two examples could be seen as communication behavior—i.e., related to other people—and since the function of communication is to implement, maintain, or change human relationships in some way, it was possible to discover what interpersonal relationship was sought and to arrange for that relationship to be implemented. Teachers some-

times say, in relation to problem behavior, "What is he trying to tell us?" It may be even more useful to ask, "What kind of a relationship is the person trying to achieve with whom?"

Children must learn how to behave appropriately when being instructed or chastised by parents, teachers, or other adults entitled to instruct or chastise them. American children are required to look at the instructing or chastising adult. If the child looks away, he may be accused of not "paying attention" to the teacher or of "being disrespectful" to a chastising parent. The authors have seen American parents hit children who have violated this rule of behavior. The Puerto Rican child, however, may be expected to look at a teacher or other instructing person, but he is expected to look "respectfully" down when being chastised by a parent or teacher. To look a chastising person "in the eye" would be seen as disrespectful, challenging, or arrogant. This difference in the meaning assigned to a particular behavior is, then, a source of cross-cultural communication conflict. Many Puerto Rican children in mainland schools have been thought disrespectful for doing the very thing that signaled respect in their own culture.

The African child (this is a generalization that is not true always and everywhere in Africa) is taught to respect people of higher status by not looking directly at them. Higher-status people in colonial Africa included fathers, chiefs, and all white people. This meant that when schools were introduced and white teachers were brought in, the teachers often faced classes of students who could not and did not look at them. It is possible that the different significance of eye contact to white Americans and people from African societies has played a part in the history of the relationships between white and black Americans—and continues to play some part today. No doubt the slaves brought to America did not look directly at or make eye contact with their white masters. Insofar as they were excluded from full participation in white society, this cultural practice could continue and would continue to be a source of hidden conflict. That is, the whites could observe that the blacks were "shiftless, untrustworthy, and unreliable" on the evidence of their avoidance of eye contact. This would also support the social mythology that accompanied slavery and the American evaluation of blacks. And it would be thought to have no special prejudicial

or discriminatory significance, since whites also interpreted avoidance of eye contact as evidence of mistrust even when whites did it. The problem is, then, a circular one. Blacks cannot participate in white society because they are thought to be untrustworthy or stupid on the basis of their communication behavior. But this is a systematic, culturally learned difference, and it is not possible to take on the cultural practices of another group except through participation in the other culture.⁴

This is not to say that race prejudice stems from different cultural use of eye contact. But it is probably true that differing cultural practices that are quite out of the awareness of the people involved may act as the seeds of misunderstanding or conflict. When one of the authors once told a class of graduate students that Arabs tend to stand closer to each other in certain communication contexts, and that they look more "piercingly" into the other's eyes and can smell each other's breath, one of the students expressed his relief on realizing that a former Arab roommate had not actually been homosexual (an American interpretation of the behavior) but had been only a normal Arab. It is perhaps worth remembering that for every misinterpretation of non-American communication behavior by Americans there is a commensurate possibility of misinterpretation the other way. To the "inscrutable" Chinese the American is equally "inscrutable."

A final example will illustrate certain aspects of cross-cultural communication in particular and will set the stage for a discussion of the part a teacher can play in helping children with the matter of learning his culture's communication codes and enterprises generally.

Some years ago a teacher-training institution was asked to arrange for a teacher and four children in her nursery school class to come to the classroom on a Saturday morning to be filmed while going through a series of customary nursery school activities.⁵ The teacher is considered by the institution to be a good nursery school

⁴For research showing that certain aspects of the cultural behavior of black Americans is or may be derived from an African background by normal processes of cultural transmission, see McDavid and McDavid (1951), Whitten and Szwed (1970), and Lomax and Abdul (1970).

⁵We are grateful to Dr. Joseph Schaeffer for permission to examine and cite these film records.

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teacher. Of the four children, two were from white middle-class backgrounds and two were black children from Harlem. All of the children were four-year-old girls and all were regular members of the nursery school class. They were filmed (and the sounds were recorded) for an uninterrupted thirty-three minutes. Two simultaneous film records were made by two cameras, facing into the scene from opposite corners of the room. In this way the scene was recorded from two opposite directions, and any person moving out of range of one camera could be recorded by the other.

