

PART II - E

A "COMMUNICATION APPROACH"

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I would like to state, at the outset, my assumptions about the functions of this paper and of the occasion for which it is written. The relevance of what follows depends largely on the extent to which these assumptions are correct and are shared by others.

My assumptions about the functions of this paper are the following:

1. This is to be a personal statement. It is to present a view of, and an approach to, problems of the preparation of educational media specialists from the vantage point of the contributor. It is not to summarize research or "cover" literature, etc. in the field.
2. The purpose of the contribution is to stimulate discussion and to help set the stage for further development of ideas and plans.

My assumptions about the nature of the occasion are the following:

1. The paper is intended to be a working document and discussion material for a series of invitational seminars which will consider basic definitions and directions to be proposed for the professional preparation of educational media specialists.
2. The need for such basic definitions and directions arises from the fact that the tasks and responsibilities of educational media specialists call for preparation in a newly emerging field of higher (graduate) education.

The broadest context

The task as I see it involves not only the development of a catalogue of more-or-less related duties and of the corresponding training requirements. I don't think that a legitimate and convincing claim for a program of professional and graduate education can be made without first developing the conception of a discipline which makes a unique and necessary contribution to knowledge.

The development of such a conception rests on one's assessment of the state of knowledge, and on one's view of what are the fundamental questions involved in proposing a program of graduate education.

My view is that this is a time of ferment and of stock-taking and redefinition in many fields. It becomes necessary, therefore, to conceive of the role of the educational media specialist not only in terms of a parochial past history and of present grooves of thought and practice, but also in terms of the emerging new organization of knowledge. Thinking in those terms, the fundamental question is: What is new about life, society, and the world? What is the emerging organization of knowledge? Is our "specialist" involved in this general ferment in any fundamental way? Does he or can

he command abilities and resources which can play a vital and basic role in the shaping of disciplines and of professions now taking place?

I think there is much that is new, he is deeply involved, and he can play such a role.

The impact of three revolutions is changing the shape of human affairs. The industrial revolution transformed man's material relations to man, society and nature. The nuclear revolution made the traditional intercourse of nations obsolete. The communications revolution telescoped and extended the industrial and scientific explosions into the educational and cultural sphere.

This is what I believe to be the broad context in which the functions and responsibilities of the educational media specialist need to be located. This is the context in which I would like to approach the nature and relevance of the "communication approach" to human affairs in general, and to our specialist's tasks in particular. And this is the context in which I see his contribution to knowledge and the problem of his graduate preparation.

What is a communication approach?

Next I would like to define a "communication approach" more precisely, and to indicate its relevance to the problem.

I define communication as social interaction performed through messages. I define messages as formally coded, symbolic or representational events of some shared significance in a culture, produced for the purpose of evoking significance.

My distinction between the "communication approach" and other approaches to human behavior rests, therefore, on the extent to which (1) messages are germane to the process studied, and (2) concern with the production, nature, and uses of messages is central to the approach employed. A "communication approach" (or theory or discipline) can be distinguished from others in that it makes the nature and role of messages in life and society its central organizing concern.

The relevance of such an approach to the educational media specialist is three-fold. First it locates him in time; it relates him, his tasks, and his responsibilities, to a profound historic transformation taking place. Secondly, it locates him within the emerging new organization of knowledge. And third, it promises to give some focus and direction to the professionalization of his field. All three are necessary requirements for graduate preparation.

An historical perspective

The educational media specialist is actively involved, whether he knows it or not, in the cultural explosion which is changing not only education but society and the world as we used to know it.

To take the full measure of this transformation, we have to reflect on just how it was that a group of primates became homo sapiens and how homo sapiens is "humanized" today.

For at least a hundred million of the last 101 million years, lush forests covered most of the land. Arboreal existence freed the forearms of some of the mammals from having to support the burden of the body. One group of primates developed these forearms into strong, sure, delicate instruments. Along with the hands, this group of hominoids developed the ability to "comprehend." Millions of years of human evolution is compressed in the word "comprehend": it stems from the expression "grasp with the forehand." The ability to grasp with the hand and with the mind literally developed "hand-in-hand." Exceptionally deft manipulation, superior grasping, throwing, chipping, carving, and weaving required an exceptionally large and complex control system: the brain.

