

Views  
on  
Communication in Education

*From a Teacher*

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Non-verbal communication is something that is largely ignored by administrators, teachers, in-service training programs and teacher training institutions. This form of communication, because it expresses so clearly attitudes and judgements, and because it is so vital in the development of the child's self-image, merits the attention of all educators.

Non verbal communication may be grouped in three categories:

- (1) Non-verbal communication that is consistent with the verbal;
- (2) non-verbal communication that is inconsistent with the verbal;
- (3) non-verbal communication without verbal communication.

A recent incident that occurred while I was on morning playground duty will clearly demonstrate its importance:

One of the students came running up and breathlessly informed me that Rose (a fictitious name) was crying. I walked over to her, and saw that she was sobbing wildly, her hands covering her face.

"What's the matter, Rose?" I asked.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it anymore! They're saying things because of my colour!" She was screaming and close to hysteria.

Rose is a ten year old Negro, second youngest of five children, slightly below average in intelligence, but extremely hard-working in class. She is a warm, responsive and apparently well-adjusted child who relates well with her peer group.

At this particular school, in a middle class suburban area, there is a larger than usual proportion of Negroes to whites for this socio-economic level. It is generally a community free of prejudice.

My first reaction was to try to reassure her, and this meant that I would have to disperse the crowd of children who were staring and gawking like spectators at an accident. But, to do this I would have had to raise my voice in a negative tone above the general noise of the playground, and I feared that this might have an adverse effect on a child whose emotions were already strained. The only genuinely reassuring action I could take was to put my arm around her shoulder and hug her. Immediately she buried her face in my overcoat, put her arms around my waist and continued weeping. Her arms around me indicated her recognition and acceptance of my reassurance. I could now raise my voice with no fear of her misinterpreting the act.

Once the children had moved away, we walked, with Rose still clinging to me, to a quiet corner of the playground, so that she could cry in privacy.

While we were alone, she continued her unrelenting sobbing. There were no words of sufficient meaning that could comfort her. I could only hold her hand, and transcend the verbal level; and she grasped my hand in response. After four or five minutes she was sufficiently calm so that I could ask who had done it; and between sobs she pointed out the children whom she recognized but could not name. Leaving Rose alone in our corner of the playground, I approached the children who had been singled out and spoke with them. At least Rose could see that the preliminary steps of justice were being taken. When I returned, I told her that I had their names and that I would take care of everything. She was almost quiet now, and merely nodded; and we resumed our slow walking back and forth in the corner of the playground.

The morning bell interrupted us. "I have to leave you. I have to get everyone else to line up," I said. "Can you line up and go in all right?" I asked, and she nodded.

I did not see her during the lining up process, but I knew I would teach her for the first period after home-room period. I had just finished the home-room period with my own class when there was a knock at the door. It was Rose. Instead of asking her to come in, I went out to see her in the corridor. "I can't stop crying.

I just can't stop," she sobbed. Again I put my arm around her shoulder, and she responded by putting her arms around my waist.

"You'll be all right, honey. Everything will be okay. It'll be all right. Everything will be fine," I repeated over and over. The simple words didn't mean much but the constant repetition of the same phrases in a soft soothing tone soon had the desired effect, and the crying nearly ceased.

Arm in arm we went down the corridor to the empty medical room. The curtains were closed and the light was quite dim in the room. We sat down on the cot. I still had one arm around her shoulders, and now I took her hand.

"Sometimes it takes a while to stop hurting, but you'll be okay after a while. You'll be fine. Sometimes crying is good for you and makes you feel better. You can stay here and cry for a while. I'd like to stay, but I have to go and teach the other boys and girls. You can stay here as long as you want to, but I have to go. You'll be okay." She nodded and I gave her a hug as I left.

I returned to my own classroom, and explained what had happened, spoke briefly on prejudice, and pointed out that what they had just witnessed on the playground demonstrated the cruel effects of prejudice.

After about fifteen minutes Rose returned to the classroom. The children ignored her completely — it was as though she were returning from a message or a trip to the washroom. I, too, made a point of ignoring her entrance. She had been the focal point of interest for too long, and if I had said anything, or gone to see her at her desk, the class' interest would have been focused on her. By this time, she must have been a little bewildered because now it must have appeared that I had forgotten all about her. The children were doing oral reading at this point, and they all had their heads down in their books. I looked down at Rose and caught her eye. She looked up with almost a blank expression on her face. I winked and smiled and she beamed back with happiness. No one else saw, no one else knew. It was just for us to know about.