The observations we have made from this film record are not the result of intensive or complete analysis of the behavior. They are the product of many hours of repeated viewing at both normal and slow speeds. We examined this film only to describe contrasts we might find between (1) white children and teacher and (2) black children and teacher. We assumed that there would be cultural differences between the communication behavior of the white and black children and that the teacher's cultural background would be closer to the white children than to the black children. The available information on the five people supported this assumption.

It is important to understand that the people in our film record cannot be taken as typical of (i.e., a valid sample of) white behavior, black behavior, nursery school behavior, etc. We will observe, describe, and discuss only an example of contrasting nonverbal communication that is observable in the film.

Since, as we have said, all behavior in interpersonal interaction is at least potentially communication behavior, we limited our observations in this film to two kinds of events. Since eye-to-eye contact is, in most contexts in white American society, a necessary element in initiating communication, we examined occasions in which each child looked at the teacher and related this to those occasions in which eye contact was achieved and followed immediately by some exchange of expressions. We also examined those instances in which there was any form of physical contact between a child and the teacher. There are, additionally, some general observations.

Observations: The children are sitting around a small table and the teacher moves around the table, often bending down at the waist and sometimes crouching beside a child for a while. Her movements—walking, gesturing, moving chairs, etc.—are smooth,

even, and unhurried. The rhythmic character of her movements and the rate at which she walks, moves, gestures, nods, smiles, etc., vary little throughout the thirty-three minutes. All the children exhibit a greater variety of movement than the teacher, but the white children's rhythms are more nearly those of the teacher. The black children follow this general pace but punctuate it often with small, quick movements. When walking or moving around the room, the white children occasionally jump or run and the black children, in addition, break intermittently into what appears to be dancing movement. On several occasions a white child appears to try bits of dance movement in imitation of the black children.

In the first ten minutes of the film the children are seated around a table cutting, pasting, and drawing. The teacher, after moving around the table behind the children, sits first at one side of the table for a while and then moves to the other side. The children have about equal opportunity to see the teacher in this period. One white child is considerably more active than the other, and one of the black children is considerably more active than the other. In the first ten minutes (at the table) the more active black child looks or glances at the teacher thirty-five times and "catches her eye" and exchanges facial expressions with the teacher four of those times. Each of these exchanges lasts from one to three seconds. The more active white girl looks or glances at the teacher fourteen times and "catches her eye" and exchanges expressions eight of those times.

Comments: At first it appears that the teacher does not pay as much attention to the black child as she does to the white child (and that she does not pay as much attention to the less active children of either color). This is true insofar as one is looking at the number and length of interpersonal engagements. Actually, the teacher appears to be trying to distribute her attentions equally among the children. But if one looks closely at the black girl's attempts to establish communication, it appears that they are not timed to catch the pauses or general "searching the scene" behavior of the teacher. When the active white child appears to want to get into communication with the teacher she either will characteristically wait for pauses, or, after glancing at the teacher, will then watch the person with whom the teacher is talking. By watching the person to whom the teacher is listening, she is not only being polite in American terms

but she can anticipate the moment when it will be appropriate for her to initiate her own communication with the teacher.

Both the black girl and the teacher look toward each other often (more often, in fact, than the white girl and the teacher) but rarely achieve eye contact and the exchange of expressions that would follow. Although this behavior may be summed up by a casual observer as "the black child gets less attention," it is more useful to see that there is a mismatching or difference in communication systems. We are not prepared, as yet, to try to describe the difference in detailed process terms. Research in human communication is not sufficiently advanced for such a detailed process description. But we can observe that the white child's monitoring of the total scene and her initiations into it are both quite different from and more successful than those of the black child in terms of the subsequent communication involvements.

Observations: Throughout the film the teacher occasionally touches, pats, strokes, or otherwise makes physical contact with the children. When we look at those occasions between the teacher and the white child there is little "search" or trial-and-error behavior. Touching occurs in a smooth flow of events. As the teacher, for example, stands and leans over the table to look into a small terrarium, the white girl snuggles slowly between the teacher and the table and the teacher's hand moves to the girl's waist and rests there for a while. But the teacher and the black girl almost never manage to achieve this. A common sequence is one in which the black girl approaches the teacher, the teacher reaches out tentatively, and the girl jiggles or twists and the contact is broken; the teacher tries again, brushes the girl lightly, and the encounter ends with only fleeting physical contact.

