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## We Suggest

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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

Grant, Barbara M., and Hennings, Dorothy Grant

*The Teacher Moves*

New York: Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971. PP. xii + 133.

The *purpose* of language is absolute. It is the transfer of meaning from one human mind to another. If the form of communication used fails in this one respect, no true language can be said to exist.<sup>1</sup>

One of the major findings of recent, broadly-based research studies in the teaching of reading has been that the most important single factor in the success of a reading program is the influence of the teacher. Viewed from among the hawkers in the market-place, from behind the desks in the publishing houses, or even from inside the sanctuaries of efficiency-oriented, economy-minded school administrators, this finding might seem a bit bizarre, possibly presumptuous, or, at least, be regarded as ridiculous. However, when viewed in the light of the broad purposes of education, and in knowledge of the conditions under which man learns best, the implication appears logical. It is not at all strange that such a completely human act as learning to read is dependent, in a great measure, upon a human relationship.

Teachers who are successful in their relationships with their pupils and their parents, with colleagues, and with other school personnel are known as facilitative and humanistic persons. Through their own skillful, genuine, human behavior they help others to learn and to be humanly effective. Three particular characteristic responses upon which to build sound bases for good relationships are those of empathy, respect, and warmth. These elements are communicated through some form of language which may "entail verbal expression, non-verbal expression, direct physical action, or a combination of all of these modes depending upon the age, intelligence, and degree of contact with reality of the learner."<sup>2</sup> Some important research about verbal interaction in the classroom and its relationship to successful

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Pei, *Voices of Man*, p. 109. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> George M. Gazda, *Human Relations Development*, p. 23. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973.

learning has been reported and translated into implications for teachers' behavior by Flanders,<sup>3</sup> Amidon and Hunter,<sup>4</sup> Bellack,<sup>5</sup> Withall,<sup>6</sup> and others. Much less is known about the quality and quantity of non-verbal interaction and its effects upon classroom learning. *The Teacher Moves* reports a study in this neglected area.

What Julius Fast's *Body Language* has done for the general public by way of introducing it to the sciences of body language and kinetics, shedding new light on the dynamics of inter-personal relationships,<sup>7</sup> *The Teacher Moves* may do for teachers, enabling them to relate non-verbal and verbal components of classroom discourse in meaningful ways. The contents of this volume are divided into two main sections. Part I, "Describing the Way the Teacher Moves," contains four descriptive chapters, based upon a study of teacher behavior recorded on video tapes, and developed within a framework for analysis of these recorded behaviors. Part II, "Improving the Way Teachers Move," consists of five chapters detailing specific strategies for suggested experimenting, selecting, and incorporating practices and techniques. Appendices A and B are valuable for understanding the reported research, and for use in developing awareness of one's own non-verbal functioning as well as non-verbal options available.

In the first part the authors categorize teachers' motions as *instructional* or *personal*. Instructional motions are identified as conducting, acting, and wielding. Conducting motions are those that enable a teacher to control student participation and obtain attending behavior. Acting motions amplify and clarify meanings the teacher is trying to communicate. Wielding motions are used in touching, handling, or maneuvering objects, materials, or parts of the room. These three kinds of motions have been analyzed, using statistical techniques. Personal motions are not employed directly to aid in the learning process. They are self-adjusting, symptomatic of inner body conditions, or fall into the category of repetitive mannerisms. Facial expressions, which

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<sup>3</sup> Ned A. Flanders, "Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes, and Achievement," Cooperative Research Monograph No. 12. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Amidon, and Elizabeth Hunter, *Improving Teaching: The Analysis of Classroom Verbal Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Arno Bellack, *et al.*, *The Language of the Classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1966.

<sup>6</sup> John Withall, "Development of a Technique for the Measurement of Socio-emotional Climate in Classrooms," *Journal of Experimental Education*, XVIII (March, 1949), 347-361.

<sup>7</sup> Julius Fast, *Body Language*. New York: Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1971.

may be instructionally oriented, but personal as well, are almost impossible to study, even with video-taping procedures, and have been considered in this text separately, in a rather subjective manner. Using these analyses of teachers' repertoires of instructional gestures, facial expressions, and bodily activity, it may be seen that each teacher develops a teaching style that is uniquely his own, that can make him a positive, or negative, influence as a "significant other" in the lives of his pupils.

In the second part Grant and Hennings consider the use of body movement in terms of strategies developed in the theatre. Acknowledging the need for spontaneity in teaching, and the advantages in taking on-the-spot direction and clues from students, nevertheless, they maintain that teachers can learn to use hands expressively, or to employ such devices as vocal pointing, pantomime, and the dramatic pause. Because students are constantly molding their behavior in reaction to clues generated by teachers, contradictory, insufficient, excessive, or ineffectual clues need to be recognized and avoided. Non-verbal clues generated in the classroom are dependent upon numerous factors. In order to select his options wisely, a teacher should consider his own personality, the student group with which he is working, the instructional process being used, and the nature of the subject being taught. Choices may be limited by needs and competencies of persons involved. Similarly, the range of interaction may be restricted by the scope of ideas and materials being explored. However, most teachers probably have many more options for meaningful, interesting, humanistic non-verbal communication than they have realized or attempted.

The teaching-learning act is a symbiotic process. If improvement in learning is desired, improvement in teaching might well be pursued. The authors of this text support the view that adequate description of the teaching act must precede projections on improving teaching. They have carefully refrained from prescribing any one mode of non-verbal teaching. Rather, they suggest that the role of descriptive research in improving the way a "teacher moves" is to help the teacher himself (1) to become more aware of his own non-verbal activity and the effect it has on his students; (2) to experiment with non-verbal strategies he previously has not attempted; and (3) to select purposefully from among options those conducting, acting, and wielding motions that meet the needs of a particular situation.

It is probable that this book will be valued by only those who are willing to attempt objectivity about themselves, and who are capable

of sincere, sustained steps toward personal, humanistic growth. Gazda has this counsel for those who are concerned and committed:

A person generally does not consciously control his non-verbal behaviors, but he can become consciously aware of them.<sup>8</sup>

Changing internalized non-verbal patterns is a long and difficult process, but if you find yourself using non-verbal behaviors that reduce your ability to be helpful to others, it may be worth the effort required to change them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.