In this incident the content of the verbal communication was without meaning; it was solely the non-verbal communication (tone of voice, physical contact, posture, smile) which communicated the reassurance and acceptance the child required.



*From a Principal*

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During the December flight around the moon, we on earth were kept informed of the Apollo 8's progress, the condition of the astronauts, and how the moon and earth looked at various stages of the trip. Our information was received through a communication system that was a tribute to modern technology, the men who developed it, and those who worked the equipment. The miles seemed to offer little resistance to what the crew wished to communicate. It was an exciting and informative period for those of us who were able to receive the messages from space, and a feeling of closeness, respect, and admiration developed for the people responsible for the NASA program. This event caused me to realize how important it is for us in our schools to open, and keep open, the avenue of communication between the school and its community.

The importance of having open communication lines is simply due to the fact that today, more than ever before, the elementary school has something to communicate. In the past, schools communicated pupils' standing to their families. This was usually a one-way passage of information to the parents. The only part the child played in this was to act as the courier. Seldom was he involved in the meaning of the report's contents other than to receive a pat on the back or a less positive form of recognition. Today, schools are changing, not only in architectural design, but also in curriculum content, methodology, and even in reporting. The community must be aware of the potential changes, why these changes are being recommended, and it must be encouraged to assist in planning what changes are to come into actual effect. To work cooperatively within a school community requires a two-way system of open line communication. Once this is established there is a greater opportunity to develop an understanding on the part of all as to why we use team teaching, or conference type reporting, or individualized learning, or adopt any other innovation.

We are responsible for communicating what should be changed, how the change should benefit the children, and the vocabulary of change. The community must be informed of the meaning of new

curricular approaches such as modern mathematics, ITA, and the linguistic approach to teaching reading. Also the new terms used to describe new school organizational plans such as "dual progress," "continuous progress," and "team teaching," should be explained. Our responsibility still remains to keep parents informed how their children are faring in school, but it is essential that our reporting procedures be altered in order that they "tell it like it is."

Our relationship to the home must not be a "This is what we are going to do with your child" approach. We must have a plan, but it is important that parents participate in the developing of the plan as sounding boards, as suggesters, and as partners with the school personnel. Once the plan has developed, then it is desirable that the total parent group hear about it and have the opportunity to question. In order to be certain that parents are involved in educational planning, the Quebec Government has recommended the establishment of the Educational Workshop.

Emphasis has been placed on communicating with the *parents*. This assumes that the *teaching personnel* have already been involved through their staff council and subject committees. When new plans are being arranged and introduced, it is imperative that *children* are not ignored as they have been in the past. They are part of the community and have an important contribution to make. A fear that must have existed in the past was that by inviting parents, teachers, and students to cooperate in formulating plans, the educational establishment would lose control. This is not the case, and it is not my intention that administrators should abdicate their decision-making responsibilities. We must avail ourselves of all that a community has to offer and, by the use of effective leadership, develop programs that will most benefit the children.

Since a community consists of more than those individuals directly involved in a school's life, provision must be made to inform these others, including the parents of pre-schoolers, and those persons with no children or whose children have already finished their elementary schooling. Certainly there has not been sufficient communication with the parents of pre-schoolers in the past, to inform them how best to help their children prepare for the more formal parts of their education. The second group deserves to know what is going on in the community school, if for no other reason than that their tax dollars contribute to the operation.

The elementary school is an exciting place to be working in today. We have a responsibility to share this excitement with the

people in the community who send their children to us and pay the taxes that contribute to our operation. We can only improve our communication practices if we recognize this need and set out to establish a program of effective dialogue in a school's community.



### *From a Student*

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I am a student in a teachers' college. Today, as on the first day of the first grade, I view the back of several of my classmates' heads before focusing upon the teacher. Perceptually, physically, I am alienated from the teacher. This establishes a significant learner-teacher relationship. My visual experience is rarely at eye level with any other person in the room. I look up towards the teacher, while the teacher pans occasionally down at me. The physical position of the learner and teacher dictates and asserts a specific relationship and even a philosophy of communication. Did you ever have a teacher stand over or behind you? Both the learner and teacher are bound in their experience of each other. This relationship influences and directs their emotions, their ideas, their patterns of speech.