The last million years robbed hominoids of their arboreal "paradise." Periodic invasions of glaciers sent them roving into all habitable parts of the globe. Huddled in cold valleys, flooded during the warm spells, the featherless and furless but luckily warm-blooded creatures were hard-pressed to develop all their resources.

Fortunately, the hominoid brain was adequate. It could not only regulate the body, coordinate the hands, focus both eyes on nearby objects, and respond to immediate changes in the environment--all of which were important--but it could also do something no other primate could do. It had the reserve capacity and mechanical calm necessary to hold an image long enough to reflect on it, record it, store it, retrieve it, and recall it when necessary. This ability to compose, hold, record, and recall images transformed hominoids into homo sapiens and enabled them to survive through collaboration, community and communication. Image-making and using was the prerequisite for the most uniquely humanizing element in this process, communication. Communication as we know it is the exclusively human ability to interact through messages which do not merely signal but which symbolize, represent, re-create aspects of the human condition,

For a long time the messages and images which composed the human fabric of popular culture were largely woven by the tribe and the village out of the same homespun yarn of everyday experience which also gave rise to the folkways of rearing, teaching, and preaching. The process was inter-personal. It was slow-moving and fixed as long as the local and limited circumstances which governed it were fixed.

Slowly, things began to change. More and more people became increasingly aware of cultural influences not of their own tribe or village. It became apparent that the common culture was a man-made system of messages and images which cultivated ways of rearing, teaching, and preaching, as well as of learning.

After a long, slow build-up, the industrial revolution burst into the cultural sphere. Instead of the age-old process of filtering down, of person-to-person transmission of most that ever comes to a human, we have the mass production and almost simultaneous introduction of information, ideas, images, and products at all levels of society. The basic cultural transformation of our time is in the media and the systems which cultivate ways of looking at life, society, and the world. It is in the processes and institutions which produce, organize, and distribute messages bearing man's notions of what is, what is important, and what is right.

This recent transformation has brought the "communication approach" into existence. This is what brought about our concern with the production, nature, and uses of messages in the acculturation process, and, in its more formal aspects, in the educational process. The field of the educational media specialist is rooted not so much in the pictures of Comenius (devotional texts have been richly illustrated many centuries before him), but in the really revolutionary practice of putting pictures as

well as texts into books "programed" for wide distribution in popular education. It is rooted not in sights and sounds as such, but in the communications revolution which gave us technological means to produce and mass-produce and project and broadcast sights and sounds and images for all. And it is now coming full circle to ways of programing and linking message systems in integrated sequences of production, perception and response.

### The basic challenge

The problem inherent in this transformation has two sides. One side is a technological problem. This requires provisions for the training of competent technologists. The other side is the policy problem. Technology precipitates but cannot solve that problem. That is what requires the preparation of professionals at the graduate level. Professionals are people who understand their relationship to knowledge and who are prepared to accept and to exercise policy-making responsibilities. I can see no other reason for professional training on the graduate level. Indeed, I consider it a perversion of the concept of graduate education to train technological experts ignorant of policy implications and unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for policy choices.

This is the really difficult part of the problem. As Charles F. Hoban wrote:

The problems of new media in education, as with almost all the problems of new technologies, are not those of the mechanics or the machinery involved. The engineers and the technicians do a reasonably good job with the mechanics and the machinery of technology. The real difficulty is more complex. It arises from the reorganization of procedures, the introduction and wider use of management on a higher level of skill, the changing role of the men and women in the process or the system, and the elevation of goals made possible by the productivity of technology.\*

The basic challenge, as I see it, is to develop a program of graduate education which is based on the degree of technological understanding necessary for policy-making, and which concentrates on the professional aspects of the problem. These aspects are based, in my view, upon a specialized concern with the nature and role of messages in the life, culture, and education of an industrial society, and upon an understanding of the relationships between technological communications systems and the nature of knowledge. An application of these concerns and understandings to teaching and learning is the special institutional responsibility of the professional educational media specialist.