Comments: If we ask "who is doing what to whom?" we can say with equal justification that the teacher avoids contact with the girl or that the girl resists contact by the teacher. But neither view allows for the probability that the teacher and the black child do not share a communication system in which touching is either achieved in the same flow of events or has the same significance in interpersonal communication. They certainly do not use the same set of cues that lead to physical contact. We cannot, as yet, be explicit

about what those cues are in either communication system, but we can see that there is a difference.

The authors believe that part of the problem of racism or prejudice in America and elsewhere is traceable to systematic communication differences in cultural communication systems at this out-of-awareness level. But we do suggest that when communication systems are systematically different, it is difficult if not impossible for the people involved to become communicationally involved *at the level* on which the difference exists. But, as we will see in the last set of observations, there are other available levels on which communication behavior is organized, levels on which the cultural disparity may not be significant.

Observations: The black girl we have observed has looked or glanced at the teacher more often than her white counterpart but with less ensuing interpersonal involvement. She has also moved toward physical contact on several occasions and each time the contact has not been made or it has been fleeting. Near the end of the thirty-three-minute film the same girl went to a corner of the room and pinched her finger slightly playing with a toy shopping cart. She stood quite still in the corner (a contrast to her usual continuous movement), and there was an expression on her face that the teacher eventually saw as "I'm hurt." She walked to the girl, picked her up in her arms, and carried her to a chair. The girl did not wiggle or move away but embraced the teacher around the neck with both arms. The teacher sat down with the girl in her lap and with both arms around her, and the girl smiled visibly and nestled her head in the teacher's bosom.

Comment: Here, at last, was a full, successful interpersonal engagement. It did not, incidentally, begin with a direct initiation of eye contact by the child but it flowed from a situation in which the teacher sought eye contact with the girl, who was then in a situation in which both could predict the outcome. One is, again, at liberty to say either that the teacher or the girl initiated the involvement. But the more important point is that at this level of organization both had learned the classroom procedures for dealing with "injured" children in the same way. No fine, low-level cues involving precise expression and timing were involved.

IV

From this last example of cross-cultural communication conflict, and from this essay as a whole, we can see that communication is a process taking place between or among people; it is not a matter of one person sending messages to another. This most clearly emerges from our observations of the attempts of the white teacher and the black child to get into communication with each other in specific ways. Each of them attempts to initiate communication with the other but their communication behaviors belong to different coding systems. Since they do not share the same cultural codes required for a particular kind of shared communication involvement, the behavior of each is not predictable to the other.

We cannot say that either person causes the communication failure or that either is to be blamed for it, although, if either of the two people looks at the other in terms of her own system, the other is "not doing the right thing." If two people do not speak a common language, we do not blame either one for their failure to communicate through speech, but we do tend to do this when the cross-cultural problem lies out-of-awareness in nonverbal communication. When a person is communicating (nonverbally) according to a different cultural system, it is not possible to correct the behavior by changing only some visible component. No single item such as the eye behavior of the black child can be pulled out and "corrected," for this is only one item in a whole pattern, and the only possible "correction" is in terms of that whole pattern. One cannot play chess, for example, if he does not know how knights move, nor can he begin to play chess by learning the moves of only a few pieces. The whole pattern must be learned.

This is the nature of the confusion in the white teacher-black child communication. The two share the same language with differences that do not seem significant to them, and they certainly share the procedures in the classroom represented by the "a hurt child gets picked up and held" incident. But when we looked closely at deeper or more out-of-awareness levels of communication, we found that the two people seemed to be using a different *grammar* of nonverbal communication.

Margaret Mead has pointed out that in contacts between complex Euro-American societies and primitive societies, our whole pattern has often not been made available to the primitive societies. She offered, as an example, the cotton frocks that may be made available to women but made available without the starch and iron required to maintain them in a Western style sense. When the starch and iron are missing it is possible to laugh at or look down on the way primitive women use cotton dresses. There is a parallel here with the white teacher-black child communication confusion. People with limited access to the whole pattern or system of white American communication cannot learn it, and the only way to learn it is through participation in the whole system.