Tension, hostility, and anxiety can easily become products of the schoolroom's contrived and limited physical situation. The child comes into class filled with the freshness of wonder. There he experiences, not an involvement with the intimacies of this world, but an atmosphere which has been fashioned without him and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. The world suddenly becomes serious. "Sit up straight, be quiet." The world of fantasy and exploration becomes altered and constrained. The real world is that of adults, a world of parents and teachers where he is allowed to respect and obey. Parents and teachers have the power to exert authority and love. The way they exercise their authority is the key to the child's growth. If they are arbitrary, then the child's ability to communicate may be as contrived and

restricted as the neat rows of desks, as confined as the classroom walls.

Surely, a philosophy of communication is needed so that educators can transcend the physical atmosphere of the classroom. When man's philosophy changes, then everything also undergoes a change. Witness the present scene. Everybody wants either to do his own thing, or to hang on desperately to something that has already been done. "Doing your own thing" means that the individual is in a process of discovering the *possibilities of his own capacities*, potentialities, and goals. That's what it's all about.



### *D'un professeur*

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On entend régulièrement parler de la valeur du dialogue entre parents et maîtres, entre enfants et maîtres, entre les employeurs et maîtres, mais entre maîtres et maîtres, jamais, ou presque!

L'instituteur qui écrit n'est pas une espèce en voie d'extinction: elle n'a tout simplement pas encore existé! Pourtant, l'éducateur, cette "fontaine de connaissances", devrait être le premier à se servir de l'écriture comme moyen de diffusion auprès de ses confrères. Les raisons alléguées?

— "Et mes copies à corriger?"

— "Qui va préparer mes examens?"

— "Mon cours de demain exige beaucoup de préparation."

On énumère une litanie de raisons, on s'esquive, on se dérobe complètement!

La situation n'est guère plus encourageante lors d'échanges verbaux. Aujourd'hui encore, un instituteur du niveau secondaire considère presque dégradant socialement d'avoir à frayer avec un confrère primaire (lire: "de niveau primaire"); la clause allouant \$300.00 de plus aux enseignants du niveau supérieur dans certaines régions du Québec n'aide pas le rapprochement entre les deux groupes. En toute justice cependant, on se doit de mentionner les

efforts entrepris pour corriger cet état déplorable dans la banlieue de Montréal.

Une autre déficience dans les moyens de communication entre professeurs au Québec provient de la barrière linguistique; les membres du P.A.C.T. et de la C.E.Q. ne considèrent même pas des rencontres entre les deux associations, tant sur des bases professionnelles que sociales. Des brèches sont effectuées lorsque vient le temps de signer une convention à l'échelle provinciale; mais aussitôt les pourparlers terminés, on s'éclipse subrepticement.

Lorsque pour diverses raisons on accoste un confrère ou une consoeur, on s'entretient en général presque exclusivement sur des sujets plus ou moins insipides.

Trop sombre ce tableau? Sans doute! Biaisé? Difficile d'y échapper lorsqu'on baigne dans le milieu: on aura spontanément tendance à se remémorer la conversation qu'on aura eue avec un tel instituteur, et on le fera justement parce que c'est l'une des rares qu'on aura eue depuis longtemps. Qu'on veuille se leurrer ou non, il y a un problème: pour survivre et s'épanouir au Québec comme ailleurs, le professeur, plus que toute autre profession, se doit de communiquer intelligemment et de façon extensive dans le contexte de son travail, sinon la stagnation et celle de son enseignement l'attendent à brève échéance.



*From an Administrator*

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Some years ago I noted the following extract from a *Monthly Letter* of the Royal Bank of Canada: "If we know what others are thinking, and if other people — in business and social life, nationally and internationally — understand what is in our minds, what we are striving for, what we hope for, many misunderstandings will be avoided."

Although the extract quoted may have been written with no thought of including the world of formal education, the statement is



certainly as valid for education as it is for any other field of endeavour. In educational administration we must attempt to know what others are thinking, and we must do our utmost to ensure that other people know what we are thinking and doing. In view of the fact that central administration is the hub of a good school system, it is imperative that it communicates with all parts of the machine as well as possible; otherwise the educational service will falter, perhaps fail.