A program of graduate preparation based on such assumptions would include consideration of (a) the communication process; (b) the development of communication systems in society; (c) the relationship of communication systems to social and educational systems; (d) the general and the specialized contributions of communication processes to knowledge, teaching, and learning under different social and institutional circumstances; (e) the nature and functions of communication means and controls in the classroom, school-system, educational system, and social system, in relation to educational aims and goals; and (f) the specialized institutional role and responsibility of formal education in the cultural transformation of industrial societies.

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\* Hoban, Charles F., "The New Media and the School." AV COMMUNICATION REVIEW, November-December, 1962

### Some content suggestions

It would be presumptuous to outline a course or a series of courses which might deal with such content. The specifics of program development always depend on the specifics of the personnel and of the institutional setting in which programs are developed. But it might not be out of order to illustrate how the bare bones of such a conceptual scheme might be fleshed out with concrete substance.

The communication process. Most conventional treatments of the communication process are not really concerned with communication. They tend to ask the questions of the learning theorist or the sociologist or the linguist or the information theorists--all of which are relevant--but not the basic communication question: what happens as we interact through messages? A careful consideration of that question would be one contribution of the "communication approach" to the preparation of the educational media specialist.

Such consideration would begin with the development of the concept of image as the biological, social, and cultural prerequisite to the "humanization" of homo sapiens and thus to communication and human learning. It would go on to analyze meaning in terms of the contribution of messages and message systems to image development and thus to behavior.

Study of the communication process from an essentially communication-oriented point of view would also include an analysis of what goes into the production and perception of messages, would develop a "grammar" of messages and message systems in functional communication terms equally applicable to pictorial and verbal "languages," and would submit the communication act both as product and as process to more intensive scrutiny than is usually done.

Communication systems. The concept of communication systems as organic components of culture, and as the cultural arms of dominant types of social organization, lies at the heart of the consideration of systems. The graduate training of the professional educational media specialist would include an historical view of the development of such systems, and a comparative view of communication systems in different societies. There can be no broad and realistic grasp of communication media in American education without some understanding of technological media systems as they reflect pre- and post-industrial organization of different types.

Contribution to knowledge. Consideration of message-image relationships and of communication systems prepares the ground for the study of normative (survival and welfare-producing) functions of communication systems under different historical, social, and institutional circumstances. Discussion of administration structuring message systems; of science assessing qualities of correspondence, adequacy, and validity built into message systems; and of art enhancing clarity, believability, and general effectiveness of expression (including the imaginative incorporation of the insights of research) could be points of departure for developing notions of value and of responsibility inherent in the tasks of the educational media specialist.

Means and controls. Administrative and organizational functions in communication are of special concern to the educational media specialist as a professional contributor to policy-making. Controls are inherent in all communication systems. The more "technological" the means of message-production the more highly structured is the system of controls regulating the flow of messages. Without careful and competent consideration of the built-in controls characteristic of the means, the means tend to

become ends in themselves to which educational aims and goals must be "adjusted." This is "instructional technology" with a vengeance. One purpose of graduate (or any) education of the media specialist should be to guard against it.

The institutional function. The communication revolution has changed the position of the teacher and the role of the school in modern industrial society. The school can no longer teach anybody anything in isolation from the mass-produced popular culture which teaches everybody something about all things. Formal education today has an institutional responsibility for preparing itself, and new generations of citizens, to learn about, learn in, and learn to guide the cultural transformation of our time.

The broadly-trained and conceptually equipped educational media specialist is likely to assume leadership functions in fulfilling this responsibility, as many of his American predecessors and his counterparts abroad have done.

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None of this is intended to furnish a blueprint for a program. In line with the assumptions set forth at the beginning of this paper, I was more interested in stimulating the process of discussion and of planning by generating what seemed to me some fundamental considerations than I was in proposing a full-fledged program.

I am not sure that a series of seminars can do much more, either, than suggest a fuller and perhaps sounder set of considerations for program planning. I am convinced, however, that the validity of the claim for graduate training rests on the development of a program which makes a unique and needed contribution to knowledge, and which can prepare professionals willing and able to act in the light of that contribution.