When two people in communication are finely tuned to each other—i.e., using the same modalities with closely matched codification systems—they both experience a sense of liking or at least feeling good about each other regardless of the content of their communication. This is recognizable in everyday life when people say, "We had a nice time together," or "We enjoyed a nice talk." These are comments on the involvement, the communication, apart from its content. We believe that children are also reflecting this when they like a teacher and find her suitable to learn from or, conversely, when they dislike a teacher and therefore find her difficult to learn from. They are, in reality, reflecting the nature of their participation in communication with the teacher on all levels, and particularly the nonverbal part of that communication. This suggests that the more successful teacher, despite her own possible focus on language presentation, is one who is able to participate with children in far more than language communication alone. Such a teacher enables the children to learn her nonverbal communication coding and thereby *to learn how to learn* the subject matter she is teaching.

This, then, provides a partial answer to the question, Why is it important to learn codes of nonverbal communication? It is important because a child's ability to learn from a teacher depends on the sharing of systems of nonverbal codification. Without this the child cannot be certain he is following the subtle interconnections in any presentation, he cannot account for certain behaviors such as particular tones of voice, and he cannot feel secure in what he has learned or what the significance of the learning is.

It is accepted, now, that all of man's communication behavior and all of his knowledge are organized in such a way that he can learn relatively great amounts of knowledge. If all knowledge were to be learned as separate pieces of information and organized only by immediate association, the learning task would be impossible. Instead, there is ordering in a multilevel, hierarchical system. The organization of the processes of human communication in any culture is the template for the organization of knowledge or information in that culture.

At this stage in our science we do not know how to teach the part of nonverbal communication that is normally out of awareness. We explicitly teach only the part that we recognize as proper social deportment, politeness, manners. But we can observe that children learn their cultural communication systems by participating in them and we can assume that children who have not become competent in a cultural communication system are either organically defective or have had too little opportunity to participate in a single whole culture. In the last illustration, of the white teacher and black children, the problem (if one chooses to consider it a problem) is one of cultural difference. The black child doubtless has command of the communication coding systems of her own culture or subculture but has not had sufficient access to the culture of the white teacher to learn all of its nonverbal components and grammar.

We know a great deal more about the structure of language than we know about the structure of nonverbal communication. We teach language performance throughout the formal education of children, but we do not teach communication competence in the sense that communication is the process of relating to other people. This is probably impossible to do in the sense that we cannot teach a person to be friends or to love another person. This comes about, when it does, *between* two people and is not something that one person learns to perform and which he then performs upon another person. So it is with human communication. It happens *between* people, and the competence required is that gained throughout life by participating in communication with other people.

There are, clearly, cultural rules of communication: rules of language use, of mathematics, of manners, of politeness, and of so-

cial deportment in general—even rules that make the institution of marriage work for those who share them and fail for those who do not. The rules cannot be judged by the criteria of right and wrong but rather by the extent to which they enable the participants in a conversation, a marriage, or a whole culture to be predictable to each other and hence able to cooperate.

Whether we are concerned with children, college students, or members of an excluded minority, the extent to which people can be (and see themselves as) members of a group or culture is the extent to which they can participate in the culture. Participation is communication taking place between them. It is *not* the messages that pass from one to the other. The fact of talking together is, itself, more humanly significant than the messages exchanged.

The authors believe that the special less-than-adult behavior that is called *children's behavior* in any society (apart from obvious developmental considerations) is determined by the nature of the adult participation in communication with children in that society. And, of course, the same view can be taken for college "children" or members of an excluded minority.

Learning skilled performances and accumulating knowledge are not substitutes for acquiring competence in managing human relations. When this is applied to the education of children, we believe that the only way nonverbal communication is learned is through the full communication involvement of the adult, the parent or the teacher, with the child. To talk to, to read to, to lecture at—these are not participation. They are not full communication involvement. These are performances by adults for children. In order for a child to acquire competence in the full range of human communication, some adults in his world must "take him seriously" in direct human involvement. Only then can a child begin to imitate adult communication behavior and *learn it through the process of corrective feedback*. Only then can a child discover the meaning and values in the messages and the subject matter he is being taught, and only then can he discover himself in the world of people.

Human encounters are creative involvements in which two people put their personalities together. They can create a unique sharing between them that both can enjoy. If a child does not acquire the competence required for such human involvements, no

store of knowledge can have its full human meaning. As Alan Lomax has written in *Folk Song Style and Culture*, "In the end a person's emotional stability is a function of his command of a communication style that binds him to a human community with a history" (1968, p. 5).

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