A desirable pattern of communication can be seen in a situation which recently occurred when modular scheduling form was introduced at a comprehensive high school:

With approval of the School Board, and following discussions between personnel of central administration and school administrators, members of the school staff studied available written material on modular scheduling and visited U.S. schools using the system. Later, discussions were held with the whole faculty to examine the pros and cons of this type of schedule. Following these exchanges of views, staff members were invited to state their wishes concerning the adoption of a modular timetable. The vote was 97% in favour. Staff then began discussions with students. Parents were also invited to attend evening meetings at the school to hear presentations which would help them to participate in the decision.

As a result of these meetings, parents and students showed a keen desire to try a flexible schedule based on a 20-minute module. With such complete support from everyone who would be affected by such a change, the School Board willingly authorized the administration to set the plan into operation in the new school year. It is reasonable to suggest that because an attempt was made to present all aspects of the change thoroughly, and because there was wide participation in the decision to move ahead, a great effort will be made by all those involved to ensure the success of the new schedule. The experiment may fail, but had this unfamiliar method of school organization been imposed upon staff and students by central administration without consultation, it is probable that it would not have had the remotest chance of success.

It is also fair to expect that ideas which originate with a Home and School Association, a Student Council, or with a school staff, will be submitted to headquarters in order to provide for consultation with specialist staff and, when necessary, with Board members. Just as it is unreasonable for a Board or a headquarters staff to im-

pose policy of a new program on school staffs without giving staff members an opportunity for full participation, it is equally unreasonable for a headquarters staff or for a school board to find itself forced by a school staff into a position which offers no possibility of dialogue.

In summary, educational headquarters must ensure dialogue between all parties involved in the educational process in order to coordinate and evaluate the educational services of the district, and to enable planning to proceed in an efficient manner which truly will represent the needs of the students in the communities served by the schools of the Board. Without such communication and group interaction there will be little opportunity for a school system to flourish in our modern society which more and more questions every facet of the education scene.



*From a Media Expert*

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Contemporary educators face a serious dilemma: how can large numbers of students be provided with activities designed to individualize instruction? A survey of college and university campuses throughout the country would reveal that much money and space is still being devoted to accommodations designed for large-group instruction. But will these spaces satisfy all the needs of changing curricula in higher education?

In recent years, a number of departments at McGill have been utilizing television as an integral part of undergraduate instruction. Programs range in complexity from pre-laboratory demonstrations to the presentation of all formal lectures via television.

One of these courses, Chemistry 100, utilizes television for its formal lectures and provides instructor-student contact through small group tutorial and laboratory sessions. The course enrolment is approximately 1300 and each lecture is shown three times. The students view their lectures via a large screen projection system in a lecture hall that seats 650 students. Data derived from student

exams over the past two years indicate that this method is effective.

Since the Chemistry 100 course draws students from a variety of academic majors, the three viewing periods cause extraordinary difficulties in overall university scheduling. Problems such as these can only increase as the university moves toward more televised instruction. Clearly, alternate solutions must be found. The individual study - and viewing - area may provide an answer.

Individual study carrels are fairly simple in construction and require only a TV receiver and a single coaxial as a signal source — one cable can carry as many as twenty-five simultaneous programs. Carrels can be placed in classroom buildings, libraries or even homes and dormitories. Any available space can become a personal classroom.

The Instructional Communications Centre at McGill, in conjunction with the Chemistry Department, is presently conducting an experiment on individual carrels. It is hoped that data from this experiment will provide information concerning:

- achievement differences between methods of viewing televised instruction;
- student attitudes concerning methods of viewing;
- the effects of multiple viewing on achievement and attitude;
- the effect on student attendance, when it is not obligatory;
- feasibility and logistics of individualized carrel television instruction.

This information will be used to help develop guidelines on the future use of instructional space at McGill and it could also be generalized to other instructional situations.

A report on the results of this experiment will appear in a later issue of this *Journal*.



*D'un éducateur*

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Il n'y a pas très longtemps, la tâche principale de l'enseignant était celle de transmettre à ses élèves l'héritage séculaire de la culture, ou plutôt cette parcelle de la culture que le maître avait ac-

quise. La formation intellectuelle de l'élève constituait donc un procédé par lequel il accumulait un bagage de connaissances, de points de vue, voire de croyances, amassé au cours de ses contacts avec une série de professeurs plus ou moins instruits et, si l'étudiant avait reçu une bonne formation, alimenté des lectures qu'il aurait faites des chefs-d'oeuvre du passé.

Souvent on passait sous silence un auteur qui, indépendant d'esprit, osait tant soit peu ébranler la structure de cet héritage. Tout au plus faisait-on du trouble-fête un homme de paille pour le démolir par la suite avec des arguments plus ou moins valables, de sorte que l'étudiant devint d'autant plus convaincu de la vérité de l'enseignement orthodoxe.

Il en était ainsi dans tous les pays occidentaux, et il en est ainsi en quelque sorte même de nos jours. Et cependant depuis quelques décennies un nouveau souffle se lève dans le monde de l'éducation. A l'instar des grands philosophes du passé, on essaie de cultiver chez les jeunes l'interrogation socratique, le doute cartésien, afin qu'ils développent pour eux-mêmes une forte intelligence et qu'ils se dotent d'une philosophie particulière pour affronter la vie moderne dans toutes ses complexités.

Comme chaque nouveauté insoumise à une sage surveillance, l'encouragement de l'indépendance complète chez les jeunes mène quelquefois à des extravagances nuisibles non seulement à la société mais aussi à l'individu. L'interrogation socratique peut devenir le rejet total de tout ce qui a été jusqu'ici accepté; le doute cartésien peut donner lieu à des incartades anarchiques. Le dialogue dégénère vite en tour de Babel. La discussion devient rapidement confrontation.

La tâche de l'éducateur de nos jours semble être celle de révaloriser l'apport du passé et d'en tirer ce qui est éternel pour en faire l'application à la vie contemporaine; ou, dans une autre perspective, de canaliser les efforts de découvertes et de créations personnelles des jeunes dans des voies que les leçons du passé indiquent comme les plus aptes à conduire les étudiants vers leurs buts.

Ce ne sera pas facile.

Pour accomplir cette tâche complexe l'éducateur ne pourra plus dépendre uniquement des ressources qui lui ont servi jusqu'ici. Il devra toujours posséder une bonne culture générale, mais à cela viendront s'ajouter une perception des besoins des élèves, de leurs buts, de leurs aspirations, et une connaissance de ce qui se fait

ailleurs dans le monde de l'éducation pour satisfaire aux nouvelles exigences. L'éducateur sera dorénavant voué à l'éducation permanente. Il voudra à la fois transmettre et recevoir les renseignements nécessaires. Il sera appelé à exploiter à fond les techniques de la *communication*.

Ce qui nous a manqué jusqu'ici a été la communication. L'ancienne pédagogie peut se comparer à une rue à sens unique; c'est un procédé selon lequel les données de l'éducation sont transmises par l'enseignant à l'élève sans que celui-ci ne puisse agir autrement que comme un récepteur passif. La nouvelle pédagogie ressemblera plutôt à un réseau d'autoroutes, et le professeur se trouvera solidement planté au carrefour où ces boulevards s'entrecroisent et se rencontrent. L'échange de renseignements, de points de vue, de croyances, se fera à travers lui. A l'éducateur donc de faciliter cet échange — de s'informer auprès des universités, des organismes du gouvernement, de sa profession, des étudiants, des parents, et surtout auprès de chacun de ses étudiants; d'y ajouter également sa part et de participer activement au processus; de dire à chacun ce qu'il veut qu'il sache; bref, de *communiquer*.

Les autoroutes n'ont pas apporté la solution à tous les problèmes de la circulation. Il reste d'ailleurs des conducteurs qui par mauvaise volonté commettent exprès des infractions. La communication, dans le sens où nous employons le mot, n'apportera non plus l'utopie dans le domaine de l'éducation; et il restera toujours, dans tous les camps, des fanatiques réfractaires au raisonnement. Mais il faut croire à la bonne volonté de la majorité, sans quoi toute entreprise sociale échouera. Et l'éducateur se voit appelé à l'effort et à la tâche exaltante de puiser dans le passé, d'employer toutes les ressources du présent, tantôt d'écouter et tantôt de parler, somme toute de faciliter l'éducation des jeunes en ouvrant toutes les voies à la communication.

